AAUSC Issues in Language Program Direction

From Thought to Action: Exploring Beliefs and Outcomes in the Foreign Language Program

H. Jay Siskin
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AAUSC 2007: From Thought to Action:
Exploring Beliefs and Outcomes in the Foreign Language Program
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Printed in the United States of America
1 2 3 — 09 08 07

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Thomson Higher Education
25 Thomson Place
Boston, MA 02210-1202
USA

ISBN-13: 978-1-4282-3011-8
ISBN-10: 1-4282-3011-4

Library of Congress Control Number:
2007936134

Chapter 4
Portrait of a Teacher: Beliefs on Feedback and Revision in the Foreign Language Classroom

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Introduction

> [While providing feedback on students' writing assignments,] I would really like to throw out grammar at times and just see what the kids have to say about an idea or about the story without having, well, having them know that I'm not looking for grammar. If they knew that going in, maybe they would *write* differently, they would approach the *writing* assignment differently. And so giving students the opportunity to write differently, knowing that I am not counting on grammar would be a nice change. If you took that element of grammar, they would write differently, meaning that they would produce more. If they didn't know an accent or screwed up preterit and imperfect I wouldn't care, and so they would write more, and address the issue on a more personal level or more meaningful for them.
>
> (Juan, Intermediate Spanish teacher, first interview)[1]

Defining *writing* is a complex operation comprising eclectic and simultaneous responses to cognitive, psychological, emotional, experimental, and literary processes that take place in a particular social context. The written text and its consequent revisions provide an opportunity to comprehend students' writing processes, their understanding of the goals of the writing class, and the feedback they receive. Moreover, revision is an aspect of composing in which second language (L2) writers often need, seek, and undoubtedly benefit from feedback. Feedback not only provides insights into students' writing but also, as Ferris, Pezone, Tade, and Tinti (1997) suggest, "allows for a level of individualized attention and one-to-one communication that is rarely possible in the day-to-day operations of a class" (p. 155).

Many foreign language (FL) teachers and students in lower-level language courses still perceive writing and writing instruction as a language exercise. This product-focused approach tends to perpetuate students' belief in the importance of correction and to place emphasis on form rather than content and structure. On many occasions, we see a process-oriented approach only in FL writing courses. However, a common complaint among teachers in FL writing and in third-year Spanish courses is that students display weak writing abilities. In an attempt to remedy that situation, I decided to implement a process-oriented approach to writing in a fourth-semester (intermediate) Spanish course. The remainder of this article explores the theoretical basis for this change and explores the evolution of a teacher's belief system when confronted by this new focus.

From a process-oriented perspective, writing is understood as a process (i.e., planning and revising) that must be performed with the reader's background knowledge, needs, and interests in mind. In this manner, the writer can shape his or her texts so that they meet those expectations as effectively as possible (Flower, 1979). From this social constructionist viewpoint, the audience (or discourse community) largely determines available knowledge, language use, and the nature of discourse. According to Swales (1990), a discourse community is composed of few expert members and a large number of novice members, all of whom operate according to implicit and explicit goals. Therefore, composition instruction is seen as a way to provide novice writers with opportunities for practicing and appropriating the content knowledge, language, and rhetorical patterns represented in the academic discourse community of which students want to be part (Johns, 1997). However, the lack of a target language context outside the classroom limits FL students' ability to see their work as an academic endeavor. Because they are not living in the target country, FL students generally do not receive extra input or have occasion to practice the L2 outside the classroom; thus, their perspectives about the importance of writing are relatively limited. Similarly, this lack of natural input may not provide enough feedback regarding the students' L2 proficiency skills. Because FL students see writing as a language exercise, they appear to be more interested in linguistic problems than in rhetorical problems and they tend to look to linguistic instruction as a means to correct errors. It is difficult for FL students to adopt a broader view of writing as a process because they tend to focus on the written product and its form.

To foster awareness of content, form, and coherence at the discourse level and to highlight the importance of personal participation in effective writing, the implementation of revision must be examined. In particular, it is crucial to observe how the revision process—from the moment the process is triggered to the last comment and to the evaluation provided by the teacher—can influence students' FL writing.

Revision, as considered in this study, is triggered by teacher feedback, which establishes a relationship between two individuals, their personalities, and their academic expectations. This relationship initiates an asynchronous dialogue in which the writer tries to comprehend the feedback and act accordingly. The teacher and the writer establish processes of negotiation and interaction that "serve as a catalyst for change" (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 283) because of their focus on particular aspects of the text. The negotiation and feedback focus learners' attention on parts of their compositions that have not been successfully expressed, thus creating communication around the written comment and the classroom dynamics as well as the teacher's expectations regarding students' written work. Moreover, students' observations in the class need to be accounted for because learners also perceive (or think they know) what the teacher expects from them in their writing. This implicit and explicit dialogue helps shape the conduct of all participants in a classroom setting. The revision process also affects a teacher's beliefs, attitudes, and expectations about the new writing approach (i.e., in-class writing, feedback on content and form, and in-class revision).[2]

Besides the power relationship that exists between teacher and student, the physical surroundings and the institution where the courses are being observed also have a bearing on the negotiation that takes place: a university, for example, differs in organizational structure from that of a high school. Observing the context in which students write can offer important insights into students' expectations of their teacher's feedback and their understanding of the goals of the course. These insights also may offer an idea of the importance of revision at different stages in the students' academic life.

