GENERATION 1.5 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF WRITTEN FEEDBACK ON THEIR ESSAYS FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES:
A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

BY

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A dissertation submitted to
The Graduate School of Education
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree
Doctor of Education
Graduate Program in Literacy Education

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New Brunswick, New Jersey
October 2011
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation could not have been completed with the support and guidance of many individuals to whom I will always be very grateful. To begin with, I wish to express my gratitude to the students and two instructors who volunteered to be part of my study. They participated in this study without hesitation and gave generously of their valuable time. I can never express in words how much I appreciate their commitment throughout this process.

My heart-felt appreciation also goes to my dissertation chair, Dr. Alisa Belzer, to whom I owe an infinite debt for her guidance, wisdom and patience. I feel truly fortunate to have had Alisa as my dissertation chair. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the two other members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Lorraine McCune and Dr. Carole Weisz. Dr. McCune knew how to guide me when I was struggling during the early stages of this dissertation, and both she and Dr. Weisz were great sources of encouragement to me throughout this long journey. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my colleague Dr. Hillary Hyman for her insightful suggestions and constant encouragement. A special thanks goes to Thomas Shivayka for his technical assistance and to Gwendolyn Harris and Veronica Geruldsen for their technical support as well. I must acknowledge my two dearest friends, Elise Gonzales and Dina who hung in there with me and knew how to calm me down in times of great stress and panic. I am also thankful to my friend Steven Kushinsky who helped me think very carefully about my own writing.
Finally, many thanks to my husband, Shlomo, and to my children, Shira and Ariel for their love and support. Without them, I would never have fulfilled my dream of completing this dissertation. Special thanks also to Shlomo for helping me with the figures and tables of this dissertation.
ABSTRACT

This study employed a qualitative methodology combined with a practitioner research approach to examine how a group of Generation 1.5 students understood and used the written teacher commentary they received on their in-class writing assignments within the context of an academic ESL program at a large community college in central New Jersey, across three different error correction feedback types. The sample population in this study consisted of three groups of Generation 1.5 students (with four participants per group) who were enrolled in a high intermediate ESL intensive writing class.

Data analysis was conducted in two phases and focused primarily on the rich data gathered from the two transcribed open-ended interviews conducted with each participant, as well as an examination of the first and second drafts of one of their essays. The findings of the first phase of analysis revealed, as expected, that error correction feedback type had a direct effect on student understanding, and that the more explicit the feedback, the greater the likelihood that students would understand the feedback. However, some of the students who received the least explicit feedback were the most successful in incorporating that feedback into the second drafts of their essays, while some of those who had received the most explicit feedback produced some of the most unsuccessful second drafts incorporating that feedback.

The second phase of the data analysis used a grounded theory approach to build upon the results of the first phase, and was designed to explain the counter intuitive pattern of student corrections that was found, by exploring the nexus of teacher feedback
and student variables. The findings suggest that there is no one “silver bullet” approach to feedback that works for all students in all situations because who the students are, their experiences in dealing with error correction feedback, and what they bring to the revision process may influence the success of a second draft.
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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Throughout the relatively short history of the teaching of composition to ESL learners, the issue of error correction has been of ongoing concern among scholars and L2 (second language) writing teachers. In spite of the fact that teachers spend a great proportion of their time consumed in correcting errors, they are often left with the persistent feeling that they are correcting the same errors over and over again. Indeed, leading researchers in the field of both first language (L1) and L2 writing share similar concerns. For example, Hillocks (1986), Knoblauch and Brannon (1981), and Leki (1990) have adhered to their claims that regardless of the method of delivery, no evidence has been reported to suggest feedback in the form of error correction is effective in helping students improve the technical aspects of their texts. And while some researchers (Chandler, 2004; Ferris, 2003) continue to champion its use, no research clearly supports error correction as an effective form of feedback.

An understanding of the historical trends in perspectives on error, however, can explain much of the current debate that is found in the literature with regard to its treatment (Ihde, 1994). As Leki (1992) points out, when the study of L2 writing was introduced into the field of second language studies, the audio-lingual method was the dominant approach used in the language classroom. Grounded in the habit formation model of behaviorist psychology, the key principle behind this approach is that the mastery of a language is in speech production, and could be achieved through drills and repetition (Silva, 1990). Thus, it was no surprise, as Silva (1990) asserts, “writing was
regarded as a secondary concern, essentially as reinforcement for oral habits” (p. 64).
Since it was believed that students had to master the language at the level of the sentence in order to produce coherent paragraphs, writing was confined to controlled sentence patterns and vocabulary (Ferris, 2002), with hardly any attention placed on the audience or reader (Nunan, 1991).

Because of the strong influence behavioral psychology had on second language teaching until the 1970s, teachers would pay more attention to form than meaning and would place a great deal of attention on correcting students’ errors so that no bad habits would be reinforced (Ferris, 2002). Unlike slips (or mistakes, as Corder [1981] calls them) which are self-correctible without the benefit of feedback from a second person (James, 1998), errors were seen as “bad habits” which could be corrected through learning. As it was essential for teachers to help students avoid forming bad habits, error correction became a major, if not primary, focus of instruction in L2 writing classes (Ferris, 2002).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, native English language educators and researchers began to shift their focus from the final written products their students produced to the process students went through when composing texts. This major paradigm shift, according to Ferris (2002), would have “great implications for both L1 and L2 writing classes in the United States” (p. 3). In their 1981 study, researchers Linda Flower and John Hayes articulated a new model to categorize the mental processes used in writing. Their model indicated that writing is a complex problem-solving activity that requires a conscious, intellectual process involving planning, sentence generation, and revising. It recognized writing as a “non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers
discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning” (Zamel, 1983, p. 165).

One of the effects of the shift in focus from the product to the process of writing was a change in the way many teachers evaluated student writing. Faigley and Witte (1981) claim that prior to the introduction of the process approach, teachers regarded revision as “copy-editing, a tidying-up activity aimed at eliminating surface errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling and diction” (p. 400). The process approach, on the other hand, encouraged teachers to collaborate with their students in the discovery of how a piece of writing is produced as a way to become more expert, by providing feedback on content and suggesting revisions during the process of writing itself, rather than at the completion of it. The accepted view was that an emphasis on grammar and correctness in the drafting phase would disrupt the flow of ideas, and further inhibit a student’s effort to write. Thus, attention to sentence-level errors was delayed until the final editing stage (Johns, 1990).

As the notion of writing as a process gained acceptance in ESL research and the ESL classroom, the distinction was made (Burt & Kiparsky, 1972) between global and local errors. Global errors were those that had a more serious effect on communication with regard to overall meaning, while local errors were at the syntax level and did not interfere with the intended meaning. As a result of a more communicative orientation towards language acquisition, only those errors that caused confusion were assumed to merit correction.

The correction of errors by teachers is now often referred to in the literature as feedback (Ihde, 1994), error feedback, or corrective feedback, which Lightbown and
Spada (1999) define as “any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is incorrect. This includes various responses that the learners receive” (p. 171). Error correction feedback, as Ihde (1994) maintains, can vary in intensity from meticulous corrections to no corrections at all, and may be used by the teacher with a number of different purposes in mind. To avoid confusion, I will use the term feedback in this study to refer strictly to the written correction given by teachers as response to their students’ technical errors in writing.

Although the process approach has, for the most part, been well received by ESL writing specialists, some researchers have raised concern about teachers ignoring the errors on the compositions of their L2 students. Myles (2002), for instance, has asserted that language proficiency and competence underlie the ability to write in an L2, and a focus on the process is only appropriate if sufficient feedback with regard to linguistic error is given, and if students have enough proficiency in the L2 to implement it in their revisions. Other researchers (Leki, 1992; Raimes, 1987; Silva, 1990) have noted the inherent differences between L1 and L2 writing, which they say, call for distinct theories and practices. For instance, the kinds of errors that ESL students make are different both quantitatively and qualitatively, and students need guidance from their teachers to help them develop strategies for finding, self-correcting, and regulating their errors. Silva (1993) further cautions that if differences exist between L1 and L2 writing, “then to make intelligent decisions about adopting and/or adapting L1 practices, ESL writing practitioners need to have a clear understanding of the unique nature of L2 writing….” (p. 191). Moreover, from a philosophical standpoint, as Patton (2004) puts it, “To fail to teach students the conventions adopted by the communities they’re in, even the lower
order [sentence level] issues, is to put students at risk” (p. 2). Other researchers (Eskey, 1983; Horowitz, 1986) concur with Johns (1995) who notes that if students are to do the writing that is expected of them at the college and university level, it would be “cruelly unfair to diverse students” (p. 16) not to point out their errors.

For the teacher in an academic ESL situation, too, the notion of turning away from the errors students write on their compositions creates something of a dilemma. While teachers desire their students to develop effective and enhanced composing skills, they equally desire them to acquire the grammatical and rhetorical forms they will need to succeed in other academic and workplace settings. The view among some process approach advocates that as learners are exposed to and practice more L2 writing, many of the errors they commit will naturally disappear, certainly runs counter to the experience of many ESL teachers (Hinkel, 2004).

In spite of what Ferris (2003) calls the “love-hate relationship” (p. 19) teachers and researchers have with the issue of corrective feedback, few would argue with Kroll (2001) who regards feedback as “one of the two components most central to any writing course with the other component the compositions students are asked to write” (p. 1). And while the process writing approach has led researchers to investigate alternative forms of response to writing, such as peer feedback (Ferris & Hedgecock, 1998; Keh, 1990), which is now even “urged in the composition literature” (Ferris, 2003, p. 20), Zhang (1995) and Curtis (1997) both found that ESL learners prefer teacher, rather than peer, feedback when asked to state a preference.

Developing writing competence is one of the most complicated aspects of becoming proficient in a second language. Yet, as Zamel (1985) observed, teachers’
error correction practices generally tend to be random and arbitrary rather than based on a clear and focused strategy. Furthermore, Cardelle and Corno (1981) maintain that the types of error correction strategies chosen by teachers are rarely based on cognitive psychology, or any other theory or empirical evidence of best practice. As Mantello (1997) states, “There seems to be a general lack of knowledge as far as error correction approaches and strategies are concerned” (p. 127). Consequently teachers must consider the many variables that may affect the effectiveness of the feedback they give their students on their compositions without much to inform their thinking beyond their own beliefs and experiences.

First, teachers need to assess who their students are, especially with regard to their prior academic literacy experiences. For instance, they must recognize that not all of their ESL students have the same academic skills and writing ability. Some students may have learned English primarily by listening rather than by extensive reading and writing. As a result, these students respond differently from other ESL learners to error correction feedback on their compositions. This situation describes the experiences of a fast growing group of bilingual students who are frequently referred to in the literature as Generation 1.5 students. Referred to as Generation 1.5 students because they have traits and experiences that lie somewhere in between those associated with first and second generation immigrants (Harklau, Siegal, & Losey, 1999), they neither fit neatly into the traditional categories of ESL students, nor of native-speakers enrolled in college writing courses (Harklau, 2003). Although, Generation 1.5 students “usually become highly proficient [verbal] communicators” (Roberge, 2002, p. 120), this “does not in and of itself assure [their] success in reading and writing” (p. 123). From a language acquisition
perspective, Cummins (1980) distinguishes between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). According to Cummins, it only takes 2 to 3 years for ESL students to learn BICS, which is context-embedded with extralinguistic cues such as gestures and body language to aid in communication. In contrast, CALP takes 5 to 7 years for ESL students to attain, and is context-reduced without the extracommunication skills that facilitate communication. However, Roberge (2002) points out that “many immigrant students are mainstreamed long before they have a firm grounding in academic language and thus they must struggle with the academic language of mainstream courses” (p. 123).

Since many Generation 1.5 students are placed in low-track and remedial classes in high school, where they are given mostly mechanical reading and writing tasks (Roberge, 2002), they do not get the practice needed to unlearn some of the errors they acquire as aural learners. Instead, these errors become fossilized in their written language repertoires. Additionally, they are not taught the critical thinking and metacognitive learning skills that international students have acquired in their home countries before coming to the U.S., and which are necessary to succeed in college.

In addition to considering their students’ prior academic literacy experiences, teachers need to know what types of error they will likely deal with and at what stage of the writing process they should offer error correction feedback (Ferris, 2002). For instance, Generation 1.5 students, for the most part, have a limited academic vocabulary, and unlike some other ESL students, have received almost no grammar instruction, and do not know such basics as the parts of speech. This becomes a problem in the college classroom when they are given written error correction feedback on their writing
assignments and do not understand the kinds of revisions their teachers want them to make (Singhal, 2004). Furthermore, as they are aural dominant, many Generation 1.5 students do not hear non-salient grammatical structures such as the “s” at the end of words and the “ing” and “ed” endings at the end of some verbs, and systematically leave off these morphemes in their writing.

Third, when giving grammar feedback, teachers should consider how much feedback to provide. Some teachers may have little tolerance for errors and mark every error on their students’ papers, or they may feel that they are not doing their jobs if they do not address all the errors in their students’ papers. However, studies dealing with L2 writing (Hendrickson, 1978; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986; Semke, 1984) have found this type of comprehensive error correction technique to be ineffective. Thus, Ferris (2004) claims that teachers need to prioritize and make decisions about which errors to mark. One way she suggests teachers can prioritize is by focusing on only those errors that individual students make frequently. Another is to target grammatical, morphological, lexical, or mechanical issues related to in class instruction or outside reading assignments.

Fourth, social and emotional issues may affect how students respond to teacher feedback. Many Generation 1.5 students, for instance, resent being labeled as “an ESL student,” and see placement in college ESL classes as a step backward, as they have already advanced out of ESL classes in high school (Blumenthal, 2002). While some Generation 1.5 students are cooperative in their ESL classes despite their negative feelings (Leki, 1999), others view their ESL classes as inconsequential courses that are barriers to their academic advancement.
Finally, teachers need to consider how learner errors could be corrected most efficaciously to improve their writing. For example, Ferris and Roberts (2001) found that students’ writing improved on the second draft of a composition when given error correction feedback in the form of both underlining and correction codes whereas comparable improvement did not occur in the absence of such feedback. This kind of minimal, indirect feedback may stimulate learners to become actively involved in the “discovery” process described by Corder (1967), Hendrickson (1980), Bates, Lane, and Lange (1993), and Madraso (1998) (as cited in Shih, 1998). However, such an approach may not be of value to Generation 1.5 students who have not been taught the English grammar and its metalanguage. Without this knowledge, a range of error correction feedback approaches may or may not be effective.

To summarize, opinions on the wisdom of any error correction feedback, and when used, what works best, are as polarized as ever. However, careful consideration of various factors may yield useful information about the relationship between error and response.

**Objective of the Study**

Given the lack of consensus on the effectiveness of various kinds of teacher feedback on error, or the lack thereof, this study is designed to gain more insight on giving effective error correction feedback by exploring students’ initial understandings of the teacher-written comments they receive on their essays. While most of the current scholarship has pursued the issue of teacher feedback in one of two ways, namely, students’ preferences for teacher feedback (Brandl, 1995; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, 1996; Leki, 1991), and students’ responses to teacher feedback (Cohen, 1987; Ferris,
1995), this study follows a slightly different course by attempting to learn students’ immediate understandings of both direct and indirect written feedback, in an attempt to learn how students make sense of and use teacher feedback in the second drafts of an essay. According to Leki (1990), there may be a large amount of research examining types of teacher response in L1 writing, but “examples of feedback and subsequent student action are rare” (p. 64).

In a short study I conducted in 2006 with a group of six Generation 1.5 students who were placed in one of two ESL writing classes, one intermediate and one high intermediate level, I found that the students often misunderstood their teachers’ comments on their written work. Sometimes the students would tell me that they did not know what a comment meant. In other instances, it was clear to me, if not to them, that they did not know. The feedback offered by the two instructors primarily consisted of circling words and phrases to indicate the presence of errors, and to a lesser degree, writing comments and questions in the margins of the papers or as end notes in response to technical errors or content. From my observations, I noted that the feedback was arbitrary and indeed confusing, and sometimes difficult to interpret. The students appeared to value all of the feedback, but especially valued the comments and questions that their teachers posed. The insights I gained from this study forced me to reexamine my own feedback practices (on both grammar and content) and inspired me to conduct this larger study in which I could explore the types of error correction feedback that have an impact on students’ learning and improvement of their writing proficiency.
Based on my own reading and reflections, coupled with my many years of teaching and some research experience, and the gaps of knowledge these have pointed to, I have developed the following questions to guide this study.

1) How frequently does a group of Generation 1.5 students understand the error feedback they receive on the first drafts of their essays, and what is the relationship between frequency of understanding and the type of feedback they get?

2) What impact, if any, does this feedback have on their second drafts? What types of feedback tend to yield change? What types of errors do students tend to correct? ignore? misinterpret?