Literature Review: Issues of Revision and Feedback in L2 Writing

Previous studies have provided glimpses into the types of revisions students make, enabling researchers to obtain a better understanding of writers' decision-making processes. These studies suggest that the reasons for students' limited revisions are connected to a lack of linguistic knowledge of the L2, lack of expertise as writers in the first language (L1) and L2, and students' expectation that teachers are interested mainly in grammar and vocabulary. However, most of what we know about L2 revision is connected to the role of the teacher in the language classroom. Thus, the question here is what we can learn about revision when it is triggered by teacher feedback. Although he worked with L1 writers, Yagelsky (1995) suggests that the nature of teachers' strategies may reinforce students' views of writing quality and revision, indicating that students' revision practices may respond to perceived teacher strategies. In addition, Porte (1997) indicates that certain aspects of revision may be related to individual characteristics and subject to individual perceptions of the teacher and the writing context.

In the FL context, feedback becomes more relevant due to students' linguistic constraints, which seem to monopolize most of the writing process. The knowledge of these constraints guides the teacher to pay attention to errors in form to facilitate students' awareness of the language. FL teachers often use writing assignments to exercise and evaluate students' ability to use specific grammar points. Despite a teacher's beliefs about good writing—the priority of the transmission of meaning and the observation of rhetorical conventions, as well as formal accuracy—students interpret the teacher's expectations by reflecting on the comments they receive about their writing. Thus, according to Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994), effective revision in L2 requires the engagement of the learner as well as the careful application of feedback practices, which can guide the writer to an awareness of the informational, rhetorical, and linguistic expectations of the intended reader. Hyland (1990) suggests that for feedback to be effective, the feedback needs to be interactive. Thus, teacher feedback is aimed at nourishing further creativity (Flower, 1988) and at including problem solving and critical thinking. In addition to this type of feedback, Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1996) suggest that the inclusion of multidraft models of L2 writing instruction encourages and rewards students' early attention to idea development, clarity, and coherence prior to the diagnosis and correction of word-level grammatical accuracy.

Ferris (1997b) observes that a majority of studies on revision have also focused on the types of revision made by students (Chenoweth, 1987) or on pedagogical techniques for helping students to revise (Cohen, 1983, 1990; Johns, 1986a, 1986b). Fewer studies (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Ferris, 1997b), however, have attempted to connect type of feedback with revision. Ferris (1997b) observes that marginal requests for information and summary comments on grammar appear to trigger the most significant revision in ESL writers. On the other hand, less influential types of feedback are questions or comments that provide information to the students and positive comments almost never lead to changes. When changes are made, they tend to improve the students' papers. Conrad and Goldstein (1999) analyze (1) a teacher's comments and students' subsequent revisions and (2) situational and individual characteristics that affect students' choices while revising. The teacher comments that Conrad and Goldstein analyzed are organized based on (1) syntactic structure (e.g., declaratives, questions, and imperatives) and (2) pragmatic shape (e.g., direct or indirect message). However, the study's findings suggest that the formal characteristics of teachers' comments did not always affect the quality of the revision of ESL writers.

Teacher feedback raises the question of how students feel about feedback and how much they understand the feedback they are provided. Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) found that students in an EFL Institute program, a university EFL program, and a university L1 program considered their teachers to be judges of their work rather than readers. These students also expressed an interest in receiving feedback on what they were doing correctly and a concern for the lack of agreement between teachers and students on feedback procedure. Moreover, Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994) reported that FL students pay more attention to form, whereas ESL students expect feedback on content as well as sentence-level comments and corrections. FL students seem to think they learn better when the teacher draws their attention to grammatical errors, correct word choice, and mechanical mistakes.

In general, students perceive feedback as a beneficial writing tool. Although students may find it harder to understand comments that are short and general, students report that they value teacher feedback and find it helpful for improving their writing (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Ferris, 1995). Students prefer longer comments—in particular, comments that explain specific problems and make specific suggestions (Ferris, 1995); however, Radecky and Swales (1988) and Enginarlar (1993) remind us that students may respond differently to the same type of feedback. Additionally, students pay more attention to revision in a pedagogical setting in which multiple drafts are required. It is logical to assume that having to revise a text will heighten students' attention more than being assigned an essay accompanied by a final grade and comments. Conrad and Goldstein (1999) report that other factors also seem to affect the perception and attitudes of students: (1) the context and instruction (Yagelski, 1995), (2) topic knowledge (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1987), (3) students' self-image and abilities as writers (Ferris, 1997a), and (4) authorship of the text. In sum, students seem to revise based on their own perceptions and on their expectations of factors such as teacher behavior, context, instruction, and type of comments.

Although students find feedback beneficial, students' perceptions reflect the complexity of revision. Zamel (1985) has claimed that regardless of teachers' best intentions, their marks or comments can produce confusion in students about how to use them for revision. Hedgcock and Lefkowitz's (1996) FL participants complain that the instructor's comments are unhelpful: "Sometimes you still don't know what word he wants you to put there" (p. 298). Some students feel frustrated at not knowing precisely what their teachers expect them to do with correction symbols and comments (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996).

A last important issue is the influence of context; that is, studies situated in the classroom context can provide essential information about the type of community that can trigger students' writing and, particularly, revision. Goldstein (2004) states that context "is 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" (p. 65). She suggests that programmatic and institutional attitudes toward the teacher may affect the way the teacher envisions the writing component in the course; thus, certain teachers may feel adequate only when they provide error feedback in the FL language classroom.

In addition, it is important to include what the teacher brings to the process of reading and responding and what students bring to the process of composing and revising (Goldstein, 2004). Goldstein considers that the interaction between teacher and students may alter the manner in which revision is understood. In the present study, therefore, the teacher's beliefs, attitudes, and expectations about writing (revision) and about his students, as well as knowledge of the content area, may influence students' revision practices.

Methodology

This review of the literature about revision and feedback provides a historical and theoretical perspective for the specific research question that motivated this study: How will a change of writing approach in an intermediate Spanish language course—from error correction to revision in addition to just error correction—affect a teacher's beliefs and expectations?

This study included a teacher (Juan) and 16 students who were enrolled in a semester-long intermediate Spanish course. In a classroom setting, the teacher figure becomes the focal point of students' academic lives and expectations. Juan's role, varied as it was, had a tremendous impact in the daily practices of the classroom. Such a pivotal figure rendered an invaluable service to the community he created with the help of his 16 students. Because the revision process in this intermediate Spanish course had traditionally been limited to error correction (the students corrected five errors and explained their corrections), certain changes to the syllabus were proposed to accommodate the four in-class revisions that took place for this study (i.e., with the presence of the teacher to answer students' questions). In addition, the teacher incorporated coding symbols to address two errors and written commentary to address three areas, including content, organization, and/or structure.

From the moment the feedback triggered the revision to the final evaluation provided by the teacher, the results of the quantitative (i.e., questionnaires) and qualitative (i.e., verbal protocols) data collection techniques illustrate the factors that influence this teacher's practices.

Results

Teacher's Beliefs and Expectations

The goal driving this study, to approach students' writing assignments in a way that helps them become better FL writers, seems to reflect teachers' observations that error correction alone does not prompt such improvement. In the quotation at the beginning of this article, Juan's desire to allow students to concentrate on ideas indicates his belief that writing in a FL needs to move beyond grammar correction to accommodate global and local perspectives to FL writing. So what is Juan's role in the classroom? What are his beliefs and expectations about revision, students, essays, and feedback?

Creator of Context

Juan, as a creator of context, provided a framework for understanding the type of relationship that took place in this Spanish classroom. His outgoing demeanor was balanced by an organized and formal attitude, communicating to his students that they come prepared to class, be ready for the activities during the class period, and participate actively. During a class hour, Juan's roles shifted between facilitator, lecturer, and listener. These roles were tailored according to the necessities of the class, displaying his methodological training and common sense. The context Juan created was important because it was the arena in which the writing and revision took place.

Following Juan's pedagogical journey as a reader, a provider of feedback, and an evaluator furnished an opportunity to observe the processes of his involvement with the essays. This involvement was not a clinical procedure in which the teacher objectively reacted to the essays, but rather a conglomeration of factors that influenced the interaction between teacher and essay. The context in which students and teacher interact, the relationships that are created during the semester, and Juan's expectations and beliefs all shaped his feedback and grading.

Teacher's Work with Writing Assignments

In addition to teacher-created contexts, other factors may affect the type of feedback that teachers provide. Factors mentioned by Goldstein (2004) include the

> teacher's personality, the teacher's pedagogical beliefs about how to comment, attitudes towards specific student characteristics, attitudes towards each student, attitudes towards the content about which students are writing, knowledge of the content about which students are writing, expectations of students at a particular level, and expectations of particular students. (p. 67)

While working with the writing assignment within this new approach, Juan was an active reader. In some instances, he asked himself questions about what he was reading to predict what the students should write next. In this manner, Juan attempted to ascertain whether the student was going to expand on an idea or explain it better. This practice, however, could also signal his expectations of what the essay should address. In the following excerpt, italics indicates Juan's own reflection on the essay he is reading.

> TA[3] (about Jeremy): [reads] *el aumento de los juegos de azar puede estar buena por muchas personas*. Okay, why is it good? *Una razón es que muchas personas juegan juegos de azar por divertido*, okay, to have fun and for entertainment.[4]

In this think aloud, Juan expected the writer to expand and answer his question; therefore, his expectation was imposing a particular outcome that the student may not have considered. The teacher's expectations influenced his behavior when responding to his students' writing. Juan's expectations fell into two categories: (1) those concerning the essay (and elements he expected to encounter therein) and (2) those concerning the students (and what he expected them to accomplish). Those expectations marked not only the manner in which Juan responded to the essays but also the way he wrote his feedback. In the case of the essays, he expected them to be structured as argumentative essays in accordance with his in-class instructions not only on the day of the prewriting activity but also for the two previous essays of the semester. The following think-aloud protocol and stimulated recall excerpts reflect Juan's expectations about the argumentative structure of the essays.