The rationale for examining the revision practices of Generation 1.5 students in particular in the ESL writing classroom is twofold. First, as Harklau (2003) notes, “more and more U.S. resident English-language learners are coming to college [and] in fact, at some colleges these “1.5 generation” students now form the majority” (Lay, Carro, Tien, Niemann, & Leong, 1999, p. 153). Yet, this student population has traditionally been left out of the professional literature (Matsuda, 2003a). Only a few researchers such as Harklau et al. (1999) and Roberge (2002) have begun to focus on the particular needs of Generation 1.5 students. This study seeks to build on this limited work by helping to develop a deeper understanding of how these students use teacher written feedback in the process of revising their compositions.

Second, and more significantly, Generation 1.5 students who are placed in ESL courses constitute a subset of a larger group of Generation 1.5 students who are more likely to be placed in basic and mainstream composition classes rather than ESL classes
(Schwartz, 2004). Thus, this study can provide a lens through which to view language acquisition and writing issues that are relevant to basic and mainstream writing teachers who teach non-native speaking students in that context, as well as to ESL teachers. As Matsuda (2003b), in his historical article documenting how second language writers have been represented in the field of basic writing argues, “In order to develop scholarship on ESL writers and writing that is relevant to basic writing teachers, it is important to increase interdisciplinary cooperation between basic writing specialists and second language specialists” (p. 83). This study, therefore, yields some pedagogical insights into how L1 composition teachers (both developmental and mainstream) can better serve their linguistically diverse students.

Regardless of where they are placed, i.e., ESL classes, developmental composition classes, or mainstream English composition classes, what all of these Generation 1.5 students share in common, is that they are a diverse group of students who have not mastered the “linguistic forms, communicative strategies, and presentation of self” necessary for academic success (Delpit, 1988, p. 283). Therefore, the typical Generation 1.5 student who crosses over from ESL to mainstream composition classes is struggling both with learning the English language and learning how to use English that meets academic standards (Schwartz, 2004).

Although there has been a growing body of literature devoted to teacher feedback, the number of such studies has been “undeniably few” (Gascoigne, 2004, p. 72). While several researchers have examined student reaction to teacher feedback where some or most of the student subjects were long-term U.S. residents (Ferris, 1995; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; McCurdy, 1992, as cited in Ferris, 1999a), there has seemingly been no
research conducted exclusively on Generation 1.5 ESL students that explores their immediate understandings upon receiving written teacher feedback on their writing. Given the current lack of consensus on the effectiveness of teacher feedback, this study yields insights on giving effective error correction feedback by exploring what students understand and do after they receive teacher written feedback.

I believe that the gap in the literature that I have identified is an indication that research has not caught up with the changing demographics of the ESL student population in colleges and universities. As such, this study will offer timely insights into the complexities of teacher intervention in Generation 1.5 students’ writing and provide information that can be of benefit to students, teachers, and the greater college community.

**An Overview of This Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter I describes the background and purpose of the study as well as the research questions that guided this dissertation. Chapter II reviews the literature relevant to this study. The chapter begins with a discussion of the use of the term “Generation 1.5” and some of the variables associated with Generation 1.5 students. The chapter also discusses the history and pedagogical movements of ESL writing. It further summarizes the major research on student response to error correction feedback in ESL writing.

Chapter III presents the research methodology for this study, including the recruiting of and description of the participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis. The analysis of the data was conducted in two phases. Chapter IV presents the findings of the first phase of analysis, which was very closely linked to the responses the
participants gave to question number 6 of the student interview guide. Chapter V presents the findings of the second phase of analysis, which was built upon the results of the first phase of analysis.

The final chapter presents a synthesis of the findings of Chapters IV and V. It further discusses some of the implications that this research has for teachers and for future research.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature that follows is divided into three areas that provide a foundation for this study in terms of its methodology and purpose. The first section discusses the academic language learning of Generation 1.5 students in college and some of the distinctions between Generation 1.5 and traditional L2 learners. The second section examines the current state of ESL writing instruction in the U.S., including a brief history of ESL writing, which for the most part, has been closely dependent on L1 writing in instructional theory. Finally, the third section reviews some of the significant scholarship on feedback and revision that has led up to this study. These particular literatures are being reviewed because they delineate the special needs of Generation 1.5 students and the unique nature of ESL writing, spell out the reasons for studying teacher feedback on L2 student writing, and point to the major gaps that exist in the literature.

Issues in Higher Education: Generation 1.5 and L2 Students

In the past several decades, the number of ESL students on college campuses has risen dramatically. This increase has been coupled with a remarkable shift in student demographics. At first, there appeared to be a homogeneity among ESL students in spite of their ethnic diversity (Miele, 2003). International students would come to this country to continue their education, get a degree and return home in the hope of getting a job, or as a stepping stone to obtaining permanent residency in the U.S. Today, however, ESL students are much more diverse in terms of their educational backgrounds, degree of academic preparedness, age, and immigrant status.
Frequently overlooked by L2 (second language) writing researchers is the fact that international students are not the only, or the primary, source of linguistic diversity on college campuses today. Noticeable in the mid- to late-1990s was a considerable and fast growing number of bilingual English students who had graduated from U.S. secondary schools and were now entering U.S. colleges (Miele, 2003).\(^1\) Subsequently referred to as Generation 1.5 students, the great majority of these students enter the U.S. college system through community colleges (Roberge, 2003), often “the gateway to educational advancement that leads to a four-year institution and a university degree” (Desruisseaux, 1998, p. 1).

The term Generation 1.5 was first identified by Rumbaut and Ima (1988) to describe young Southeast Asian refugee children adapting to life in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. Since then, the term “Generation 1.5” has been widely used to describe many different students in different ways. My use of this term is in keeping with Oudenhoven’s (2006) definition of Generation 1.5 students as “immigrant students who move to the United States at the age of 12 or older and enroll in middle school or high school in this country” (as quoted in Masterson, 2006, p. 1).

Although the number of Generation 1.5 students has already increased considerably, this number is expected to continue to rise dramatically (Masterson, 2006). It is anticipated that by the year 2020, ethnic minority groups will account for approximately 65% of the growth in the U.S. population, and as Masterson asserts, “lessons learned from community colleges, if examined closely and seriously, can equip

\(^1\) This relatively new phenomenon was the outcome of immigration reforms in the 1960s that resulted in an increased number of families arriving to the U.S. with young children and adolescents (Harklau et al., 1999).
four-year colleges and universities with effective tools to prepare for and serve these students” (p. 1).

While the term Generation 1.5 has become recognized in L2 writing research, these students are by no means a homogenous group. A common denominator is that they are traditional college age and bilingual, and as a result of their exposure to Americans and spoken English in high school, have good listening and speaking skills and are conversant in American teen culture. In spite of this, and their coming up through the public school system, “they are in an “in-between position in terms of their language and literacy” (Roberge, 2003, p. 1). In other words, their L1 literacy was interrupted because of their need to learn the L2. Blanton (2005) uses the term “literacy interrupted” to describe how the L1 literacy experiences of Generation 1.5 students can affect learning to write in a second language. She further states that Generation 1.5 students’ L2 writing in English, “deficient it is considered to be, may actually be more developed than their L1 writing” (p. 110).

As Harklau (2003) points out, placing Generation 1.5 students in college writing classes can be problematic. Because they may not have not developed the academic language, background, and cultural schemata that U.S. college track and international students have learned, they may feel inhibited or be unprepared to participate in a college class with others who are academically better prepared. According to Blumenthal (2002), “Regarding writing, study skills, and the general knowledge one expects of a high school graduate, Generation 1.5 students are often ill prepared for college courses” (p. 49). Since the “language and literacy profiles [of Generation 1.5 students are] somewhere between those of ‘basic writer’ and ‘ESL student’” (Goen, Porter, Swanson, & Van Dommelen, 2002, p. 103), they are often placed into either basic writing or ESL writing
courses, and in some instances, in freshman composition classes. In many cases, however, none of these placements are a good fit with their actual needs.

One problem with placing Generation 1.5 students into L1 writing classes is that they may be taught by teachers who are untrained in working with low literate L2 students or who may be unaware of their weak literacy skills as they have good communication skills. As a result, these students may miss a great deal of information and experience “yet another interruption” in their education (Miromontes, 1993, as cited in Hartman & Tarone, 1999, p. 101), similar to the interruption they experienced when they left their countries of origin to come to the U.S. In addition, the instructors of these courses may not have the training to deal with students from non-English language backgrounds and may be unaware of their specific needs and how best to help them improve their writing skills. Another part of the problem is that there is little or no articulation between secondary and postsecondary institutions in the United States regarding these students. In addition, college policy makers often do not recognize them as a special population (Harklau, 2000). Discussions regarding Generation 1.5 students are “frequently limited to the English as a second language domain where college administrators and mainstream faculty often feel all language issues involving nonnative speakers of English should be resolved” (Hinkle, 2006, p. 47).

However, placing Generation 1.5 students in ESL classes with international students presents yet a different challenge. Reid (1997) asserts that Generation 1.5 and international students “have learned English differently from each other, so their language problems have different sources and different solutions” (p. 17) than do L1 struggling writers. But at least as importantly, they differ from each other, despite often
being grouped together. Ferris (1999a) and Roberge (2009) point out, for example, that Generation 1.5 students may not have learned or have difficulty interpreting the specialized language (metalanguage) to understand grammar terminology and rhetorical structures. Thus, terms such as “thesis” and “topic sentence,” which are found in ESL textbooks and which international students may have encountered in their native countries, may not be helpful to Generation 1.5 students unless such terms are explicitly defined and taught (Ferris, 1999a).

Ferris (1999a) goes so far as to stay that writing instruction for Generation 1.5 needs to be different from the instruction offered to international and other ESL students. She states, for example, that teachers may need to supplement writing texts with more focused attention to formal grammatical features, and in addition to providing clear and explicit corrective feedback on students’ writing, demonstrate to them how to use the feedback and edit their own work. In consulting six grammar/editing books, Ferris (1999a) found that the texts presupposed students had a knowledge of the terms subject, verb, and agreement. However, when Generation 1.5 student writers were asked by Ferris, Harvey, and Nuttall (1988), what they knew about subject–verb agreement, they responded, “If the noun has an ‘s,’ then the verb must also have an ‘s,’ so they agree,” (p. 146) a clear indicator that they did not know what was meant by that term.

In sum, while Generation 1.5 students can be found at four-year colleges and universities, they typically begin their postsecondary education at a community college “for both remediation and ESL study and because of various economic and cultural constraints” (Blumenthal, 2002, p. 51). With the anticipated continued growth of Generation 1.5 students at two-year institutions, new policies and instructional strategies
must be made that will take into consideration their academic needs and goals. Unfortunately, however, there is relatively little cohesive research to guide educators in making informed decisions regarding these students (Hinkle, 2006). The only consensus among researchers appears to be “that institutions of higher education are simply placing unnecessary barriers in the paths of Generation 1.5 students” (Hinkle, 2006, p. 47). Among the studies that do exist on Generation 1.5 students, most focus on Generation 1.5 students’ reading and writing abilities, while few emphasize their experiences and perceptions with writing and teacher feedback. I believe that this study, therefore, helps fill a gap in the literature.

**The History of ESL Writing Research and Instruction**

Despite the differences between Generation 1.5 and traditional L2 learners, there are similarities between the two groups. For example, both Generation 1.5 students and international students are capable of making similar grammatical errors. Therefore, to work more effectively with Generation 1.5 students, composition teachers need to consider the historical foundations on which certain L2 theories and teaching methodologies are built. Because theoretical and pedagogical practices are always historically situated, as Matsuda (2003a) points out, an understanding of writing instruction history provides a framework within which teachers can reflect on their own beliefs and practices within the context of shifting trends, in order to make appropriate decisions with regard to classroom materials, activities, and feedback strategies.

The history of composition instruction can be viewed as a succession of approaches that began with the product approach (or what is currently referred to as the current traditional paradigm) in the early 1900s, followed by the process approach, which
began to emerge in the 1960s. In truth, there has been a multitude of approaches throughout the 20th century, a fact which many researchers ignore. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss more than these two dominant, commonly practiced models. In this section of the literature review, I trace the shift from the product to the process approach paradigms, highlighting significant developments in ESL composition, studies, which have, to a large extent, been influenced by the history of L1 studies.

**The Product Model**

As explained by Connors (1997), an emphasis on form and mechanical correctness were the hallmarks of the product approach writing classroom. Basically developed at Harvard in 1894 after discovering that many of their students could not write very well (Connors, 2003), the product oriented classroom was firmly in place throughout the U.S. by 1910, and persisted well into the 1960s. Informed by a behavioral, habit-formation theory of learning, the product approach became a method of composition instruction that was teacher-centered and gave students “no freedom to make mistakes” (Pincas, 1982). The essays which students wrote were judged on form and syntax and returned to them with many corrections and comments. The assumption was that students would learn from these and gradually improve their writing skill over time as a result (Williams, 1998).

As its name suggests, the product model focused on students’ finished products rather than on the process of writing. Very little writing instruction occurred in class; when it did, the focus was primarily on the commonly prescribed patterns of English sentences, with students then practicing writing their own sentences in these patterns (Silva, 1990). The central concern of this approach was to teach technical correctness at
the sentence level on the assumption that proficient writing would follow. With regard to composition, students were taught how to recognize and write a well-formed, coherent, five-paragraph, grammatically correct essay (Warschauer, 2002).

**The Product Model – The ESL Classroom**

Because until the 1980s there was little L2 research to draw upon in building L2 writing theory or planning classes, the L1 product model approach to writing instruction was welcomed into the ESL classroom. However, with the influx of foreign students at the university level in the mid-1960s and an increasing awareness of the need to prepare them to function effectively in institutions of higher education, it was understood that controlled, grammar based guided composition instruction was not enough. A new ESL version of the product model, called Current-Traditional Rhetoric, that combined the basic principles of the product model from L1 composition instruction, with Kaplan’s (1966) theory of contrastive rhetoric, was set in place (Silva, 1990). Originally proposed some 45 years ago by the applied linguist Robert Kaplan as a pedagogical model to explain second language writing, the central idea in contrastive rhetoric is that since culture influences language, the rhetorical aspects of each language are unique to each culture. According to Kaplan, “logic per se is a cultural phenomenon” (p. 2) which is evident in the rhetorical patterns of different cultures. This idea relates to the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Whorf, 1956) of linguistic relativity, which claims that each language has its own set of rhetorical conventions that influence how people think and write. For example, Standard Written English rhetorical conventions demand essay writing that is direct and linear in its development (Kaplan, 1966), and holds the writer responsible for effective communication. A Thai student, by contrast, is likely to see such a
straightforward approach as “excessively blunt and lacking in subtlety” (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991, p. 30) and a Japanese student might consider the burden of understanding the author’s intent to be on the reader. Thus, as Leki (1992) explains, the Current-Traditional Rhetoric paradigm turned writing into a skill of arrangement whereby:

writing teachers would determine paragraph patterns typical of English and teach those to their ESL students. The students imitated the patterns, assuming that by learning these basic patterns, they would then be able to transfer these skills to the writing of acceptable academic prose and pour their writing content into the carefully prepared and practiced molds. (p. 6)

Contrastive rhetoric was later criticized for favoring a static view of culture (Kim, 2008; Silva, 2001). Both Zamel (1997) and Spack (1997), for example, have argued that L2 writers are diverse and do not neatly fit into fixed cultural groups as writers, and therefore, contrastive rhetoric risks stereotyping students into certain images. Another criticism is the methodology that contrastive rhetoric employs. As Kim (2008) argues, most contrastive rhetoric research has resorted exclusively to text analysis to trace cultural influence without considering contextual factors such as students’ social and educational backgrounds, and past writing experiences.

The Process Movement

In the 1960s, education underwent a major transformation. As a result of Sputnik, there was a sudden availability of federal money for education. Government grants and scholarships started flowing into college English departments, transforming composition studies into a recognized and distinctive field of expertise (McLemee, 2003). Furthermore, composition theorists began investigating and drawing on scholarship from other disciplines, especially psychology and linguistics, with writing researchers shifting the focus of their research from the end product towards the process of writing itself. As a result of their work, the focus of writing instruction shifted from an emphasis on the
final product to teaching students to adopt the writing processes of highly competent writers.

Since the 1970s, cognitive psychology has offered “fertile lines of research for scholars” (Williams, 1998, p. 33) and has spurred a host of studies that have examined thinking strategies necessary for writing (Hillocks, 1986). Emig’s (1971) study of the composing processes of 12th-graders was the first study of its kind to examine how writers compose rather than simply what they compose. Emig contended that the central concern of teaching writing should be the composing process rather than the finished text. Using a think-aloud protocol to collect data, she observed that the eight advanced high school writers she studied did not follow the many composition rules and outline format that standard textbooks of the time proposed as critical to becoming a successful writer. Her findings suggest that writing is not a linear process but one that involves recurring phases of planning, drafting, and reviewing of text. Accordingly, a writer starts to plan his/her ideas in the first stage. Then the writer checks to see whether the writing and organization makes sense and will be clear to the reader, which often leads to further planning and drafting. The writer continues to edit and refine his/her draft until a final draft is produced that meets writer, task, and audience expectations.