> TA (about Mary): Okay, I'm trying to get started here . . . so hopefully they are writing the pros and cons.
>
> SR[5] (about students): At least I want them to address both sides of the issue.

Juan's expectation that the essay be structured in a particular way had an impact on his reading of the essays. Students' weaknesses were related to the structure and organization of the essay, to which Juan paid close attention when assigning a grade and when providing feedback. In the case of expectations toward his students, Juan's overall expectations of individual students influenced the type of feedback he provided and the type of work he thought they could manage.

> TA (about Beth): Let's see what Beth has to say. . . . [H]er quality of language, her grammar is pretty good, always has been. . . . She writes well.
>
> TA (about Jeremy): *tener divertido* [he marks the first error with a V] *estas personas no juegan todo lo tiempo*, Jeremy should be able to fix this, he's a smart kid, okay.[6]

In the second example, Juan assumed that the student was going to be able to correct the error; however, he subsequently discovered that the student was not able to do so. This example raises the possibility that a student may not be able to make an appropriate correction if the feedback (or in this case, the coding) is not

explicit enough for the student to understand. On the other hand, perhaps Juan's expectations were not correct.

Teacher's Preference

During his first interview, Juan reported that when he was evaluating the students' compositions, what he most enjoyed in a general sense was seeing how students engaged with the readings on which the essays were based and how well the students understood the readings. However, during the second interview, Juan revealed that when he was reading the compositions, he liked seeing students progress in their ability to write well-structured essays. This report reflected his view of how his new approach to teaching writing had had an impact on the development of his students as writers.

> Mary, for example, has organized herself, and her ideas are more structured, and I think that this came from the way we are doing, like in the pre-writing activity, showing them the structure, and practicing it and giving them feedback on that. As far as ways of defending themselves, I think that it's interesting and enjoyable that way, and you see that students are doing better in that regard, and I think they would be better prepared to go into, if they continue on, out of the GEP.[7] I think that this method will enable them to defend, or to get into a writing or literature course, versus the grammatical approach.

In sum, Juan acknowledged that he liked certain elements within the essays and that he rewarded students for those elements when he assigned grades. He mentioned, for example, that he liked to see improvement in a student's writing skills. Other elements also played into his evaluation. He liked to see a strong introduction with a clear thesis, students addressing both sides of an issue, personalized stories, and a strong conclusion.

> TA (about Mary): Okay, for Mary, that is a great introduction, I think, compared to other essays, the thesis is clear, so I'm going to say: [writes] *Mary, me gusta tu introducción*.[8]

> TA (about Tom): I like the way he addresses it. . . . [writes at the end of the composition] *Tom, me gusta la manera en que hablas sobre los dos puntos de vista acerca de los juegos de azar*.[9]

In effect, the above examples open a window to two distinct types of reading/evaluative enjoyment on the part of the instructor. On the one hand, Juan enjoyed what students had to say about the topic of the essay. On the other hand, he liked to see students incorporate elements that he had pointed out in his instruction and feedback because he believed that those elements demonstrated improvement in students' writing ability.

Teacher's Feedback

Why do teachers provide feedback? This important question marks the objective of the teacher from the moment he reads the essays. Juan gave one reason for providing feedback: Students would sense that he was interested in them, creating a sense of community. In one interview, he stated:

> I think that for me personally I like when professors give you feedback; it shows that they are interested in what you've done and that they have taken time to write down what they think. . . . I don't know if they get as much feedback in other areas or not, but we are sort of a little family, and so to me that's especially important for the first composition. I think I give more feedback then, in order to establish that rapport with students and to tell them, "I'm here to teach you, but I'm also interested in how you write and you as a learner." Maybe my comments tell them that. Secondly, as far as the grammatical errors that they made, I don't really know what that tells them. It probably shows them what their gaps in their linguistic knowledge are; it's kind of, that they know I care about their learning.

The idea of the Spanish classroom as a specific community ("a little family") shows Juan's interest in building an environment where fluid communication is highly valued. During the second interview, he also mentioned that providing feedback comments allowed for an individualized communication that might not be possible in the day-to-day functioning of the classroom. In addition, individualized communication can enhance students' understanding of grammar, content, and organization. In his last interview for this study, Juan noted:

> It's showing that I'm engaged in their text, that I'm reading with care and with detail, I guess, and create a small little dialogue between teacher and student, which normally maybe doesn't happen in other activities. . . . Kind of guide them and write comments directed towards grammatical errors. I think that they will hopefully gain a better understanding, as far as backing up their opinions, whether being a specific example, whether in some cases it is clarifying exactly what you mean, maybe it's tending to grammatical errors in order to make that clarification possible; hopefully, in some cases, they will be able to understand better organization, as far as sentences or paragraphs, and I guess in content backing up what you say or expanding and elaborating. I think that's it. Well, how to be better writers, too.

Juan's comments reflect the idea of the necessity of having a sense of audience, which is essential when considering the interactive nature of reading and writing (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998). Following Goldstein (2004), students need to feel that what they write is not static and that the meaning prevails not only in their words but also in what the readers (i.e., their teachers) bring to the reading. Thus, feedback matters to students because it reflects an interaction between the reader and the text.