In the 1980s, L2 research started focusing heavily on writing, and with gradual but gathering momentum, the process approach was adopted into the second language classroom (Caudery, 1995). Vivian Zamel is frequently credited with introducing process writing to the ESL field in 1977 (Krapels, 1990). Advancing her hypothesis that research findings on the composing processes of L1 writers can be applicable to L2
writers, Zamel (1982) observed the writing of proficient ESL students and concluded that:

It is quite clear that ESL writers who are ready to compose and express their ideas use strategies similar to those used by native speakers of English. Their writing behaviors suggest approaches to the teaching of composition that ESL teachers may have felt were only appropriate for native speakers but, which in fact, may be effective for teaching all levels or writing, including ESL composition. (p. 203)

In spite of the momentum of the process approach in L2 composition, some researchers (Horowitz, 1986; Johns, 1990; Reid, 1984) have been very critical of this approach, claiming it fails to give ESL students an accurate view of what academic writing is really like. Horowitz (1986) for example, claimed the process approach does not really “bear any resemblance” to the kinds of writing that students will be asked to do in other classes (p. 144). Moreover, Reid (1984) criticized Zamel’s study for not taking into account the majority of ESL students who fell outside of the “advanced” writers category, and who were “inexperienced” writers who first needed to “develop their understanding of academic prose” (p. 151). Leki later argued (1992) that there were differences between L1 and L2 writers. She cautioned that “there is still not very much information on the nature of these differences, and [asserted that] a clear picture of these students’ writing processes is only just beginning to emerge” (p. 79). Ellis (1994, as cited in Carson, 2001) concurred and pointed out that second language acquisition (SLA) research has focused primarily on talking and listening rather than on writing, and as a result, SLA theory and L2 writing theories have remained separate and distinct.

More recently, L2 specialists have come to recognize that while L1 and L2 writing share some of the same characteristics (Matsuda, 2003b), they now constitute two distinct “cultures of writing” (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995, p. 540). Silva (1993), for instance, points out that while L1 and L2 writing are “similar in their broad outlines” in
that L1 and L2 writers both “employ a recursive composing process involving planning, composing, and revising to develop their ideas and find appropriate linguistic and rhetorical means to express them, [there are] salient and important differences” (p. 657) between L1 and L2 writing. He further argues that the ESL revision patterns are distinct from those of native English speakers:

It is clear that L2 composing is more constrained, more difficult, and less effective. L2 writers did less planning (global and local) and had more difficulty with setting goals and generating ideas and organizing material. Their transcribing was more laborious, less fluent, and less productive—perhaps reflective of a lack of lexical resources. They reviewed, reread, and reflected on their written texts less, revised more—but with more difficulty and were less able to revise intuitively. (p. 670)

Leki (1992), too, argues that while “L2 writers are not entirely different from L1 writers at the same level of competence in writing … they [are not] exactly the same” (p. 83). As she puts it:

…we can and should use successful techniques from L1 writing classes to teach writing to L2 students, but we also need to keep in mind that these techniques may need to be adjusted for ESL students. (p. 83)

Moreover, Bell (1995) cautions that because of the unique challenges ESL writers face, the “wholesale transfer of assumptions” from L1 to L2 writing pedagogies can set up hurdles for these students and negatively affect their academic success (p. 687).

Matsuda (1998) calls for a “symbiotic relationship” in which the field of L2 writing research maintains an autonomous standing independent from second language and composition studies, but allows for an open dialogue with those fields (as cited in Nye, 2006). This model allows the field of L2 writing to contribute both to composition studies and second language studies. This model, as Nye (2006) asserts, “reminds L2 and L1 writing researchers that although research findings from one field may be applicable
to the other, researchers should not ignore the differences between ESL and non-ESL writers and classrooms” (p. 24).

To sum up, while L2 writing has taken its place as a distinct academic discipline, questions about the complex task of teaching L2 writing continue to abound. And while tenets of the process approach are used quite extensively in ESL classrooms around the world today (Hartshorn, 2008), perhaps because of all the controversy, “the actual pedagogical practices sometimes resemble the lockstep rigidity of traditional pedagogy” (Matsuda, 2003b, p. 69).

Through this brief overview of the history of L2 writing, it is clear that L2 writing has been fully established as an area of second language studies and pedagogy. However, it is still heavily influenced by L1 composition studies and does not as yet have sufficient emphasis on second language studies. Ferris (2003) sums it up well when she states that while L2 writing research is becoming “more extensive and varied in its own right …at this point in time, L2 writing as a separate area of inquiry is still in the early stages” (p. 15).

**Research on Response to Student Writing**

Since the 1990s, L2 writing feedback research has focused on a few key areas. In addition to error correction, they include student perceptions of teacher feedback, the tone of written feedback (i.e., praise, criticism), the mode of teacher feedback (i.e., oral, written, or computer mediated), and the effectiveness of various approaches to responding to student writing. In the remainder of this chapter, I review three domains of the literature which are particularly relevant to this study: 1) the focus of teacher
comments, 2) the impact of various kinds of error correction feedback, and 3) how students feel about different ways to get feedback.

**Descriptive Studies on the Nature of Teacher Feedback**

With the advent of the process approach to writing, written response to student writing became a significant issue for L1 writing instructors in the late 1970s. As Ferris (2003) and Hyland (2003) have noted, most of the early research on L1 response was highly critical of instructors’ responding behaviors, variably assessing them as too “short, careless, exhausted, or insensitive” (Connors & Lunsford, 1993, p. 217), “arbitrary and idiosyncratic,” (Sommers, 1982, p. 149), and treating intermediate drafts as if they were the final products (Sommers, 1982). Furthermore, Murray (1984) claimed that teachers were preoccupied with teaching students “to study what we plan for them to study and to learn what we or our teachers learned” (p. 7). In their seminal article, Knoblauch and Brannon (1981) assert that, “We have scarcely a shred of empirical evidence to show that students typically even comprehend our responses to their writing, let alone use them purposefully to modify their practice” (p. 1). And in a similar article, Sommers (1982) maintains, “We do not know in any definitive way what constitutes thoughtful commentary or what effect, if any, our comments have on helping our students become more effective writers” (p. 148).

In terms of L2 writing, Zamel, who Ferris (2003) calls “one of the most articulate advocates for allowing the insights of L1 research to guide research and pedagogy in L2 writing” (p. 15), was critical of the way L2 teachers responded to their students’ writing, asserting that teachers acted more like language teachers than composition teachers. Zamel noted, for instance, that teachers “are so distracted by language-related problems
that they often correct these without realizing that there is a much larger, meaning-related problem that they have failed to address” (1987, p. 700). Elsewhere, Zamel (1985) concluded that the error correction practices of L2 teachers tend to be random and arbitrary rather than drawing on any clear and systematic strategy.

However, beginning in 1990, several studies showed that the focus on grammar in teacher feedback started to change (e.g., Caulk, 1994; Ferris, 1995; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Saito, 1994). In their 1990 study, for example, Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990 observed that the three instructors addressed both textual and organizational issues in their students’ compositions. In a later study, Conrad and Goldstein (1999) found that teachers addressed a broad range of issues that included coherence, cohesion, paragraphing, content, and purpose, as well as grammatical concerns.

Ferris (2003) takes exception to Zamel’s (1985) claim that “we need to establish priorities in our responses to drafts and subsequent revisions and encourage students to address certain concerns before others” (p. 96), objecting to what Ferris (2003) calls a “false dichotomy” (p. 23) between “content” and “form.” Ferris concurs with others (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Reid, 1994) who find it implausible that teachers ignore errors in form on first drafts, as conventional process approach wisdom calls for, noting that different students make different types of errors and have different needs. Thus, for example, it would be senseless for a teacher to fish for something to say on the organization of an already well formulated first draft when all the paper is asking for is feedback on grammar (Ferris, 2003). Another factor complicating the issue is that ESL students, especially those in an academic setting, want detailed error correction (Leki,
Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994) sum up the wide variation in teacher response in L1 and L2 writing classes as follows:

The most “consistent” finding in this area seems to be that written response among L1 and L2 instructors is diffuse; while some raters focus principally on substance, organization, and writing style, others regularly aim their red pens at mechanical concerns such as spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. (p. 144)

**Studies on Error Correction**

Given that teachers direct so much of their time and effort to commenting on their students’ papers, it is no surprise that a substantial amount of L2 writing feedback research has been conducted on the effectiveness of error correction. Between the early and mid-1980s, numerous studies (Cardelle & Conro, 1981; Lalande, 1982; Semke, 1984; Zamel, 1985) were conducted on error correction. For a decade after the mid-1980s, however, the number of studies on error correction notably decreased. One reason was the widespread use of the communicative language approach, which focused on meaning rather than on form (Hartshorn, 2008). A second reason, as Hartshorn asserts, is that through the influence of L1 written feedback studies, a number of L2 written feedback studies (Kepner, 1991; Robb et al., 1986; Sheppard, 1992), “discouraged further research by concluding that error correction has no facilitative effect on students’ writing accuracy” (p. 21).

The issue of the effectiveness of error correction, however, was later revitalized with the publication of Truscott’s (1996) very controversial review article entitled, “The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes” in 1996 (Hartshorn, 2008). In this article, Truscott rejects any possible advantages that error correction may have in improving students’ writing accuracy, and even blames it for catastrophic results on learners’ progress in writing. He builds on his strong opposition to error correction
feedback by arguing that there is no convincing research evidence that error correction helps ESL students improve the accuracy of their writing. Moreover, he makes three key observations in support of his position: 1) The common approaches to error correction ignore second language acquisition research that suggests that acquiring the structures of a second language is a gradual and slow process; 2) Many teachers are unable or unwilling to give adequate error correction feedback, and even when they do, students are often unable or unwilling to use it; and 3) Error correction discourages and de-motivates students and takes time and energy away from more productive tasks that can enhance their development as writers (Hartshorn, 2008). Truscott summed up the state of research on error correction with:

Veteran teachers know there is little direct connection between error correction and learning: Often a student will repeat the same mistake over and over again, even after being corrected many times. (p. 341)

Since Truscott’s argument was so strong, a number of L2 writing scholars, most notably Ferris (1999b, 2002, 2004), wrote critical articles in response. Ferris (1999b) accused Truscott of overstating negative findings in the literature and rejecting other findings that favor grammar correction. In response, Truscott (1999) remarked that Ferris’ arguments are unfounded and biased and that as a minimum, the proponents of error correction must situate it within a process of language learning. As Truscott puts it:

…effective correction would have to be based on an understanding of complex learning processes, rather than relying on simplistic ideas of transferring information from teacher to learner, as it currently does. Nor is there any attempt to deal with the problems created by developmental sequences or with the issue of pseudolearning. (p. 118)

Ferris and Truscott ultimately agreed that the existing data are insufficient in determining the potential effects of error correction on L2 writing (Hartshorn, 2008). They suggested the need for (a) more experimental studies that compare groups of
students that receive feedback with groups that receive no error feedback, and (b) research that investigates whether those students who receive error correction improve in accuracy over time.

Ellis (1998) and Ferris (1999b) claim that Truscott’s argument that error correction should be abandoned in the ESL classroom is premature and overly strong. Ferris (1999b) disagrees with Truscott primarily on two points: one is the problem of definition, and the other is the problem of support. With regard to the problem of definition, Ferris argues that Truscott uses a vague definition of error correction. According to Ferris, there are various types of error feedback, with some researchers reporting the use of detailed error correction schemes, and others more vague about the kind of feedback students received. Ferris also claims that feedback that is selective, prioritized, and comprehensible does help some student writers. With respect to the problem of support, Ferris claims that Truscott overstates the negative findings, and disregards those studies that contradict his argument.

While partially acknowledging some of Truscott’s claims, Ferris (2002) argues that teachers should continue giving error correction feedback because (a) several studies have shown that error correction feedback helps students in the short term, (b) surveys of ESL student opinions have found that students both attend to and appreciate teachers’ comments on their errors (Ferris, 2002; Goldstein, 2001), and (c) error correction feedback helps students become “independent self-editors” (Ferris, 2002, p. 9).

To clarify some of the research regarding error correction feedback, it is helpful to understand two important terms in the literature: direct and indirect feedback. Although the terms have not always been used consistently among researchers, generally speaking,
direct feedback refers to “the provision of the correct linguistic form by the teacher to the student,” and indirect feedback happens when “the teacher indicates in some way that an error has been made—by means of an underline, circle, code, or other mark—but does not provide the correct form, leaving the student to solve the problem that has been called to his or her attention” (Ferris, 2006, p. 83).

**Studies not supporting the effectiveness of error correction.** Three of the L2 studies on which Truscott based his claim are Semke (1984), Sheppard (1992), and Kepner (1991). These frequently cited studies compared the influence of form-focused feedback and content-based feedback (in isolation and in combination) on various measures of accuracy. Taken as a whole, these studies suggest that form-focused feedback has no significant effect on the writing accuracy of adult learners.

Semke’s (1984) experimental study used the results of a writing accuracy test, a writing fluency test, and a close test to compare the effects of four methods of teacher feedback on the first drafts of essays written by learners of German over a ten-week period. These methods included: (1) writing content-focused comments without corrections, (2) making corrections on all errors, (3) writing positive comments with corrections, and (4) marking errors by means of a code for self-correction. Semke, who used a process approach, found that among the four groups, students who received comments alone made the most progress in general language proficiency on both the fluency and close test, while those who had to self correct their errors made the least progress. Based on her findings, she claimed that students who received feedback on both content and grammar can become confused which type of feedback deserves higher priority, and this may obstruct the development of their writing abilities. She concluded
that the way to improve writing accuracy was through the continued practice of writing, and that error correction may have a negative effect on learners’ attitudes, especially if they have to correct the errors on their own.

In Kepner’s (1991) study, students in an intermediate Spanish as a foreign language course were provided with two types of written feedback on their journal assignments: one group received message-related comments (comments on content) and the other received surface error corrections. Two dependent measures were used: a higher-level propositions count to quantify the ideational quality of the student text and a surface-level errors count to tally all grammar and vocabulary errors. Kepner then checked the students’ journal assignments, written after 12 weeks of instruction. In terms of grammatical accuracy, Kepner found a negligible difference between the group who received surface error corrections and the group who received message-related comments on their journal entries. In addition, students who received meaning-focused comments revised significantly better than those who received error correction. While Truscott (1996) used this study as clear evidence against error correction, the students were not required to write a second version of a composition; thus, the effect of error correction was minimized.

Sheppard (1992) compared the effects of two different types of feedback (coded error correction vs. feedback on content) on two comparable groups of intermediate ESL students. Both groups wrote seven compositions, followed by a conference with the teacher where they could discuss any of their concerns regarding their feedback. The essays were subsequently rewritten with the first draft of essays 1 and 7 compared to measure overall progress. With respect to one variable; i.e., the marking of sentence
boundaries, the content group improved significantly while the coded error group did not. The conclusion reached by the author was that feedback on content was superior to feedback on form on the writing assignments of L2 students.

Another study Truscott (1996) used to support his argument against error correction feedback was Robb et al.’s 1986 experimental study that examined the effects of four types of grammar corrections used on the surface errors of Japanese learners of English. These types were: (a) explicit corrections where the errors were pointed out and the correct forms given; (b) the highlighting of mistakes with a yellow pen, without any explanation offered; (c) the number of errors tallied at the end of each line without further explanation; and (d) the use of a correction code which showed both the location and type of error made. In all these cases, the students were asked to rewrite their compositions, making the necessary corrections. At the end of the course, results showed negligible differences among the groups in terms of accuracy. Consequently, the study concluded that “highly detailed feedback on sentence-level mechanics many not be worth the instructors’ time and effort” if the less salient feedback had the same effect as the comprehensive feedback (p. 91).

One study that supports Truscott’s (1996) argument is Polio, Fleck, and Leder’s (1998) study that investigated the effects of direct feedback on the linguistic accuracy of 65 ESL college students. The students were divided into two groups. The experimental group received direct error correction and revised one journal entry per week for a 7-week period. A control group received no feedback. It was found that the experimental group did not perform any better than the control group on measures of linguistic accuracy. Therefore, the authors concluded “that learners can and do correct their own
errors without feedback” (p. 61). Although the study was relatively well-designed and carefully interpreted, the conclusions might have been enhanced had the researchers conducted their study over a longer period of time.

In one of the more recent studies that supports Truscott’s (1996) claim that error correction is ineffective, Truscott and Hsu (2008) investigated the narratives of 47 Taiwanese learners of English. The authors found that while error correction feedback helped student writers reduce the number of errors on their revised texts, this improvement did not translate into improved accuracy on a new writing task performed one week later. Therefore, the authors concluded that fewer errors on a revised text should not be considered as an indicator of learning.

In sum, this selected review presents a bleak picture of error correction feedback as a means to improve students’ accuracy in their writing. However, it is evident that the studies used different student populations, applied different methodologies, and were narrow in scope. Thus, no conclusive findings can be made.

**Studies supporting the effectiveness of error feedback.** In his 1982 quasi-experimental and longitudinal study, Lalande compared the effects of indirect feedback and direct feedback (the teacher corrects the mistake) with 60 L2 learners of German in the U.S. Students in the control group were corrected by their teachers and asked to rewrite their compositions. Students in the experimental group, who received error coded feedback and a chart indicating were they had made errors, were asked to self-correct using these aids. Lalande found that the group who received error coded feedback made significantly fewer errors over time than the group who received direct feedback. However, because there was not a no-feedback control group (a shortcoming Truscott
[1996] pointed out), the effects of correction could not be compared to the effects of no correction.

In a study of 72 ESL students, Fathman and Whalley (1990) found that when teachers underlined errors in their students’ texts, students made fewer grammatical errors in their compositions than when no such feedback was provided. Their study, which had no control group, indicated that both grammatical and content feedback are beneficial and can be provided at the same time without overburdening students. However, because this study examined text revisions and not new pieces of writing over time, it is impossible to know, as Truscott (1996, 1999) claims, whether or not corrective feedback ultimately has benefits for students in terms of long-term language development.

In their longitudinal studies, Frantzen (1995) and Ferris and Helt (2000, as cited in Ferris, 2002) reported similar results to Lalande’s 1982 study. In fact, in all three studies, the students who received direct feedback made either no progress at all or regressed in some error categories. Ferris (2002) points out that the cumulative effect of the results of these studies “appeared to be that students who received indirect feedback improved in accuracy far more than those who did not” (p. 20). In fact, researcher’s attitudes towards direct correction are fairly negative, which is evident in the fact that recent studies have tended to investigate the effectiveness of indirect, rather than direct types of error feedback (Ayoun, 2001).

Since Truscott’s claim that error correction should be abandoned in the L2 classroom, the more recent studies on error correction feedback have tried to be responsive to Truscott’s criticisms by carefully designing their research, and in particular,
by using a no-feedback control group (Ko, 2010). One example is Lee’s (1997) study. Lee examined three common assumptions about error correction practices in ESL classes: (1) overt correction is helpful, (2) students can cope with error feedback in the form of a correction code, and (3) all errors deserve equal attention. One hundred and forty-nine students participated in an error correction task in which their performance in error correction in writing was observed in three different conditions: direct prompting (errors are underlined and students correct them), indirect prompting (lines which are error free are marked with tick), and no prompting at all (no error correction is given). Lee found that when direct prompts were provided, students corrected significantly more errors than when either indirect and no prompts were provided; thus, she concluded that students’ major difficulty in error correction is recognizing the existence of errors. Additionally, the results indicated that students were weaker in correcting meaning errors than surface errors, confirming that meaning errors are more difficult for students to detect and correct than surface errors.

Ferris and Roberts (2001) used a control group to examine the short-term effects of differing levels of explicitness in indirect feedback given to immigrant student writers. The study was performed against three feedback conditions: (1) errors marked with codes from five different error categories; (2) errors in the same five categories underlined, but without any marking or labeling; and (3) no feedback at all. Yielding similar findings to those of Ferris and Helt (2000, as cited in Ferris, 2002) and Robb et al. (1986), the authors concluded that the less explicit feedback appeared to help students in their study to self-edit just as well as the corrections coded by error type. The implication was that,
at least with some populations of students, it might be adequate for teachers simply to locate errors without marking them by type.

Chandler (2003) used an experimental and control group to investigate whether the writing of ESL college students who corrected their grammatical and lexical errors on their papers improved in accuracy over a period of 10 weeks. In this study consisting of 31 ESL students, both groups received error feedback. The only difference between the two groups was that the experimental group was required to correct all the errors underlined by the teacher before submitting the next assignment, whereas the control group (who received the same feedback) was allowed to correct the errors towards the end of the semester, after the first drafts of all five homework assignments had been completed. Chandler reported that students in the experimental group showed significantly more improvement in accuracy than her control group who only did correction towards the end of the semester. In the second phase of the study, Chandler examined the effect of four different types of error correction: (1) direct correction, (2) underlining with error codes, (3) error codes only, and (4) underlining only. Results showed that direct correction or underlining mistakes led to more accurate revisions than underlining mistakes with error coding or error coding only. According to Chandler, a possible explanation for these findings could be that students found these type of feedback clearer and more time saving for them. Chandler’s argument for direct feedback contradicts the findings of Ferris and Roberts (2001), who maintain that indirect feedback is more effecting than direct feedback as it gives learners the opportunity to be engaged in cognitive problem solving.
More recently, using a no-feedback control group, Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005) examined two types of error correction feedback on three grammatical features (prepositions, the simple past, and the definite article). They compared direct written corrective feedback and an oral conference after each piece of writing with direct written corrective feedback only, to determine the impact on the writing accuracy of 53 ESL post-intermediate adult students. The study found a significant effect of the combination of written and oral feedback in the use of the simple past and the definite article in new pieces of writing. No effect, however, was found in the use of prepositions. These findings were confirmed in Bitchener’s (2008) study with 75 low-intermediate ESL students. Students who received written corrective feedback performed with greater accuracy than those students who did not receive any corrective feedback in the use of the English article system. In a delayed post-test two months later, the difference in accuracy was found again.

In a tightly controlled experiment, Bitchener and Knoch (2009) examined the role of corrective feedback in the development of accuracy in the use of the English article system. In their 10-month study with 52 low-intermediate ESL college students, the authors found that the experimental group that received corrective feedback outperformed the control group that received no corrective feedback on four pieces of writing (one immediate and three delayed posttests).

Finally, Bitchener and Knoch (2010) extended their previous research on the effectiveness of feedback in the development of accuracy in the use of the English article system (“a” and “the”). In their study with 63 advanced ESL writers at an American university, they found that students who received feedback in the form of written meta-
linguistic explanation (simple explanation of the use of the article, and an actual example of its use), and those who received both written meta-linguistic explanation and oral form-focused review, retained their accuracy gains across a 10-week period. In contrast, the who received indirect feedback in the form of circling to locate where an error had occurred were not able to retain the gains made in an immediate post-test. The authors concluding that providing simple meta-linguistic explanation and examples is the best type of error feedback for long-term accuracy.

In summary, because of the tremendous variation in the populations studied, the measures of effectiveness, and the experimental and control conditions, it is difficult to build knowledge or draw conclusions from one study to another. It seems that it is not only the form of error correction that makes a difference in learners’ improved accuracy rates, but also the classroom context and the characteristics of the individual learner.

**Students’ Reactions to Written Feedback**

Recently, a growing number of studies has been conducted that examine the students’ perceptions and reactions to teacher response in both L1 and L2 writing (Arndt, 1993; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Enginarlar, 1993; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Leki, 1991; Radecki & Swales, 1988; Saito, 1994). One of the most significant insights that has emerged in this area, especially as it pertains to ESL students, is that despite the lack of effect, students believe that teacher feedback can improve not only their writing, but their L1 grammar as well (Ferris, 2002, 2005; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994). Furthermore, error correction feedback (as opposed to content feedback) is often the kind of feedback students want and expect from their teacher (Enginarlar, 1993; Ferris, 1995; Leki, 1991; Radecki & Swales, 1988; Saito, 1994; Schulz, 1996). To illustrate, in
Radecki and Swales’ (1988) survey of 59 ESL students’ attitudes towards feedback on their written work, findings revealed that students seem to need and expect their teachers to correct all of their errors. The authors concluded that ESL teachers could lose their credibility among their students if they do not comprehensively correct students’ grammatical errors. In a similar survey of 100 ESL students’ preferences for error correction, Leki (1991) found that students equate good writing in English with error-free writing, and they both expect and want all errors in their written work to be corrected.

Moreover, using both quantitative (survey and factor analysis) and qualitative techniques (interviews), Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1996) compared 21 foreign language (FL) and ESL college level participants to see how they used their teachers’ comments in their writing. The authors found that although the FL students were fully aware that their teachers wanted them to add examples or elaborate on certain points in their compositions, they considered and expected composing and revision in an L2 to be a means for practicing their writing, rather than “trying out new ideas or demonstrating creativity” (p. 297). In contrast, the ESL students believed that the main purpose of writing was the development of ideas and being evaluated in academic settings. This meant that each group had expectations for a different type of feedback. However, the ESL students did express a preference for sentence level error correction and felt they would learn more when their teachers highlighted their grammatical errors.

**Student response to peer feedback.** In recent years, peer feedback (or peer review) has become a widely used teaching method in L1 and L2 writing instruction. Nelson and Murphy (1993) attribute its emergence in writing to the shift from the product to the process approach, which values peer feedback in combination with teacher and self
feedback (Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, & Huang, 1998). In addition to examining the effect of peer feedback on students’ writing (which so far has been inconclusive), some of the focus of the research has shifted to students’ attitudes and beliefs about peer feedback. The results of this research have been similar to the results of the research on error correction feedback; they are inconclusive and even conflicting. For example, some researchers (Leki, 1991; Zhang, 1995) have noted that some students question their peers, as well as their own, capability to give constructive feedback. Others (Amores, 1997; Chaudron, 1984) found that some students maybe uncomfortable receiving feedback from their peers or prefer instructor feedback over peer feedback.

Conversely, other studies have revealed that most students had favorable attitudes toward peer feedback. In their exploratory study involving 12 advanced international graduate ESL students enrolled in a high-intermediate/advanced writing class, Mendonca and Johnson (1994) used post-peer review interviews to determine whether students had found the peer review activity beneficial and how they had used their peer recommendations. They found that while the students believed peer feedback to be useful, they used the feedback selectively. Still, some of the students reported finding their peers’ feedback either irrelevant or unclear. Furthermore, Lin and Chien (2009) found that after 8 weeks of training, students believed that peer feedback was less traumatic than teacher feedback, but they still had a preference for teacher feedback.

To sum up, many studies examining teacher and peer feedback have been conducted. However, they have yielded inconclusive and conflicting results. Further examination of both teacher and peer feedback are therefore needed in order learn the potential benefits feedback can have in helping students improve their L2 writing skills.
In providing an overview of the complex nature of L2 writing and the studies that have examined the usefulness of teacher feedback, this literature review has demonstrated that the majority of L2 writing studies have employed quasi-experimental methods or questionnaires to explore the effects of various types of teacher feedback on student writing. Although these studies are informative, they do not capture the students’ experiences using feedback. Therefore, the literature review suggested that a qualitative study “that is primarily descriptive and relies on people’s words as the primary data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 11) would yield important insights for L2 writing instructors, especially as it pertains to Generation 1.5 students. In short, the literature review supports the aims and methods of this study. By interviewing students on their perceptions and beliefs about the feedback they received on their writing assignments across three feedback types, this study accomplishes what the gap in the literature points to.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study examined how three small groups of Generation 1.5 students understood and dealt with the written teacher commentary they received on their in-class writing assignments within the context of an academic ESL program at a large community college in central New Jersey. It is an examination of the understandings students had of the error feedback they received on their papers across three different feedback types and an evaluation of how these understandings consequently shaped their revisions.

This research emerged from my everyday work teaching composition in the academic ESL program at this community college. It was, in part, a first person inquiry into my own teaching, learning and meaning making, as I asked, researched, and attempted to answer a real puzzle I have about my work; that is, why, in spite of the great effort I put into providing feedback to my ESL students on their compositions, the same mistakes seem to reappear over and over in their subsequent essays. In this chapter, I describe my research design, the research site and my role as researcher, the participants, my data collection plan, and my data analysis procedures.

Theoretical Framework

As this study stems from my professional experience as a teacher practitioner as well as my belief that teachers need to critically investigate their own practices, social constructivist/interpretive theory served as the foundation of my study. Social constructivist theory is grounded in the epistemology that humans take an active role in
constructing the world(s) in which they live and that learning is an interactive and
dynamic process in which learners construct new ideas based on their current and prior
knowledge (Bruner, 1990, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). In such a scenario, knowledge cannot
be viewed as an entity that is transferred from the teacher to the student in a vacuum, but
rather must be seen as an active, social, and constructive process that occurs within a
context that is fostered through interactions with others. In examining the effects of
teacher feedback, I was therefore considering the relationship between the knowledge and
experiences students bring with them to the learning task, as well as the classroom and
institutional setting through which the learning takes place. I developed a research design
that would enable me to better understand this intersection.

Qualitative Research and Methodology

Research Design

Because I studied students’ interpretations and understanding of written error
feedback on their compositions across three feedback styles (my own and that of two
other participating teachers), a qualitative methodology combined with a practitioner
research approach best suited this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explain that
“qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This
means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to
make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them”
(p. 3). According to Creswell (1998), qualitative methodology is especially useful in
situations where the researcher is the “instrument of data collection who gathers words or
pictures, analyzes them inductively, and focuses on the meanings of participants” (p. 14).
Citing Ragin (1987), Creswell (1998) further points out that “quantitative researchers
work with a few variables and many cases, whereas qualitative researchers rely on a few cases and many variables” (p. 16). In my particular study, a qualitative methodology enabled me to explore in depth, within a particular academic environment, students’ responses to the corrective feedback they received from three instructors who utilized different feedback strategies. Because I focused on the learners’ meaning making of teacher’s written comments, I felt a qualitative descriptive design would uncover new information that would be unobtainable using quantitative methods. This, in turn, could help untangle some of the contradictory findings of previous research.

Although this study was a qualitative study, I used some quantitative data. While some qualitative researchers maintain “that numbers have no place in their work…, [if the researcher is] trying to convey relative sizes, frequencies, averages, and similar concepts, then numbers and statistics are as appropriate for qualitative research as for quantitative” (Krathwohl, 2009, p. 356).

According to Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb (2007), “the defining feature of practitioner research is the teacher educator’s dual role as practitioner and researcher” (p. 3). Because the researcher’s professional context is the site for inquiry, “the boundaries between research and practice often blur, creating unique opportunities for reflection on and improvement of the practice of teacher education” (p. 5). In practitioner research, the research questions “are often formalized versions of puzzles that practitioners have been struggling with for some time and perhaps even acting on in terms of problem solving” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 72). The rationale for using this particular approach reflected my desire to examine my own beliefs and improve my practices with regard to written teacher feedback, by gaining a better understanding of the influence my feedback
strategies, and the feedback styles of two other instructors, has on students’ revision processes. Although at its core, practitioner inquiry is intended to improve practice and understanding within a local context, it can have broader applications because the knowledge gained may be useful beyond local contexts, for example, by sharing new understandings on effective feedback strategies, to the larger community of educators and scholars (Borko et al., 2007).

The nature of my research questions led me in the direction of a qualitative study because it would enable me to focus on several Generation 1.5 students and investigate how they read, interpreted, and used different types of error correction feedback. More specifically, I could ascertain what types of feedback worked and did not work for them, what types of feedback were more or less useful, difficult, confusing, and so forth. And in the process, I had the opportunity to learn about my own teaching as well. This study has propelled me to critically reflect on my own teaching and change the way I provide feedback to enable my students to learn more effectively. I was able to corroborate my findings by crosschecking the results obtained by the use of three data collection methods—student interviews, teacher interviews, and student revisions.

Dohrer (1991) has asserted that “good commentary… must prompt revision and must allow the student the opportunity to reconsider the text in light of the reader’s response” (p. 52). However, I have learned that determining what good feedback is can be an arduous and challenging task.
Pilot Study

Description

A pilot study was conducted during a summer session in June 2006 which was aimed at (1) determining the types of learner errors made as well as the possible types of teacher feedback that would be used for this study, and (2) identifying and eliminating the possible design problems prior to implementing this study. Students enrolled in a summer session ESL writing course attended a writing class for 2 hours and 50 minutes, two days per week, and attended a writing lab for 1.5 hours, one day a week. The research question that guided this study was: What do a group of Generation 1.5 students understand about the feedback they receive on the first drafts of their essays?

Participants

The participants were five ESL students who volunteered to take part in the study, two males and three females. All had attended at least one year of high school in the U.S. They came from four different cultural backgrounds and spoke four different native languages. I used “purposeful sampling” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 65) in selecting participants; that is, I invited only Generation 1.5 students who were enrolled in a high intermediate or advanced level ESL writing class to participate in this study because these students are more likely to have acquired the formal linguistic knowledge and ability to self correct their errors than students in beginning or intermediate level courses who have less grammatical awareness and ability to correct errors on their own. Two of the participants in the study were enrolled in a high intermediate level writing class, taught by an adjunct instructor at the college. The other three participants were enrolled
in a different section of the same advanced level writing course which was taught by a full time instructor of the college.