Juan saw the importance of feedback as a trigger for successful correction or revision. His feedback had a bearing on the type of communication that developed in this asynchronous dialogue; thus, Juan's acknowledgment of the way feedback was presented signaled to his audience what he was considering when writing the comment.

Similarly, the choice of language became an issue as well. At certain points in the verbal protocols, Juan wrote a sentence in which he included an English word in parentheses. True to his belief that students needed to become accustomed to the target language, he provided most of the feedback in Spanish; however, when he thought that a word he had chosen would be unknown to the student or would most likely not be remembered, he glossed his own feedback with English translations.

> TA (about Beth): [writes] *(apoyando estas organizaciones que ayudan a las personas adictas)*, it's kind of a weak role, being the devil's advocate here but I want her to, [rereads his comment] I'll put 'supporting' [writes above *apoyar*] supporting.[10]
>
> SR (about John): [he explained why he added the English translation of the word *apoyar* (supporting)] I thought that maybe that was vocabulary that he didn't know.

Juan's concern for comprehensibility reflects the type of dialogue he wants to have with his students. Because most of his comments were written in Spanish, he wanted to make sure that students had a better chance of responding to the feedback. This asynchronous dialogue attempted to foster flexibility on the possible outcomes that his feedback triggered.

Providing feedback entails a significant responsibility toward students' learning. When students read the feedback, they do not perceive or imagine how difficult it may be for the person who provides the feedback. Juan occasionally hesitated about the type of feedback to offer and about the type of language to use. This hesitation, seen in the think aloud, suggested that he frequently reconsidered his decisions throughout the evaluation process, a practice that lengthened the feedback process.

> TA (about Jeremy): [sighs] I don't know, maybe I should help him out here.

Issues of Content and Form

From his first interview, it was clear that what Juan liked least about reading his students' essays was correcting language errors. He was conflicted about the importance that needed to be given to content versus form. He found it difficult to decide which errors to circle and how detailed his coding should be. Overall, Juan limited his correction strategy to signaling errors on linguistic features that students should already know. Juan seemed to focus on grammar primarily because that is one of the goals of the course; however, he disliked the attention he needed to pay to form. This observation seems to contradict the idea that FL teachers attend to mechanical features and lexical accuracy over content (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994). Apart from his preference for content over form, Juan's views on responding to both influenced his grading. That is, in his opinion, content and ideas were most important, followed by organization, grammar, vocabulary, style, and (finally) punctuation. This hierarchy meant that he was weighing content over form.

In this study, Juan's inclination toward stressing content elicited a different response from the prestudy feedback method in which Juan signaled only five errors to be corrected. This renewed awareness of content generated a particular sense of readership that was overshadowed by the previous grammar-coded approach.

> SR: I guess, because they are revising and most of the revisions are based on content, so I'm a little bit more detailed about the things I want them to do. I think you are a different reader, because, well, compared

> to what I used to do, with grammar you let things like that slide, because if they are just revising for grammar, it's not a big deal; but because this is more focused on content I feel like I need to provide them with something to make the writing better, as far as content, because they are revising mostly on content. I feel like I need to be more detailed with the comments I provide.

The idea that he became a different reader highlights the importance of what teachers can achieve when focusing on elements other than grammar. Regardless of the importance of students' linguistic accuracy, due to this new emphasis on content, Juan provided targeted feedback, focusing on areas that could improve students' writing skills. As interactive and thorough readers, teachers can help students identify what needs to be learned or adopted to become better writers through the production of drafts (Goldstein 2004).

Types of Feedback

Ferris (1997b) suggests that certain types of feedback are more successful than others. During the first interview, Juan discussed his use of routine comments such as *Bien* and *¡Qué interesante!* to give positive feedback before writing negative comments. Similarly, he personalized his comments with the goal of engaging the students.

Regardless of his attempts to reach students using personalized and positive comments and tailoring his comments to connect better with individual students, Juan used different types of feedback to address content and form. His marginal written comments, as Ferris and Hedgcock (1998) suggest, have immediacy, leaving no doubt regarding his intent. Juan's directness facilitated students' comprehension of his comments and made clear the part of the essay to which he was referring. However, he also provided end comments that are summative in nature, "bringing together major 'themes' to educate the writer about particular types of content or rhetorical issues and corresponding strategies for revision" (Goldstein, 2004, p. 75).

In his comments, Juan provided different types of feedback: challenging, elaborating, textual (organization and structure), and positive. When working with form, Juan's coding scheme was based on symbols from a system provided by his department: VOC for vocabulary, V for verb, T for tense, ING for English (*inglés*) and ORT for *ortografía* (or spelling) and so on. He intentionally used those codes to make students think about their errors. As he mentioned in his interview, if the coding was extremely specific, his approach would be akin to directly correcting each error.

> At times I change the things that they have on there [referring to the code system used in Intermediate Spanish II] because some are very detailed, it's like the paradox of using a key. I don't want to be so detailed that it's almost as if I'm correcting every error. . . . I like to keep it nice and general so they actually have to think about what the possibilities are as far as the correction rather than giving them specific information saying, "This should be an adjective."