Before beginning data collection, I went to the writing lab and explained the study to students. I asked each student for their permission to photocopy and keep a copy of one or more of their essays that they had written in class. All agreed.

**Data Collection**

The primary data source for this pilot study consisted of audiotapes of the standardized open-ended interviews I did with the five participants. The main aim of the interviews was to learn how students understood the error correction feedback they received on the first drafts of their essays. Before conducting the interviews, I collected one piece of writing which had received teacher written feedback for each of the participants. I photocopied the essays, and returned the originals to the instructors. After examining the contents of the essays, I recorded all of the errors students had made onto a coding sheet. A separate coding sheet was generated for each student. I then recorded the level of understanding students had of each error onto the coding sheet. I coded the students’ responses as “full understanding”, “partial understanding”, or “no understanding.” I defined “full understanding” as understanding the nature of the error indicated in the feedback, “partial understanding” as recognizing why an error was made but not knowing how to solve it, and “no understanding” as having no knowledge of what the error is or how to solve it.

I met with all of the participants individually during the 4th and 5th weeks of the semester, at their scheduled lab hour. All of the participants, to a greater or lesser degree, were familiar with their teachers’ response styles and expectations. A lab coordinator
and two student assistants who oversee the writing lab had full knowledge that I was conducting a study and knew which students were participating. The writing instructors were aware that I was conducting a study but were not informed which students were participating. I met with each student individually, and the interviews were conducted in my office.

**Lessons Learned**

The pilot study revealed several problems with my interview protocol and interviewing techniques. First of all, several of my questions were too general, and I did not get the information I needed. Also, on more than one occasion, I anticipated a student’s response and took the lead in the discussion rather than waiting for the participants to fully respond to my question. As a result of the pilot study, I revised some of my interview questions and was better prepared to be a more neutral, patient, and focused listener. In addition, my pilot study enabled me to recognize any incomplete data. As a result, I improved my coding scheme by adding new categories that I felt would help me better manage and analyze my data.

Based on my analysis of the data, I made several conclusions. First, all of the students said they liked and wanted to receive teacher feedback on their essays, and four out of the five students reacted positively to the feedback they had received. One student expressed his dissatisfaction with the fact that his teacher had circled his errors, but made no attempt to explain the nature of the errors. He appeared frustrated that his teacher had written the word “redo” across the top of his essay without explaining whether it was the content of his essay or his grammar that needed revising. Another student did not understand some of the codes her teacher used to indicate an error. For example, she did
not know that the code “art” meant that she was missing an article in a sentence. Secondly, students often did not know why the error which had been identified or corrected was a mistake, and further remarked that they would not know how to fix it. When the mistake was a clear, surface level mistake, such as a misspelled word or missing third person “s,” then they had little problem correcting the error, but other errors were not as well understood or corrected.

The adjunct instructor of the students in this study did not require her students to submit revisions; thus, I had no way of ascertaining how her students used her feedback in any subsequent revision. I was successful in obtaining revisions from only one participant. I observed that in at least three instances he understood the feedback he had received on his first draft, but ignored the feedback on his second draft. For example, the student was able to recognize that the circle his teacher made around a particular word in his first draft signaled a spelling error, but repeated the same spelling error in his revision. In another instance, he understood that he had spelled the word “seriously” incorrectly when writing the phrase “not seriously”; however, in his revision he replaced the phrase “not seriously” with “carelessly.”

While conducting my pilot study, I began to witness the struggles students had with interpreting some of the written feedback on their papers. Since then, I have been reflecting on and evaluating my own classroom decisions and actions while reformulating some of my teaching practices. For instance, each time my students are engaged in composing in-class essays, I now promote a workshop type environment where I act as a facilitator and have students seek my help whenever they feel the need arise. By providing students with immediate feedback, I can help them with some of their problems
while they are composing rather than days later (when I return the papers), when
according to Frankenberg-Garcia (1999), “solving them [their problems] is no longer
such a pressing matter” (p. 102). Unlike written feedback, where students may have
trouble understanding their teachers’ comments, on the spot feedback also ensures that
students understand the nature of their errors. Furthermore, because I noticed that
students did not always understand some of the error symbols their teachers were using
on their papers, and which I had been using on my own students’ papers, I decided to
switch to verbal cues. Thus, rather than write “WF” to indicate a “word form” error, I
would write the key words “word form” on a student’s paper. My observation that codes
are not always helpful to students is supported by Lee’s (2005) findings that “correction
codes may not be as easy and straightforward as they appear” (p. 8).

As I continue to reflect on the results of my pilot study and the lessons I have
learned from it, I have become curious about what others in my field are thinking and
doing with regard to giving feedback on their student’ compositions, and how this is used
by learners. Since my colleagues and I are concerned with ensuring the success of our
Generation 1.5 students, I felt that a study that included an examination of the written
feedback approaches of two of my colleagues, and that used Generation 1.5 students as
its sample population, would yield valuable insight that would be of shared interest to my
colleagues as well as to English language teachers generally.

**Context and Instructional Setting**

The setting for this study was a large suburban community college in central New
Jersey, where I have been a member of the ESL/Modern Languages Department for well
over 18 years, teaching beginning, intermediate, and advanced ESL writing. Hillsdale
County College (a pseudonym) serves approximately 13,000 full- and part-time students from varying ethnic backgrounds and nationalities. This is in keeping with one of the stated goals of the college, which is “to provide access to education for a diverse population.” Even among native speakers of English, academic English language skills are often underdeveloped. As a result, the majority of incoming students are placed into developmental or ESL courses.

The data collection for this study took place over the course of the fall 2008 semester. Notwithstanding the 2006 and 2007 academic years, in which the ESL population slightly declined, the college has seen a steady enrollment of its ESL student population in the past several years. Accompanying this enrollment pattern is a notable change in the profile of the ESL student; the student population has become much more diverse in terms of students’ national origins, educational backgrounds, degree of academic preparedness, age, and immigration status.

The ESL Program

The ESL program at Hillsdale Community College is a non-credit program within the ESL/Languages and Cultures Department. The program is designed to develop students’ language proficiency in the areas of pronunciation, conversation, reading, and writing in order to prepare them for college level courses. The ESL courses are divided into five proficiency levels and four skill areas (pronunciation-speaking, reading, writing, and grammar).

At Hillsdale, students are placed into writing courses based upon their College Board Accuplacer placement test results, which is based on writing, reading, and grammar, or by advancing through the department’s five-level writing course sequence. The Accuplacer test helps ensure appropriate student placement in either the beginner (Level
I), low intermediate (Level II), intermediate (Level III), advanced (Level IV), or high
advanced (Level V) English-language courses. In actuality, ESL placement decisions also
depend on an oral interview and teacher recommendations.

The majority of Generation 1.5 students are placed into level III where they are
required to take ESL Intermediate Structure III, ESL Intermediate Writing III, and ESL
Intermediate Reading III, or into level IV where they are required to take ESL Advanced
Structure IV, ESL Advanced Writing IV, and ESL Advanced Reading IV. Full-time
students take a minimum of four courses per semester, each of which meets for 80
minutes twice a week, over a 14-week semester. Although the ESL program offers
coursework in discussion and phonology, Generation 1.5 students are generally exempted
from these courses as they come to the college with good oral skills. In addition to their
ESL classes, students taking Level III ESL classes may take a math class, and students in
Level IV may take one 3-credit course, usually an elective, that counts toward their
major. The majority of students taking morning or afternoon classes enroll as full-time
students, though some elect to take one or two courses, attending school on a part-time
basis. Students taking evening classes are usually enrolled part-time.

Each writing course focuses on the development and organization of ideas
through outlining, writing first drafts, and revising. Moreover, rhetorical modes such as
narrative, argumentative, and cause-effect essays are analyzed and then practiced through
writing assignments. In addition to class time, students are required to attend an ESL
language lab for 1 hour per week for supplemental practice. At this particular community
college, students at the intermediate and advanced ESL levels are expected to write six to
eight essays per semester. Most compositions are written during class, with time limits.
The teacher of each class typically uses a two-draft system for compositions wherein
he/she gives feedback on content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and other conventions on students’ first drafts of their compositions. Students are then required to complete their second drafts at home, and submit the revised papers to their teachers. While teachers are expected to follow a departmental curriculum guide and are required to use a pre-selected textbook, they have a great deal of latitude in choosing the topics they have their students write on, and in the manner in which they provide feedback on their students’ essays. 

The selection of Hillsdale Community College as the site for this study was an obvious choice for three main reasons. First, as mentioned earlier, I am a teacher in the ESL program at this community college and am familiar with the goals and approaches of the ESL program, the support faculty and students receive, the culture of the college, and the types of ESL students enrolled in the college. Being part of this environment, I have an advantage in terms of accessing and understanding the culture, and I am able to obtain in-depth data quite easily. Second, the number of Generation 1.5 students enrolled in ESL writing classes at this college has increased dramatically, and ESL faculty members on campus have been discussing ways to better meet the needs of these students. One of the areas the ESL faculty, and I in particular, have been interested in exploring more deeply is how teachers can improve the ESL student writing quality through the feedback we give to our students about their writing. Finally, as I was interested in conducting a study that would allow me to reflect on my own feedback style with the goal of improving it, this research involved examining how a small group of my own students responded to my written error feedback on their papers, as well as how two additional small groups of students responded to different types of feedback given by two other
cooperating teachers. Therefore, for this study, I assumed the dual role of practitioner and researcher.

I asked two instructors, Alex and Cathy (the pseudonyms they selected for themselves) to be part of this study were because of their reputations as dedicated teachers, their long-term experience (over 15 years each) teaching ESL students, their passion for the teaching of writing, and their diverse feedback approaches. Alex uses a feedback system comprised of circles around grammatical and lexical errors, and slashes between independent clauses to indicate a punctuation error such as a comma splice or run on sentence. Cathy uses a symbol system printed in the back of the course textbook that identifies the type of error. My feedback consisted of circles around the errors with key words above them identifying the type of error.

The Sample

Since I wanted to investigate Generation 1.5 students’ understandings of error correction feedback on their compositions and how they used that feedback in revising their papers, student research participants were selected from the pool of four to five students in each of our classes who could be defined as Generation 1.5.

The selection process occurred at the end of the first week of the fall 2008 semester after I had received a written approval from the Rutgers University IRB (Institutional Review Board) to conduct the study. I asked both Alex and Cathy to recruit all the Generation 1.5 students they had in each of their sections and ask them if they were willing to participate in the study. Cathy had 4 Generation 1.5 students in her class, and Richard had 4, all of whom volunteered to participate. There were five Generation 1.5 students in my class, and all volunteered to participate. After the teachers provided
me with the names of the students, I contacted them, informed them about the nature and purpose of the study and sought their agreement to participate. All of the students agreed to participate. I then required them to sign consent forms (Appendix A) before beginning the research process. I protected their rights by informing them that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty.

At the beginning of the second week of the semester, then, I had recruited 13 Generation 1.5 students enrolled in ESL High Intermediate Writing (level IV) to participate in the study: four students from Alex’s class, four students from Cathy’s class (whom I refer to as Group A and Group B, respectively), and five students from my class (whom I refer to as Group C). All did not go as planned, however. One participant from Alex’s class wrote an unusually brief essay and would not expand on it despite my requests to do so. In fact, this student stopped doing further class assignments and subsequently failed the course. As I did not gather enough data from the student to work with, I decided to exclude him from the study. I then asked Alex to nominate another student. There were no other Generation 1.5 students in Alex’s level IV writing class who met the criteria for the study, so he nominated a student from his advanced level V writing class who agreed to participate. Consequently, out of the 13 students who participated in the study, 12 were enrolled in the level IV ESL writing course, and one (Andre—a pseudonym) was enrolled in the level V ESL writing course.

All of the students except for Andre participated in all aspects of data collection; that is they wrote both a first draft and revision, and met with me for two interviews. I attempted to meet with Andre three times. The first two times, he told me that he had not yet revised his first draft, and the third time he failed to show up. I then tried to contact him again by phone, but I was unable to do so. When the semester was over, I learned
from his teacher that Andre had received a grade of “incomplete” for his writing class and was put on academic probation.

**Description of Participants and Their Writing Backgrounds**

Participants in this study were college students between the ages of 17 and 27. Eight were men and five were women. The majority of the participants, five, came from the Dominican Republic, three came from India, and one each came from East Jerusalem, Pakistan, China, Peru, and Japan. Nine students had been in the United States less than five years, three students had been in the United States six years, and one student, Yvonne, had been in the U.S. for 15 years. Whereas most of the participants had at least 10 years of education in their native language before continuing their education in an American high school, three students began their U.S. education in junior high school, and one student, Yvonne, entered the sixth grade when she arrived here. Because of difficulties at school and family problems, Yvonne went back and forth from the U.S. to the Dominican Republic throughout middle school. She attributed her difficulties learning English to the numerous interruptions in her schooling. Nine of the 13 students elected to register for the advanced ESL structure class I was teaching the semester following data collection. This enabled me to get to know these nine students within a somewhat different context.
Table 1

**Background Characteristics of Participants**

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<th>Group</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age at immigration</th>
<th>Years in U.S. high schools</th>
<th>Writing classes taken at MCC up through time of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td>Darshan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>084, 093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: Alex</td>
<td>Fatima</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Palestinian</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ganesh</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Peruvian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andre</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>084, 093, 099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B</td>
<td>Yong</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: Cathy</td>
<td>Ingrid</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Julio</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5½</td>
<td>084, 093, 093*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kasumi</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C</td>
<td>Hakesh</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>084, 093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: Janet</td>
<td>Hiten</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>084, 093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nasheeta</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>084, 093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yvonne</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>084, 093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marcos</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>093</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Failed course the first time and had to repeat.

**Data Collection**

To pursue my research questions, this study relied on qualitative data collection and generation. I used a variety of methods for gathering data, which according to Glesne (2006), “contributes to the worthiness of the data” (p. 31). Glesne cites Berg (1995) who notes that this practice, called triangulation, is not “the simple combination of different kinds of data, but the attempt to relate them so as to counteract the threats to validity identified in each” (p. 5). Throughout the course of data collection, I focused on the participants’ academic contexts, writing assignments, writing difficulties, and literacy backgrounds. I made constant comparisons among the pieces of data I collected. This helped me to begin focusing on recurring themes and patterns in the data in order to develop my analysis. I was also fortunate to have had rather extensive contact with the
participating teachers as well as with other teachers who were familiar with the student participants.

The specific data collection methods and analysis are discussed in more detail in the following section.

**Interviews**

**Student interviews.** The primary method of data collection consisted of two standardized open-ended interviews with each student (See Appendices III & IV). I also collected demographic and background information such as age, place of birth, language information, and schooling background. According to Patton (1990), researchers use standardized opened-ended questions “to minimize interviewer effects by asking the same question of each respondent” (p. 285) and to “permit respondents to respond “in their own terms” (p. 295). Patton further states that open-ended interviews can help “to minimize issues of legitimacy and credibility by carefully collecting the same information from everyone who is interviewed” (p. 286). The purpose of using an open-ended interview for this study was to elicit the students’ responses towards and understanding of their teachers’ written comments, on the two assignments under study.

I conducted two interviews with each participant during the fourth or fifth week of the semester after they had completed their third or fourth writing assignment. The first interview with each participant revolved around the teacher marked first draft of a paper that each student had written, and the second interview focused on the revised second draft of the same paper. I also conducted follow-up interviews with three students, one by phone and two in person, when a question arose about the data and I needed further clarification.
The purpose of the first interview was to elicit the students’ general perceptions of the feedback process and their understandings of the written error feedback they receive on their papers. The purpose of the second interview was to ascertain the participants’ rationale for the revision decisions they made, and their perceptions of the quality of the feedback, and to ask additional questions that emerged from my ongoing data analysis. I made every attempt to schedule the interviews at the convenience of the participants, and they took place at the college in either a private conference room in the library, an empty classroom, or my office. At the start of each interview, I asked permission of the participants to audio-tape the interview and told them that they could have access to the transcripts of the interviews upon their request. All consented.

During the first interview, I pointed to specific feedback comments on the students’ first draft of their essays and asked them, “Why do you think your teacher marked this?” and “Could you give me an example of how you might correct the error?” to learn what they understood about the particular feedback that was given. I repeated these questions for every marked error on the paper. The type of errors I identified in the students’ papers are listed in Table 2.
Table 2

Error Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Error Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wrong Word</td>
<td>A more appropriate word was required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Verb tense</td>
<td>The incorrect verb tense was used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Singular/Plural</td>
<td>A singular noun was used instead of a plural noun or vice versa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Verb form</td>
<td>An incorrect form of a verb or verb phrase was used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Capitalization</td>
<td>Either a word that should have been capitalized was not capitalized or vice versa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Either an article was wrong or missing, or student added an article where no article was needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Word Form</td>
<td>The incorrect form of a word was used (e.g., an adjective form of a word was used instead of the adverbial form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>A mistake in spelling occurred.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Comma splice</td>
<td>An error was made joining two independent clauses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>An error was made in the choice of pronouns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Subject-verb agreement</td>
<td>An error was made involving subject-verb agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Fragments</td>
<td>An incomplete sentence was used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Awkward</td>
<td>An awkward phrase or sentence was used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Parallelism</td>
<td>Parallel grammatical structure needed in a work or phrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Preposition</td>
<td>A preposition was wrong or was missing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher interviews. I had originally planned to interview the teachers during the 12th week of the semester; however, this was a hectic time for both instructors, so I rescheduled the interviews for the end of the semester after the instructors had turned in their final grades. The teacher participants were interviewed about their teaching backgrounds, their writing training, experience, and approaches to writing feedback. (See Appendix V). These interviews were open-ended and focused primarily on understanding the two instructors’ philosophies of teaching writing and their approaches to giving feedback on errors for their particular group of learners. I took notes during each interview, and following each interview, I documented my reflections on the interview.
All of the open-ended interviews I conducted with students and teachers were audiotape recorded and transcribed as soon as possible after data collection. They were supplemented with observations of the interactions collected in my field notes.

**Participants’ Written Materials**

In addition to open-ended interviews, writing samples were collected for each student. These writing samples consisted of the first and second drafts of one essay the student had written during the middle of the semester.

Before I met with each student for their first interview, I asked the cooperating teachers for the first drafts of their essays. The essays were photocopied, and the originals returned to each teacher. I then identified the errors and took notes on the ways the instructor interjected comments on the drafts.

I located and underlined the first 10 to 15 errors in each composition, which represented on average 75% of the total number of errors on each essay. My goal was to ascertain students’ understandings of the first 10 errors they had on their papers; however, in some instances, where students seemed relaxed and engaged in the interview, I was able go beyond the first 10 errors to about the first 15 errors. The only exception was in Ingrid’s composition, where I could locate only eight marked errors. I then categorized the errors onto a separate coding sheet, which I completed upon transcribing the interviews. The topic of writing varied depending on the respective content of the lessons.

**Additional Document Collection**

I collected students’ college transcripts. Other relevant documents I collected included course syllabi, teacher-made assignments, and textbooks.
Recording and Managing of Data

A primary record was developed through tape-recorded interviews, note taking during and after the interviews, as well as the scanning of essays. To ensure the validity of the data, summaries of the interviews were prepared and offered to the participants for their review.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two phases and focused primarily on the rich data gathered from the two transcribed open-ended interviews I conducted with each participant, as well as my examination of the two sets of students’ essays, interviews with the two participating teachers, and my own personal observations and memos. The analysis of data commenced the moment I started collecting the data.

My analysis in the first phase was very closely tied to the answers students gave in response to question number 8 of the Student Interview Guide which sought to learn the extent to which students understood their teachers’ feedback on the first 10–15 errors in the first drafts of their essays. The specific question asked was, “Why do you think your teacher marked this?” In instances when student responses were too brief, this was sometimes followed by the question, “What do you think he/she would like you to do?” The 8th question (and the follow up question if necessary) was repeated for each error of the first 10–15 errors the teacher had marked. I analyzed students’ responses to this question by first coding their interpretation of the errors they received on their first drafts into three categories, “full understanding,” “partial understanding,” and “no understanding.” I then created a three-point rating scale with 2 points representing “full understanding,” 1 point “partial understanding,” and 0 points “no understanding.”
I then collected the second drafts of each student’s essay as soon as each teacher had them available. The changes, if any, each student made to each underlined error, was recorded onto a second coding sheet (See Table 4). I created a coding taxonomy drawn from the one developed by Conrad and Goldstein (1999) to judge the changes students in their study made from the first to second draft of an essay. I coded the students’ corrections to each error they received on their first drafts into three categories, “completely correct,” “partially correct,” “incorrect,” and “not attempted.” I created a similar rating scale for students’ corrections to their second drafts as the one I created for the initial understanding of their first errors, with 2 points representing “completely correct,” 1 point representing “partially correct,” and 0 points representing “incorrect.”
“Completely correct” was the ability to solve the problem indicated in the feedback. “Partially correct” was the ability to improve the text to some degree, but not completely correct it.” “Unattempted” was the category I created for errors students either made no attempt to correct or could not correct because they changed the content of their essays. When I had difficulty assigning a category, I marked the ones I was unsure about with an asterisk. I then made an informed decision by discussing students’ corrections with a colleague in the ESL Department.

Table 4

_Coding Sheet (Second Draft)_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error #</th>
<th>Line #</th>
<th>Error</th>
<th>Student's Written Interpretation of Error</th>
<th>Error Successfully Corrected (Yes/No/Partially)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a way to increase trustworthiness of this process, the first and second drafts of essays written by three of the students (one student per group) were coded by another rater, a colleague in the ESL Department at the same college. There were only a few differences in opinion pertaining to identifying error type, and they were discussed until
an agreement was reached. The same process was used for describing students’
corrections on their second drafts. A separate coding sheet to record the first draft errors
and student interpretation of the errors was generated for each student (See Table 3).

The second phase of the data analysis built upon the results of the first and was
designed to help me make sense of the quantitative findings, and capture some of the
participants’ feelings, perceptions, and experiences with error correction feedback, and
add depth and meaning to the results. I approached this phase of my analysis using a
grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) so that the major themes in the data
would “emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection
as “a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an
inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon (p. 24). Put more simply, “the
essential idea in grounded theory is that theory will be developed inductively from data”
(Punch, 2005, p. 155). Accordingly, I did not begin my analysis of the data collected for
the second phase of my study with a theory. Rather, through ongoing data collection and
analysis, I created a theory that could explain and link together the principal ideas that
were identified in each phase of the study.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) differentiated between three phases of analysis a) open
coding, b) axial coding, and c) selective coding. Data may be qualitative, quantitative, or
a combination of both. Coding refers to “extracting concepts from raw data and
developing them in terms of their properties and dimensions” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.
159). Ryan and Bernard (2000) describe coding as “the heart and soul of whole-text
analysis [which] forces the researcher to make judgments about the meanings of
contiguous blocks of text (p. 780). In my effort as a qualitative researcher to uncover the major theme within the data, I had to use “both [my] creative and critical faculties in making carefully considered judgments about what was really significant and meaningful in the data” (Patton, 2002, p. 467).

Open coding is the first procedure for analyzing the accumulated data. It involves a line-by-line analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) of the interview transcripts and other data, and identifying and coding initial categories of information about the phenomenon being studied. Creswell (1998) described this phase as “a procedure for developing categories of information” (p. 150). In the current case, I read and carefully examined each transcribed interview for salient categories of data supported by the text (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I then broke the data down into discrete ideas, compared them for similarities and differences, and gave them meaningful labels. I used index cards to organize the data collection and help in the data analysis.

Axial coding is the next stage after open coding. The main goal is to put the parts of the data identified and separated in open coding back together to build new connections between categories that will lead to the development of a specific category that is associated with the set of data. Miles and Huberman (1994) call this a process of “subsuming particulars into the general” (p. 254). In this study, after the initial sorting and coding of the data into emerging themes and categories, I identified one category as the central phenomenon, exploring causal conditions, contextual conditions, and consequences for the central phenomenon identified (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Selective coding, the final stage in grounded theory data analysis is “the process of integrating and refining theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143). The core category
reflects cumulative knowledge about relationships between categories, which can then be integrated to provide the theoretical framework underpinning the analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1998) maintained that the core category should be able to “pull the other categories together to form an explanatory whole” and “account for considerable variation with categories” (p. 146). It is at this stage where the researcher is able to identify the storyline of the data (core category), which completes the development of the theory.

Selective coding proved to be the most difficult part of my dissertation research. I spent many hours reviewing interview transcripts and memos. I also discussed my findings with two of my colleagues and sought help from my dissertation advisor. I wrote a storyline memo as a means to help me integrate categories. The storyline memo was as follows: *Error correction feedback strategies in and of themselves do not make or break a student’s ability to revise an essay.*

In search of my core category, I sought out a small sub-sample of three student participants to depict as individual case studies. In selecting my cases, I focused on the most diverse and different cases that would elucidate some of the characteristics of a larger population. This data provided a singular description for each of the three cases from which issues or themes were identified.

A cross analysis was conducted to search for similarities and differences among the three cases and isolate underlying themes. The selective coding process identified one core category that was systematically related to other categories. The core category for this study was that *error correction feedback does not exist in isolation because who*
the students are, their experiences in using teacher written feedback, and what they bring to the revision process can influence the success of a second draft.

The relationship between the categories were validated and refined. The categories were integrated together until I arrived at a theory. In this case, the theory dealt with the question of what other factors influenced the ways in which students revised their essays other than the feedback and revision relationship itself. The categories I arrived at included the role of motivation, students’ beliefs about writing and revision, their skills with regard to self editing, their actual capacity to apply grammar rules in practice, their feelings about English and ESL classes, and the instructional context beyond the error correction feedback.

While “the traditional approach, often referred to as quantitative research, leads to hypothesis-testing research, …the qualitative approach leads to hypothesis-generating research” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 4.) Accordingly, this study was designed without any preconceived hypothesis or expectation that one type of error feedback approach is better than the others. Rather, the goal of this study was to increase the effectiveness of teacher feedback by analyzing the types of error feedback that are most helpful to students based on their perspectives as well as analysis of the relation between feedback type, error type, and student response on second drafts. Because teacher feedback is a major component in the learning process, it can have an enormous impact on a student’s progress in writing. If students are unable to understand teacher feedback and use it to improve their writing skills, then it will be more difficult for them to pass their writing classes and succeed in their mainstream classes. Therefore, it is important to find out what type (or types) of feedback is most useful to Generation 1.5 students in the
context of an ESL composition class in a community college. The data collection and analysis strategies were designed to build knowledge in this area.

**Role of Researcher**

In this research, I assumed a dual role of both practitioner and researcher. As such, the boundary between inquiry and practice at times became blurred and unfixed. While I planned my actions carefully, and remained committed to the rigorous examination and critique of my practice throughout this study, I acknowledge that, at least in some way, the role I played as a teacher to some of the student participants may have had some unintended and immeasurable outcomes. For example, the interview process may have raised some of my students’ inhibitions, so they were less likely to speak their true feelings. Or, the students may have unconsciously altered the opinions they wished to express.

**Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of the study arose mainly because it utilized a single study research design. The findings from this one study alone cannot be generalized to other populations or settings. Similar studies with larger groups of Generation 1.5 students in this college and other colleges would provide a more in-depth understanding of the experiences these students have when dealing with written error feedback on their writing. However, comparing student responses from those participating in three different classrooms does promote reliability and validity through triangulation.

A second limitation concerns my conflicting yet complementary roles of teacher and researcher. Although “teaching and research are often seen in opposition” (Hyland, 2003, p. 245), Hamilton and Pinnegan (1998) note that the linking of research and
practice holds “invaluable promise for developing new understandings and producing new knowledge about teaching and learning” (as quoted in Loughran, 2004, p. 10).

Because I have an intimate familiarity and extensive awareness of the learning environment in which the study took place, it was important that I adopt a position on issues of objectivity and subjectivity with regard to the research questions. I realize that my past experiences have shaped my world-view as well as my beliefs, and have contributed to my biases in conducting the study. Unlike in a quantitative study where subjectivity is viewed negatively, in a qualitative study, where the researchers are the instrument of data collection, some degree of subjectivity is “an invariable but not necessarily negative fact” (Jansen & Peshkin, 1992, p. 717). I, therefore, had to acknowledge and remain aware of my assumptions, and through this awareness, control for bias as much as possible during the data collection and analysis stage (Newman & Benz, 1998). In other words, it was crucial that I maintained an ongoing critical reflexivity throughout my research and sensitivity to how my own personal biography may have influenced this study.

In no specific order, these are the biases of which I am aware: 1) I believe I have a solid understanding of the college ESL classroom context and the kinds of issues that college bound Generation 1.5 students and their teachers confront. 2) I maintain awareness of the fact that Generation 1.5 students are a diverse group of learners who possess varying degrees of facility with speaking, reading, and writing, not only in English, but in their native languages as well. 3) I believe that the assessment, and placement of Generation 1.5 students is a very complex issue. 4) I feel that immediate feedback is preferable to written feedback and that teachers should provide feedback in
this manner as much as possible. 5) I believe that comprehensive error correction feedback is not helpful to most students, and that teachers should correct only those errors that are persistent or impede meaning. 6) In my estimation, many educators either forget or are unaware of the fact that Generation 1.5 students are semi-literate in their native languages and/or in English and, as a result, have difficulties with reading and writing.

To minimize possible distortions that may result from the fact that one of the three groups of participants were drawn from my own classroom, I shared my findings with a disinterested peer “who is familiar with the setting and [could] serve as devil’s advocate for alternative explanations of research data” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994, p. 32). Furthermore, I kept a reflexive journal where I recorded thoughts, decisions, questions and insights related to the research as a way to help me sort through my assumptions and try to separate them from the data collection and analysis I was carrying out.

Besides stating my views and utilizing peer debriefing, the research methods used in this study are described in detail to enhance dependability. Triangulation enabled me to ensure that the imperfections of one method of data collection were compensated by the use of alternative data-gathering instruments (Sagor, 1992). The study used several methods of triangulating the data that included quantitative analyses of students’ understanding of their teachers’ comments on their errors, coding of open-ended interviews, line-by-line analysis of students’ essays, teacher interviews, and field notes, as well as peer review of data coding.

In addition to striving to increase dependability of the findings, ethical considerations were incorporated into the research design. As the teacher–student
relationship inevitably changed from the typical classroom interaction, it was necessary for me to protect the rights and confidentiality of the participants. All data, including photocopied essays, audio taped interviews, and student records from all participants were kept in a secure place in my office and will be destroyed three years after the end of the study. Data collected from the participants was not shared with other participants in the study or their instructors. Finally, the participants were informed of the purpose of this study, who it would serve, and who would have access to it (Hyland, 2003).

Although the research design does preclude generalization across settings, I believe that the findings of the study offer insight into the diverse needs of Generation 1.5 students in ESL, developmental, and mainstream writing classes with regard to feedback on student writing, as well as courses across the curriculum, so that educators will be better prepared to facilitate their academic success.
CHAPTER IV  
QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

The previous chapter focused on the methodology for this study as well as provided the context for it. The following two chapters are devoted to the findings of the study. As previously stated, data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. While the objective of this qualitative study on error correction feedback was not to quantify patterns, I found that the answers students gave to the question of the Student Interview Guide which sought to ascertain the degree to which students understood their teachers’ feedback on the first 10–15 errors on the first drafts of their essays (perhaps the key question), could readily be transformed into numerical codes that could be analyzed quantitatively. Because I was interested in learning how frequently students understood the written feedback comments on their first drafts of essays and the relationship between the frequency of understanding and the type of feedback students received, a quantitative rather than a qualitative analysis seemed appropriate. According to Silverman (2000), using numbers descriptively in qualitative research “can offer a means to survey the whole corpus of data ordinarily lost in intensive, qualitative research. Instead of taking the researcher’s word for it, the reader has a chance to gain a sense of the flavour of the data as a whole. In turn, researchers are able to test and revise their generalisations, removing nagging doubts about the accuracy of their impressions about the data” (p. 185).

Initially, I present the findings of my quantitative analysis. The quantitative analysis indicates how frequently students understood the teacher feedback on the first
drafts of their essays, and the impact, if any, which this understanding had on their second drafts. In Chapter V, I turn to a qualitative analysis of my interview data where I attempt to capture participants’ feelings, impressions, perceptions, and experiences with regard to feedback. The findings presented in Chapter V also helped provide some explanations and meaningful supplements for the findings presented in Chapter IV.

**Students’ Understanding of Initial Teacher Feedback on Error**

In order to analyze the data I obtained from the responses students gave to question 8 of the Student Interview Guide, I recorded all of the errors students had made onto a coding sheet, similar to the one I had used for my pilot study. A separate coding sheet was generated for each student. I then recorded the level of understanding students had of each error onto the coding. As I did for my pilot study, I coded the students’ responses as “full understanding,” “partial understanding,” or “no understanding.” I defined “full understanding” as understanding the nature of the error indicated in the feedback, “partial understanding” as recognizing why an error was made but not knowing how to solve it, and “no understanding” as having no knowledge of what the error is or how to solve it.