Thus, the coding was based on what Juan thought students could accomplish. He allowed room for students to try to solve problems on their own without his immediate help. This aspect of the correction process explained some of Juan's decisions on the application of a coding system. In addition, Juan perceived that the coding system generally helped students, at least in the short term. Moreover, his presence in the classroom could guide students if they encountered problems in interpreting the coding scheme. In general, students were successful with their corrections; however, some of the coding problems observed in this session were due to a misunderstanding of the code or the use of an inappropriate code.

> SR (about Tom): I marked *en adición* [addition] as VOC. This was not spelling, and he changed the spelling. If it were spelling, I would have marked *ortografía* [orthography], but this was VOC.

That example shows a common problem among teachers and students: multiple interpretations of the coding symbols. There is an element of ambiguity in the choice of the symbols, which allows for misinterpretations—hence, the difficulty in knowing which coding symbols trigger appropriate corrections. Regardless of the accuracy of Juan's coding, the students successfully corrected a majority of the grammatical errors, an indication that Juan chose errors that fit within students' knowledge base.

During this study, Juan made comments about some of his feedback not being good enough and recognized that other comments appeared to be genuinely helpful.

> I hope they view my comments regarding things like 'thesis,' as something that's helpful, or 'conclusion.' Maybe it's a time factor, and they end up without a conclusion, so I hope those comments are helpful, or they see them as being helpful.

His least helpful comments, in his opinion, were the ones that provided general praise because they did not usually trigger revision. In the third interview, he reflected as follows:

> *Me gusta tu introducción, buena idea, buena conclusión*. [These phrases] are rather random, kind of cookie-cutter; they probably don't appreciate them.[11]

However, this raises the question of why teachers use such modes of feedback. Certainly, the insertion of generic positive comments is a common approach to giving feedback on students' writing that seems to reflect a need to build positive communication. In the short run, the revision does not seem to be affected; but in the long run, it may encourage students to approach writing in Spanish in a positive manner. Moreover, this comment about positive feedback not being useful is contradicted by Juan's final definition of good feedback.

> I think student writing would show greater improvement if my feedback and comments were more positive. I think my comments are too negative. I'm always suggesting things, like, "This doesn't make sense," "Explain more," or "Provide specific examples," and sometimes I think

> that if I provided a little bit more positive feedback, especially at the initial stages, that may affect the way, they may improve perhaps, but I don't know if that's going to affect the text directly, it may affect their approach to writing, appreciation of writing.

This reflection was the result of responding to and evaluating students' drafts. After evaluating the revisions and reflecting on his own feedback, Juan was aware that his comments could improve and help students become better writers. He sensed which comments did not always work and in which ones he could have adopted a different tone. The need to provide positive feedback related to his goal of creating good rapport with students rather than improving the quality of their writing. However, Juan seemed to favor the idea of helping students embrace the act of writing first as a means to improve their attitude about writing in Spanish.

Juan realized that if his feedback was not accurate enough, students could not perform a successful revision. This concern is shared by many teachers who work with writing; however, by providing additional comments and not penalizing students for not achieving a higher degree of success in their revisions, this failed revision becomes a platform for helping students understand the problem better in subsequent essays—and for helping teachers evaluate their own feedback.

The Notion of Revision

> [Revision means] incorporating the comments in your suggestions, or the professor's or somebody's feedback; I guess, number one, meeting those, understanding those, and then, deciding on how you are going to integrate those suggestions into your compositions, so you have to reflect on what is recommended that you do, and think about it; and number 2, decide how you are going to incorporate those, and then actually do it and carry it out; and then part of the revision I think also includes getting additional feedback again on the new version, have someone else read it again, and incorporate their ideas as well, and getting those ideas in the new version before turning it in. Another word that comes with revision is "process," steps and processes that go on.

During his interview, Juan mentioned that this method of revision would be new to students because their only experience with revision in a university Spanish course was to correct a small number of linguistic errors. Thus, he presented the normal parameters for students in the Spanish intermediate-level course before they had had a chance to work with content-based revision.

> My students, they don't understand revision because they are only addressing grammatical structures, and so they are not looking at the whole document again; they are just looking at the errors of form that they had, and sucking those out of the context of the composition and focusing on those, so they are not revising at all.

However, with the inclusion of content revision, he hoped that the notion of revision would expand and that students would become better writers. Juan did not take into account the fact that his students had taken composition and rhetoric

courses in their L1, in which issues of revision had been addressed. During the third interview, he expanded on the notion of revision a bit more because his students had already been working with revision on content.

> I think they probably address what I write, what I mention; for the most part, students at this level are [addressing what I comment on], except a few, I don't think that when I say revise they are going to go out and do something I haven't addressed.

Juan's Opinion of the Revision Process

After Juan had worked with this new revision approach for a semester, his perspective on its advantages and disadvantages was elicited. The last part of this section presents Juan's overall impression of how this revision method affected (1) the quality of students' argumentative essays and (2) students' linguistic accuracy.

> They are better in general, I think students learn how to write an argumentative essay, and leave this semester with a better idea of how to, to also present an idea about a topic, and respond what they want to, but address both sides of the issue, rather than just answering the question. . . . In general, these people are addressing or expanding a lot what I suggested, and they also move things around and organize ideas a little bit differently, so in general, the response is good. This has been, as far as responding to my comments. The grammar things, maybe I could have helped them a little bit more with that, but in general they were okay.