The following examples illustrate full understanding, partial understanding, and no understanding. In the case of full understanding, Nasheeta was able to correctly change the verb form error in her sentence, “The food is very spice.” to “The food is very spicy.” The error had been circled and had the key words “word form” written above it. In contrast, Fatima showed no understanding when she could not tell me why her teacher circled the comma before the word “because” in the sentence, “The girls will not care about the style and fashion when they wake up in the morning, because they are all girls.”
In response to the question, she located a point on her paper and said simply, “Maybe he wants a comma here and a period over there.” Marcos showed partial understanding when he explained why the clause in his essay “Because he dresses like a gangster” was a sentence fragment, but could not tell me how he would fix the sentence fragment.

**Descriptive Findings**

As discussed in further detail in Chapter IV, there were three distinct groups of students representing three teachers’ different types of feedback: In Group A, the feedback was in the form of circles around the errors and slashes between clauses to indicate a mistake in punctuation. In Group A, 59 errors were collected. Out of the 59 errors, 27 were fully understood, 9 were partially understood, and 23 were not understood. Figure 1 shows that the students in Group A had full understanding of 46% of their teacher’s feedback, partial understanding of 15%, and no understanding of 39%.
In Group B, the feedback was in the form of codes above the errors. Out of the 46 errors that were collected, 25 were fully understood, 3 were partially understood, and 18 were not understood. Figure 2 shows that the students in Group B had full understanding of 54% of their teacher’s feedback, partial understanding of 7%, and no understanding of 39%.

*Figure 1. Group A: Students’ understanding of feedback.*
Figure 2. Group B: Students’ understanding of feedback.

In Group C, the feedback was in the form of circles around the errors with key words placed above the errors. Out of the 71 errors that were collected, 47 were fully understood, 7 were partially understood, and 17 were not understood. Figure 3 shows that the students in Group C had full understanding of 66% of their teacher’s feedback, partial understanding of 10% and no understanding of 24%.
Figure 3. Group C: Students’ understanding of feedback.

The data in Tables 5 and 6 represent the differences between the groups in terms of students’ initial understanding of feedback. Table 5 represents the actual numbers of feedback errors included in this study, and Table 6 represents those numbers converted into percentages.
Table 5

*Students’ Initial Understanding of Teacher Errors (actual number of errors collected)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Full understanding</th>
<th>Partial understanding</th>
<th>No understanding</th>
<th>Total corrections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

*Students’ Initial Understanding of Instructor Feedback (percentages)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Full understanding %</th>
<th>Partial understanding %</th>
<th>No understanding %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The findings reveal that error correction feedback type had a direct effect on student understanding, and that the more explicit the feedback, the clearer it was for students to know what they needed to do to fix their errors. As Figure 4 indicates, there was a linear and downward pattern of “full understanding” from the group that received the most explicit feedback (Group C) to the group that received the least explicit feedback (Group A).

As indicated above, students in Group A, who received error correction feedback in the form of circles around the errors and slashes across punctuation errors, demonstrated an understanding of slightly less than half of the marked errors on their papers. The most common problems students in this group stated they had included: (a)
not understanding the nature of and reasons for their errors, and (b) not agreeing with their teachers’ assessment.

Students in Group B fared 8 percentage points better in terms of understanding the feedback they received than students in Group A. It was revealed through the interviews I conducted with the students in Group B that they, at times, either misinterpreted the meaning of the codes or did not know what the codes meant. This finding corroborates Zamel (1985) and Ferris (1992) who found that L2 students have difficulty interpreting the abstract forms and codes writing instructors often incorporate into their feedback.

While the students in Group C (my group) had the greatest success in understanding their feedback out of the three groups, they still did not understand 24% of the feedback. In some cases, the feedback was not very clear or specific enough. In other instances, students did not understand the specific grammar terms I had used in providing feedback. This result is consistent with Ferris (1999b) who also showed that in addition to not understanding the codes their teachers use, students sometimes do not understand the formal grammatical terms that teachers use. Clearly, if students do not understand the specific grammar terminology, they will not know how to correct the errors on their papers, unless simply pointing out the error is an adequate cue to correct.

Relationship Between Error Category, Teacher Feedback Type, and Student Understanding

Although the sample was small, and there was not enough data to draw conclusions (See Table 7), it was clear that it was easiest for students to understand those errors for which there are concrete, specific rules and solutions (i.e., mechanical errors
such as spelling and capitalization). For example, out of a total of 14 spelling errors, students had a total understanding of 11 of those errors, and out of a total of 6 capitalization errors, students showed full understanding of all 6 of those errors. Conversely, students appeared to have had greater difficulty understanding feedback on morphological errors such as articles and verb forms, and lexical errors such as word choice and prepositions. This is consistent with Truscott (2007) who observed that mechanical rules, such as spelling (Richards & Schmidt, 2003), are much simpler to fix and often can be corrected in isolation—i.e., correcting the spelling of single words without considering the sentence as a whole—and Ferris (1999b), who found that errors in word choice, word form, and unidiomatic (or awkward) sentence structure, are often “untreatable” (p. 6), meaning that these error categories are complicated and that fixing them can not be reduced to following a simple set of rules. For instance, students seemed to have the most difficulty understanding errors in articles and prepositions, and a great deal of difficulty comprehending errors in awkward sentence structure, as these error categories deal with a much more complex body of knowledge that require some knowledge of the subtleties and nuances of the English language in order to understand and correct.
Table 7

Student Understanding According to Error Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Error Type</th>
<th>Total Errors Collected</th>
<th>By Group A, B, C</th>
<th>Total Understanding</th>
<th>Total Partial Understanding</th>
<th>Total No Understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Word choice</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5, 4, 11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6, 4, 4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Comma splice</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12, 0, 5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Verb tense</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9, 2, 2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Singular/Plural</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1, 7, 5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Verb form</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9, 1, 3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0, 6, 4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Agreement</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2, 3, 9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Run-on sentence</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6, 2, 3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Capitalization</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1, 0, 5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Parallelism</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1, 5, 1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Fragments</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1, 0, 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Awkward</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2, 1, 5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Article</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0, 5, 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Connector</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1, 3, 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Possessive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1, 0, 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Preposition</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2, 3, 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Word Form</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0, 0, 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationship Between Understanding of Error Feedback on the First Draft of Essays and Revision Success

As explained in Chapter III, the research design required that three groups of students each receive different types of written feedback (a circle or slash to indicate the location of an error; correction codes above an error; and a circle around and key word(s) above an error). Although understanding the feedback seems critical to correction, it is not necessarily sufficient. Therefore, the next step in analysis suggested the importance of comparing type of feedback to frequency of actual revision. The first and second drafts
of the students’ essays were compared to identify the extent to which the feedback led to student revision. Drawing from the coding taxonomy developed by Conrad and Goldstein (1999) whereby they used the categories “successful, “unsuccessful,” and “unattempted” to judge the changes students in their study made from the first to second draft of an essay, I coded each error correction as “completely correct,” “partially correct,” “incorrect,” or “unattempted.” A “correct” revision was the ability to solve the problem indicated in the feedback. “Incorrect” was the inability or unwillingness to fix the problem. “Partially correct” was the ability to improve the text to some degree, but not completely correct it. “Unattempted” was the category for feedback I created for errors students circumvented. For instance, on the top of the second page of Kasumi’s text, her teacher, Cathy had drawn brackets around a portion of Kasumi’s text and wrote above it in rather large script, “Needs total revision.” At the bottom of the same page, Cathy had drawn an arrow to another location on Kasumi’s text and wrote, once again in large script, “I don’t understand what you mean by this sentence.” Rather than try to fix her text in order to convey the intended meaning of her sentence, however, Kasumi decided to rewrite a new essay. This made it impossible for me to relate any of the feedback she had received to any corrections. One student (Andre) did not produce a revised paper, eliminating 15 error corrections from the analysis. Another 39 errors were not addressed because students had changed the contents of their essays in response to feedback on organizational issues. A detailed discussion of the types of feedback comments that triggered students to change the contents of their essays is beyond the scope of this study. In total, then, the number of first draft errors that resulted in correction were 33, 32, and 57, for Groups A, B, and C, respectively.
Table 8 shows the relationship between students’ understanding of the feedback they received on the first drafts of their essays and their success and failure in incorporating the feedback in the second drafts of their essays. The results were unanticipated and counter to what common sense would suggest.
Table 8

Relationship Between Initial Understanding on First Draft and Revision Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group A</th>
<th>Errors 1st draft</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Revision</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>Partially successful</td>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>Partially successful</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no understanding</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partial understanding</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full understanding</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total after revisions</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group B</th>
<th>Errors 1st draft</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Revision</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>Partially successful</td>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>Partially successful</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no understanding</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partial understanding</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full understanding</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total after revisions</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group C</th>
<th>Errors 1st draft</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Revision</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>Partially successful</td>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>Partially successful</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no understanding</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partial understanding</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full understanding</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total after revisions</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The box representing the total number of first draft errors for each group is marked Non Applicable (N/A) as it is a category that does not make sense with regard to the first draft since not all of the errors resulted in correction.
As Table 8 indicates, students in Group A demonstrated a total understanding of 16 errors on the first drafts of their essays, but successfully corrected 21 errors on their second drafts, suggesting that understanding the nature of the error and successful correction of the error were not always related. While it was clear that in some instances errors that were not understood on the first drafts, were successfully corrected on the second drafts, it was hard to draw any conclusions about the relationship between full understanding of errors on the first draft and correction success on the second draft since, as described above, some of the errors on the first drafts were not included for analysis. However, it is clear that what runs counter to expectation is that so many not understood errors were corrected in Group A. The findings for Groups B and C were contrary to the findings in Group A, and seemed about as expected. In Group B, students showed full verbal understanding of 20 errors and partial understanding of 1 error on the first drafts of their essays, while successfully implementing only 16 errors. Students in Group C who received the most explicit feedback among the three groups, showed a similar trend in actually making corrections. While students in this group showed a full understanding of 40 errors and a partial understanding of 5 errors on the first drafts of their essays, they were successful at correcting only 31 errors on their revisions.

Overall, the findings indicated that the students in Group A, who received the least explicit feedback among the three groups, corrected their errors more often than the students in both Groups B and C. In other words, Group A is an anomaly, and it seems that something is at play here besides the style of feedback. This raises the question of what else contributes to student correction of error in addition to the nature of teacher feedback.
Discussion

Not surprisingly, the analysis of this study data demonstrated that the level of explicitness of grammar feedback influenced students’ understanding of the feedback, and that the more explicit the feedback, the greater likelihood that students would understand the feedback. However, initial understanding of teacher feedback did not always result in successful revisions. Students in Group A, who received non-explanatory feedback in the form of circling and slashes, were the most frequent correctors of their essays while students in Group C, who were provided with key words to help them identify the nature of their errors, were the least frequent. Clearly, while the teachers’ feedback choices may have had some impact on how students revised their essays, it seems likely that there were other factors that influenced how students revised their essays.

In Chapter V, I attempt to link the patterns that emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data to the findings in this chapter as a way to explain the counter intuitive pattern of corrections. The patterns emerged from analysis of the interviews I conducted with all the participants, an in-depth review of the literature, and my own personal observations and memos. The data I collected helped me make sense of the quantitative findings, captured some of the participants’ feelings, perceptions and experiences with error correction feedback, and added depth and meaning to the results. I believe that the analysis that follows confirms the supposition which emerges from the findings discussed in this chapter that feedback, in any form, in and of itself, is not the sole determinant in what causes students to correct their errors, but rather is part of a bigger, more complex
process that cannot be understood simply by analyzing the relationship between understanding of feedback and correction.
CHAPTER V
QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Chapter IV reported on the frequency with which students’ understood their teachers’ written feedback on errors and the extent to which they implemented the feedback on the second drafts of their essays. The results showed, as conventional wisdom would dictate, that the more explicit the feedback, the more frequently students understood that feedback. What ran counter to all expectations, however, and what became the narrative arc of Chapter V was that some of the students who received the least explicit feedback were the most successful in incorporating that feedback into the second drafts of their essays, and some of those who had received the most explicit feedback produced some of the most unsuccessful second drafts incorporating that feedback.

The rationale for writing this current chapter was to address the question that emerged from the anomalous findings in Chapter IV. Specifically, “What can account for the fact that a group of students who received the least explicit feedback and who were the least successful in understanding that feedback, were the most successful in incorporating that feedback in the second drafts of their essays?” My quantitative analysis answered the initial questions of this study. They inquired how frequently a group of Generation 1.5 students understood the feedback they received on the first drafts of their essays, how frequency of understanding and the type of feedback received relate to one another, and the impact, if any, this feedback had on their second drafts. However, my analysis may have overlooked an important part of the equation, namely, who the
students are, their experiences in dealing with their feedback, and what they bring to the revision process that may influence the success of a second draft. A qualitative approach, as Webster and Mertova (2007) assert, “allows researchers to get an understanding of [their] experience[s]” (p. 5). In my endeavor to answer the new question that emerged from my findings in Chapter IV, I needed, therefore, to explore the intersection of teacher feedback and student factors, and how they contribute to students’ ability and motivation to understand and use teacher feedback. By investigating a small sub-sample of students, I was able to use a qualitative perspective to explore “complex personal and interpersonal phenomena” (Krathwohl, 2009, p. 237) that was not possible with a quantitative approach. The qualitative approach adopted for this study enabled me to “go beyond the numbers” and participate in the “inner world” of the participants. Based on my own personal observations, analytical field notes, and literature review, my hunch was that there was a bigger picture to be understood and that several other factors, in addition to the form of error correction feedback students receive, could account for the anomaly described in the previous chapter.

Reaching for an explanation to the question that emerged from the findings in Chapter IV motivated me to search for an improved understanding of who the Generation 1.5 student participants are. The data I had collected, as well as my own intuition, told me that an explanation for the anomalous findings of the previous chapter would come from using what I knew about the students, their ways of thinking about writing and responding to feedback, and the learning strategies they brought to bear. More specifically, I felt that I needed to focus my inquiry on developing a more complete picture of the students’ background experiences with L2 writing, especially their beliefs
and perceptions regarding the importance of revision. For this aspect of my analysis, I
drew on the interviews I had with the students, as well as on the first and second drafts of
their essays, course handouts, student records, informal conversations with some of their
present and past teachers, and my own personal notes taken during the course of this
study. I had not intended to use the data in this way, and therefore, unfortunately, I did
not probe on things I might have, had I known the study would go in this direction. Had I
known how the study would unfold, I would have probed further into each of these cases
to refine my analysis and interpretation of the participants’ writing experiences.

In the remainder of this chapter, I attempt to answer the question that emerged
from my analysis in Chapter IV and extend knowledge about the relationship between
teacher written corrective feedback and student revision in response to it. I present my
findings in the form of three short case descriptions of students that are based mostly on
my personal observations, their first and second draft writing analyzed for this study, and
the interviews I had with the students: two students from Group C (my group), and one
from Group A (Alex’s group). I chose these particular students because I wanted to
present descriptions of two students who had a high level of understanding of teacher
feedback (at least average or above average for the group), but a low level of correction
in comparison to the rest of the group, and one student who had a low level of
understanding of teacher feedback, but a high level of correction in comparison to the rest
of the group. The rationale for describing three participants in detail was my desire to
“gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved”
(Merriam, 1998, p. 19). I believe that the stories I present offer a possible explanation for
the findings presented in Chapter IV.
The three cases presented here will be followed by a cross case analysis which highlights the emergent themes about what students bring to the revision process, which plays at least as important a role as the form and function of teacher feedback.

**Hakesh**

Hakesh is an Indian immigrant who was 18 years old at the time data was collected. He immigrated to the U.S. with his family when he was 16 years old. He began his education in the U.S. at the start of his junior year in high school. He told me that from the age of 5 until he left India, he had attended schools where English was the language of instruction. Still, his English was not proficient enough for him to test into regular English composition classes when he first arrived in this country. Hakesh told me that he was mainstreamed into regular English classes midway through his junior year and said that he was assigned to practice writing essays each week in his senior year of high school.

The semester I conducted this study was Hakesh’s second semester at Hillsdale County College. He tested into and had passed ESL 084 Writing Intensive III prior to taking my ESL 093 Writing Intensive IV class. He also tested into and enrolled in a section of ESL 092 Advanced Structure IV. However, three quarters of the way through the semester, he withdrew from the class on the advice of his teacher who said he was going to fail the course. The following semester, Hakesh enrolled in my ESL 092 Advanced Structure course where he earned a final grade of “C.” In total, Hakesh was my student for two 14-week semesters.

One of Hakesh’s professors, described him as very smart, but very lazy. I reached the same conclusion based on Hakesh’s performance in my ESL 092 and ESL 093
classes. He rarely came to class prepared and always had an excuse for not completing his homework. Although he admitted that he did not study for his quizzes and exams, he managed to pass the class with a grade of “C.”