Juan's greater focus on content and textual organization seemed to be influenced by the method of the study. During the third interview, Juan talked about this new revision method.

> I like this method; I think students are better prepared to take higher courses, much more prepared or keen on, or in tune to defending themselves. They are responding to content and being asked to back up their ideas, structure things logically, making sure there is a thesis, making sure there is a concrete conclusion, so this method is preparing them much more than the five grammatical errors.
>
> . . . To a certain extent, it's probably what we should be doing, whereas with the other method, we went flying through these things, especially when I had two classes to teach with 40 students, and I was not responding to the content, and part of me felt guilty.

Juan not only preferred the new method but also seemed to believe that the students who had taken part in this study gained an advantage over students who had not participated. He brought up issues related to providing feedback, such as the time factor. The fact that revision is time-consuming and that it took place in the classroom may have influenced the type of feedback Juan provided. However, his observations about the new method open the door to the development of similar approaches to language courses at lower levels.

Discussion

In general, FL writers' beliefs that language teachers emphasize form over content (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996) seem to reflect the instruction received in their FL courses. The pedagogical interventions (i.e., incorporating content-oriented comments and an in-class revision session) in this intermediate Spanish course were structured so that students had the option to pay attention to the essay as a whole entity as well as to ask their teacher questions when revising, potentially lowering the frequency of feedback misunderstandings. The following section addresses the question included at the beginning of this article: How will a change of writing approach in an intermediate Spanish language course—from error correction to revision in addition to just error correction—affect a teacher's beliefs and expectations?

To address that question, I categorized and analyzed the data obtained from the verbal protocols (think-aloud protocols and stimulated recalls) and interviews. The results of those analyses indicate that the teacher, Juan, (1) brought his beliefs, expectations, and opinions about students, writing, and the context of the classroom community to the task of responding to and evaluating students' essays; (2) was influenced by the FL teaching context at a large university (programmatic and institutional attitudes); and (3) believed that feedback helped students become better writers.

In relation to Juan's feedback, the results also indicate that he preferred to provide feedback on content rather than form, which contradicts earlier research on FL teachers' feedback practices (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996). When Juan provided feedback on content, he reported feeling like a different reader; that is, he paid more attention to the content and organization of the essays than when he had considered only form (as he had done in previous semesters). Consequently, his feedback was focused and directive because students would need to use his comments in their final drafts to address content and textual problems (which had not been the case in previous semesters).

In addition, the think-aloud protocols allowed me to perceive what Juan was analyzing (to avoid repetition of "think-aloud" … thinking when he read the essays, how he responded to them, and what feedback he utilized to address the students' writing problems. That information was invaluable when I contrasted the teacher's data with the students' protocols regarding the same problematic areas. Moreover, Juan's beliefs about feedback on form explained his resistance to correcting all errors in an essay, as well as his decision to provide specific symbols that would either limit students' hypotheses about the problem or provide an exact answer.

Furthermore, Juan, as a creator of context, illustrated the importance of establishing a dialogue between him and his students. As Goldstein (2004) indicates, "the unique interaction between teacher factors and individual student factors will affect how we respond and how students use our commentary in revision" (pp. 66–67). Juan's presence during the revision session (with the exception of the revision sessions of the six students involved in the think-aloud protocols during essay (3) allowed students to ask questions about his feedback and share their concerns with him. He maintained two types of dialogue with the students: (1) asynchronous

(written feedback) dialogue and (2) synchronous dialogue during the revision sessions. Juan made sure that students had the chance to communicate with him during the revision sessions, which affected the way in which students responded to his comments. In addition, the inclusion of the revision sessions helped students focus on their tasks and emphasized the importance of the writing component of the course.

The data provided insightful information on a teacher's feedback: his beliefs, expectations, opinions, and practices. In addition, the use of stimulated recalls, from a methodological point of view, helped Juan reflect on his teaching practices and make changes in his approach to teaching writing and in the manner in which he provided feedback.

Pedagogical Implications

Observing revision through multiple data sources may prove useful in discussions about FL writing for writing courses and language courses. In a writing course, revision is normally included in the design of the syllabus (process writing approach). Teachers in language courses, however, still tend to see essays as products; that is, they spend time focusing on form rather than content and textual features (e.g., organization). Therefore, they do not include revision in the design of the syllabus. The results of this study suggest that there are benefits to incorporating feedback about content at earlier stages of students' FL writing experiences. This type of feedback gives students the opportunity to focus on the entire essay, emphasizing, in this manner, the importance of the writing component in the course and the teacher's interest in students' ideas. Moreover, including an extra day in the syllabus for an in-class revision session allows students to reconsider their essays and to work on them from a different perspective due to their teacher's comments, that is, their audience.

Through this study, I encourage teachers to become classroom researchers in their own courses. By observing their own feedback practices, teachers can investigate (1) the type of feedback they rely on or prefer, by using a diagnostic evaluation; (2) types of feedback that trigger successful revision in individual students, by looking at students' responses to the feedback and deciding whether students engage in substantive revision and whether they understood the feedback; and (3) patterns that signal problematic areas, by creating records for each student to analyze. These observations do not need to be as detailed as the research for this study, but an outline of the problematic areas and the type of feedback to which students respond can provide teachers with a clear idea of what each student needs. Moreover, if teachers discover that students share similar problematic areas, the teachers will seek to address those areas during class. Teachers might create a handout for the class, such as "Common Problems in the Drafts," that would provide an arena for the teacher and the students to discuss common problematic areas in student essays.

Furthermore, although revision is an individual act, this does not necessarily mean that students cannot benefit from whole-class discussion and teachers' suggestions. The inclusion of revision sessions emphasizes the interaction

between teachers and students, decreasing miscommunications and misunderstandings and providing an atmosphere that resembles a writing workshop. Creating this type of context also helps teachers communicate their expectations about essays and the students' approach to writing. This communication facilitates students' comprehension regarding revision procedures and the assigning of grades. Moreover, occasional questionnaires or evaluation sheets may help students reflect on the course and provide teachers with valuable information on students' perceptions relating to the course design, the choice of tasks, and feedback. In this manner, the classroom becomes an arena in which an instructor's concerns are included along with students' concerns.

Regarding the writing component of the course, an exploration of different genres will help students connect their L1 writing experiences to those in their L2. This approach generates links between what students already know and what new conventions they need to work with. Promoting their background knowledge of writing can remind students to use strategies that need to be incorporated into their L2 writing experience. Thus, teaching (or reteaching) strategies may help students become better writers.

A last point: The inclusion of positive feedback promotes a sense of accomplishment, especially in cases in which students' L2 proficiency is low. An acknowledgment of students' success may trigger increased motivation in future writing assignments, especially when students see that the teacher is not only an evaluator but also an engaged reader.

Juan's story has allowed us to experience his thoughts while responding to an essay and to share his concerns, expectations, and beliefs about writing and revision in Spanish. His experiences may help researchers and teachers of Spanish reflect on their own practices, see how writing instruction and syllabus design may be improved, and observe the challenges of teaching writing to students of Spanish. His feedback is the result of an amalgam of affective factors, academic expectations, and his educational background, revealing how complex the sources of teachers' responses can be. Through stimulated recalls and the evaluation of students' revisions, Juan became aware of his weaknesses and strengths. This experience indicates that if teachers have the opportunity to become researchers in their own classrooms, they may be able to locate areas to target for further professional development.

The results also reveal the importance of feedback in writing instruction. Perhaps the most interesting finding from a writing perspective, however, concerns the interaction that takes place between the teacher and his students in the classroom setting: a combination of asynchronous (written response) and synchronous (oral response) communication. Because most L2 writing research has been conducted in writing courses, the context of the *language* classroom offers new implications for syllabus design, instruction, and research. In addition, the feedback and the teacher-student interaction can help educators observe and reflect on the common and individual needs of the student and, consequently, guide teachers to provide effective responses.

Topics for Further Research

The results of this study have, in addition, suggested topics about which further research is warranted. The present study has investigated FL revision in an intermediate Spanish course through argumentative essays. Argumentative writing activities, important as they may be in the context of academic writing, are not the only writing tasks these writers are expected to perform. In addition to argumentative essays, future studies should include other genres, such as description and narration. Verbal reports by students while responding to diverse writing tasks can reveal different revision processes. Because description is a less cognitively demanding task than argumentation, students' revision processes may be different. Similarly, this study focuses solely on an intermediate Spanish course at the university level; therefore, other contexts, such as high school classes or beginning courses at the university level, appear to be the next logical step in the continuation of FL revision studies. Finally, because this study focuses solely on Spanish as a FL, it is imperative that research focus on other foreign languages to complete a portrait of FL revision.

Notes

1. The teacher, Juan, participated in three interviews: one before the semester began, one after the feedback session for essay 3, and one after the revision session for essay 3.
2. Elsewhere I attend to the changes in student essays and to students' beliefs and practices around FL writing, feedback, and revision (Elola, 2005).
3. Think-aloud protocol.
4. TA (about Jeremy): [reads]: *The increase in games of chance can be well [sic] for many people*. Okay, why is it good? One reason is that many people play games of chance for enjoyable [sic], okay, to have fun and for entertainment.
5. Stimulated recall protocol.
6. TA (about Jeremy): *have enjoyable* [sic] [he marks the first error with a V] these people don't play all of time (sic), Jeremy should be able to fix this, he's a smart kid, okay.
7. General Education Program.
8. TA (about Mary): Okay, for Mary, that is a great introduction, I think, compared to other essays, the thesis is clear, so I'm going to say: [writes] Mary, I like your introduction.
9. TA (about Tom): I like the way he addresses it. . . . [writes at the end of the composition] Tom, I like the way you talk about the two points of view concerning games of chance.
10. TA (about Beth): [writes] (supporting these organizations that help addicted people), it's kind of a weak role, being the devil's advocate here but I want her to, [rereads his comment] I'll put 'supporting' [writes above to support] supporting.
11. *I like your introduction, good idea, good conclusion*. [These phrases] are rather random, kind of cookie-cutter; they probably don't appreciate them.

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