Perhaps one source of difficulty for Hakesh was that he was not accustomed to 80-minute class sessions. I learned this from a discussion I had had with him outside of class where he remarked, “In high school, it was a 40-minute class. It gets boring [in longer classes].” Another problem may have been Hakesh’s attitude towards taking ESL classes. It seemed to me that Hakesh thought that he did not belong in ESL classes because he had already taken and passed out of ESL classes in high school. I felt that his attitude probably decreased his willingness to work hard as well. At the start of class, he frequently would put his head down on his desk and pretend to fall asleep, without bothering to take off his coat and hat. He may have done this to draw attention to himself. Sometimes students would point to Hakesh and laugh aloud about his behavior, while Hakesh would look up and just smile under his cap, seemingly enjoying all the attention. Other times, Hakesh appeared to be a bit confused or to drift in a different world during class.

Hakesh rarely participated voluntarily in class activities. When I called on him to answer a question, he would often ask me to repeat the question or ask what page I was referring to in the text. Since Hakesh had a used copy of the textbook with another student’s answers in it, I could never tell for sure whether a correct response meant he knew the answer or was simply reading the answer another students had written in his textbook. At other times, Hakesh would respond to my questions with a flip answer, which I assumed was to generate laughs from his classmates.
Hakesh’s behavior appeared similar to that of the community college Generation 1.5 students Gawienowski and Holper (2006) profile, who seemed to “think that the teacher will pass them to the next level simply because their bodies are physically in the class. They have nothing to offer during class discussions because they have not done the homework” (p. 121). Similarly, Hakesh was in class a lot more in body than in spirit. Additionally, Hakesh’s behavior was typical of the Generation 1.5 students who Cathy, the teacher of Group B, commented, “think they’re above it – but they’re not!”

Even when he appeared more alert, Hakesh never really had much focus in class. In one instance, for example, Hakesh told me he could not concentrate on the lesson because his thoughts were on a girl who had just broken up with him. He asked for my permission to spend his class time at the computer located in one corner of the classroom. I wanted to be understanding, so I told him he could use the computer provided he work on a class assignment. I also figured it was better to have him busy at the computer apart from the group than have him fall asleep or be disruptive in class. On two or three other occasions, I again allowed Hakesh to use the computer, with the provision that he would not disrupt the class.

Hakesh would become animated in class only when his best friend and fellow classmate, Hiten, would try to dominate the class with jokes and other disruptive outbursts. Like Hakesh, Hiten was an Indian Generation 1.5 student and a participant in this study. Together they comprised a duo that could create havoc in the classroom. Each time Hiten would disrupt the class, Hakesh would bounce around at his desk, laugh out loud and make inappropriate comments. This would fuel the anger of a couple of other students, who would shout back at them to “shut up” and say they were preventing
the rest of the class from being able to concentrate on the lesson. It often got to the point where I would have to ask Hakesh and Hiten to leave the room. I learned that other colleagues were experiencing the same phenomenon in their classrooms due to Hakesh and Hitens’s behavior, and on occasion we would quip that it sometimes felt as if we were teaching “13th graders” rather than college students. One colleague, for example, told me that both Hakesh and Hiten were immature and very disrespectful towards both her and their classmates. She also reported that “they ruined it for the rest of the students.” The instructors were not the only ones complaining. One of Hakesh’s classmates commented to me after class that “he should go back to high school. No, kindergarten.” In addition, one of the language lab coordinators told me that when my 093 class met in the lab, the session “turned into a wild party” because of a few students, including Hakesh and Hiten.

At the end of the following semester, I learned that both Hakesh and Hiten had failed their ESL 099 Reading/Writing V classes and had to repeat this course before they could take the College Placement Exam and exit the ESL program. In fact, in an informal discussion I had with their ESL 099 teacher three months later, she vividly recalled how Hakesh and Hiten would act out in class. She also said that they were the first in the class to finish their final exams, and that their final essays were the hardest for her to correct because they contained many more errors than the essays of the other students in the class. Her comments helped validate the observations and inferences I had made of Hakesh and Hiten when they were my students.
Hakesh’s Essay

Gawienowski and Holper (2006) point out that many of the essays Generation 1.5 students write are “hasty, general statements that fill the requirement for a certain number of words or pages” (p. 123). The essays Hakesh wrote in and out of class fit this description well. From my classroom observations and readings of Hakesh’s essays, it seemed likely that Hakesh was inattentive and uncommitted to his writing tasks. For example, in the first draft of the essay that I analyzed for this study, Hakesh produced only 10 sentences of text, significantly less than the average 15 or so sentences the other students would write. While some unskilled writers find it difficult to write on demand (Raimes, 1985), this did not seem to be Hakesh’s problem. He was given at least 60 minutes to complete his draft and did not appear stressed or rushed by the assignment. The paper he turned in was as superficial and hastily written as all of the other first drafts that he produced throughout the semester, whether he wrote them under timed conditions or not. The clear impression I got was that Hakesh did not take the assignments or the class seriously.

Hakesh did not turn in the revision for the essay that was the focus for this study (as well as a requirement for the class) on time despite my giving him a one-week extension. When I told Hakesh that I needed his revision so that I could analyze it for my study, he told me that he had a free period after class and would write the revision for me then. So after class, Hakesh and I went up to the ESL department office where I provided him with a private writing area next to my office. Hakesh sat down to work on his revision. Within less than five minutes, and to my surprise, he appeared at my office door with his “completed” revision. I took this quick effort to be an expression of
nonchalant detachment from his task. The following is a side-by-side copy of Hakesh’s first draft with teacher feedback and second draft, which he wrote in response to that feedback. A side-by-side comparison makes it easy to see that there was little qualitative improvement from the first to the second draft. In this essay, Hakesh wrote about the culture shock first time visitors to India often experience.
Although qualitatively, Hakesh’s revision showed little improvement, Hakesh did follow my feedback and correct all of his errors. As Table 9 below demonstrates, out of
the 10 errors identified and discussed, Hakesh fully understood 9 corrections and partially understood 1 correction. He successfully corrected 6 of the errors he understood, partially corrected 2 of them, and was unsuccessful at correcting 1 of those errors. Although Hakesh was successful in correcting the sentence fragment in his third body paragraph, he was less successful, in this same paragraph, at correcting his errors in word choice. This is not surprising as syntactical errors such as sentence fragments are rule based whereas semantic errors in word form do not have rules governing them making them harder errors for many students to correct. However, given that Hakesh was able to successfully explain to me the changes in word choice he would make to correct those errors, I was somewhat surprised that he did not do so in his revision. I believe that had he spent more time working on his revision, Hakesh would have successfully corrected those errors.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error #</th>
<th>Error Type</th>
<th>Initial Understanding of First Draft</th>
<th>Correction on Second Draft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Connector</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Singular/Plural</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Parallelism</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fragment</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Partial Understanding</td>
<td>Part Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Awkward</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Part Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Part Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observation of Hakesh’s first and second drafts shows little change between the two drafts. The only significant change Hakesh made was a change to his introductory
paragraph, where he moved the first two sentences of his first body paragraph to his introduction, most likely demonstrating that he knew the purpose of a thesis statement.

A positive point that can be made about Hakesh’s revision was that he used the traditional five-paragraph essay format, as indicated by a clear thesis statement in his introductory paragraph and cohesive markers for paragraph shifts, (i.e., his use of the transition markers “the first,” and “the second,” in the first two body paragraphs of his revision, and “in conclusion” in his conclusion), to signal a transition between paragraphs. Still, his writing failed to show an understanding of purpose and audience, and did not move beyond the basic programmatic five-paragraph essay.

The strategy Hakesh seemed to use in revising his paper was to follow my feedback closely and literally. However, it appeared that he followed some of my comments without really reflecting on the mistakes I had given feedback on. For instance, in the excerpt below taken from Hakesh’s first draft, I made an explicit correction to an awkward compound sentence by deleting some of the words and reducing it to a simple sentence. However, I neglected to take out the word “it.”

In revising his paper, Hakesh corrected his error by copying my correction, including leaving in the extra subject “it” as I had done, even though he understood the correction, and by implication, the nature of his mistake. This is in accord with Hyland (1998) who observed that students often understood the necessary rules of grammar but choose “the
easier option of relying on [their] teacher” (Hyland, 1998, p. 273) to fix their mistakes rather than try to figure them out on their own.

Surprisingly, the only modification Hakesh made to his essay, without any written feedback from me, was in a final comment at the end of his concluding paragraph. This change, however, seems to worsen the quality of his paper as he used the word “cooperate” incorrectly.

There was no improvement to the content of Hakesh’s two body paragraphs and conclusion. For example, Hakesh did not provide any support to the topic sentence in his first body paragraph. Furthermore, in the second body paragraph it remains unclear what Hakesh means when he states that “the environment is different.” He lists “food, language, and clothes” as examples, but he does not give any detailed explanations. In his concluding paragraph, Hakesh changes his concluding sentence to one that is more ambiguous than the one in his first draft. It is important to note that Hakesh not clarifying his ideas in these two paragraphs has nothing to do with the nature of feedback or his interpretation of it. Other than one marginal comment where I wrote “unclear” with a question mark next to it in the third body paragraph, every other mark I made was related to technical errors. Perhaps this expressed to Hakesh that I was more concerned with the technical errors in his paper than with content and coherence. This was unusual (and unconscious) on my part, as I usually comment on content before addressing grammatical errors. Yet, in spite of my atypical feedback, I know from several other examples of his revisions that Hakesh’s performance was typical for him, and I do not believe I significantly “skewed” his response toward technical rather than content revision by failing to comment on the latter.
During one of his visits to my office with Hiten, I questioned Hakesh further about his revision practices. He replied, “If I’m in a hurry, I just look at the mistakes. If I don’t have that much time, I just look at the mistakes and try to correct them.” Hiten also contributed to this discussion and said, “Students know [the course] is not gonna count. They just want to get a passing grade. They just want to get a C. If it’s not gonna count, why bother putting more effort to try to get a higher grade?” In the discussion that ensued, Hakesh pointed out, “At least give us a credit [for taking ESL classes]. You just waste two years and money [taking ESL classes].” Hakesh’s comments suggested that attaching some credits to ESL courses would be a motivational incentive for ESL students to try harder.

Indeed, Hakesh’s attitude, lack of effort, and demeanor regarding the class activities suggest that the modest changes he made on his second draft had had far less to do with the nature of the feedback than they did with his feelings about being an ESL student. In other words, no single correction strategy in and of itself could have the instructional power to help Hakesh to improve his draft without a desire on his part to do so. This seemed to be entirely lacking.

Still, another issue that needs due consideration is that although Hakesh corrected or partially corrected every error except one, his revision is technically better than his first draft, but as a piece of writing and an effort to make a set of points, it is not. One clear implication that can be drawn from this is that feedback on grammatical accuracy alone is not enough to help students write a better paper when they revise. When emphasizing form over substance (which I inadvertently did in this case), teachers are focusing on only one part of what makes writing effective (Gray, 2000) and possibly
hindering or, at the very least, doing nothing to support their students’ ability to express their ideas in writing. However, based on other revisions I received from Hakesh, had I given feedback on content, I believe that he would have added on or reworded one or two sentences, but that those changes would have been minimal. In other words, even when I gave Hakesh more feedback on content, he did little to address it — again suggesting that his progress in writing was only partly dependent on the nature and the format of the feedback he received.

**Nasheeta**

Nasheeta is a student from Pakistan who was 22 years old at the time of this study. She reported that she came to this country from Pakistan with her family at the age of 17 and completed her junior and senior years of high school in the U.S. Nasheeta told me that she transferred from ESL to mainstream classes at the beginning of her senior year of high school. She was rather vague about any instruction in English she received in Pakistan, only remarking that she “had one subject in English, but it wasn’t a big one.”

After she graduated from high school, Nasheeta enrolled at Hillsdale County College, where she was placed into the second level of the ESL program. However, after she had completed three semesters at Hillsdale, she left the College to return to India with her mother for eight months in order to help take care of her ailing grandfather. Upon her return to the U.S., Nasheeta resumed her studies at Hillsdale. When the study was conducted, it was Nasheeta’s fourth semester in college, and she was participating in her third writing course, so she was familiar with the expectations her teachers had of her in her writing classes. Nasheeta was a student in my writing class along with Hakesh and
Hiten, and then she, too, enrolled in one section of the ESL092 Advanced Structure IV classes I was teaching the following semester. In other words, I got to know her over a period of two 14-week semesters.

Nasheeta was a student who displayed behavioral characteristics similar to “Student 2” in Gawienowski and Holper’s (2006) study of Generation 1.5 students who runs into class late explaining that she could not find parking, and who draws a lot of attention from the other students as she is settling into her chair. Similarly, most days, Nasheeta would arrive to class about 10 minutes late. She would enter, apologizing and explaining that on her way to class, she had to stop to buy some coffee, and then proceed to a desk which her best friend and fellow student Sandeep had saved for her. Nasheeta was outgoing and had many friends at Hillsdale. She seemed to view school mostly as a place to socialize; the academics were of secondary importance. While never outwardly demonstrating the anger and resentment over having to take ESL classes that Gawienowski and Holper observed in many Generation 1.5 students, and which I observed in Hakesh as well, Nasheeta was lax about doing homework, turning in assignments on time, and being prepared for class. Based on Nasheeta’s lateness and lack of preparation, and her acknowledgement to me that she put little time and effort into doing her homework and studying for her exams, the impression I got was that she was just too busy with everything but school to be bothered and had better things to do than be in class.

Nasheeta had to repeat her ESL 073 Structure Intensive II and ESL 083 Structure Intensive III courses two times each before passing on to the section I taught of ESL 092 Structure Intensive IV. In this class, Nasheeta received a final grade of “D,” which meant
that she had to repeat this course as well. I was surprised that Nasheeta never bothered to contact me about her “D” and never showed any curiosity about her grade on the final exam, as most of her fellow classmates did. Given that she never came to talk to me about her grade, it seemed that I was more upset about her having to repeat the course than she was.

**Nasheeta’s Essay**

In contrast to Hakesh, Nasheeta wrote rather lengthy responses to her assignments. In fact, Nasheeta never seemed to be at a loss for what to write. Her essays were usually longer than those written by many of her classmates. However, like so many other Generation 1.5 students, Nasheeta was “unable to hide behind [her] oral fluency” (Gawienowski & Holper, 2006, p. 122) in her writing. Her essays were filled with numerous writing errors typical of Generation 1.5 students. The draft and revision she wrote that I analyzed for this study were similar to all her essays. For this assignment, Nasheeta responded to the same writing prompt as Hakesh had in the example of his work. Nasheeta’s first and second drafts, placed side by side, appear below.
Nasheeta’s First Draft

When people visit a foreign country like Pakistan, they could get funny cultural shock because they find everything different than other countries. The most shocking things for the visitor are the language, the food, and the clothing.

First, all, the language is very hard to learn and it sounds really hard too. But you could try to learn common sentences like: Where do you want to go and what do you want to eat. The most hard thing is shopping for them because it’s very different from the United States because here in the United States people just have to go inside the store and get whatever they want but in Pakistan you have to bargain a lot and for

Nasheeta’s Second Draft

That you have to speak the language in Pakistan because, usually, the workers don’t understand English.

Second, the food is very different than in Pakistan. Food is very spicy and oily because they use so much oil in every dish but it taste so good. We also have variety of rice dishes so; the people who come from the other countries like Pakistani food.

Third, things are clothing. Our clothes are very different in Pakistan. You will see people wearing long dresses and when they see some body wearing pants and shirts they will talk why is she wearing this kind of clothing and women have to cover their heads all the time.
A comparison of Nasheeta’s first and second drafts reveals that she made almost the same number of errors in each draft. As Table 10 shows, of the 17 errors identified and discussed, Nasheeta fully understood 11 corrections, partially understood one, and had no understanding of 5 corrections. She successfully corrected only 7 of those errors she understood, and partially corrected 2 of those errors she understood. In addition, I noted 9 new errors in her revision.
### Table 10

**Nasheeta’s Understanding of Feedback and Success at Revision**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error #</th>
<th>Error Type</th>
<th>Initial Understanding of First Draft</th>
<th>Correction on Second Draft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Word Form</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Part Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>Partial Understanding</td>
<td>Not Attempted*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Awkward</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Part Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Capitalization</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Awkward</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Part Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Punctuation (comma splice)</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Part Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Capitalization</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Part Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Subject-Verb Agreement</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Capitalization</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Verb Form</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Part Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Connector</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Not Attempted*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Subject-Verb Agreement</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Not Attempted*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Capitalization</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Not Attempted*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For error no. 3 Nasheeta ignored the feedback. For error nos. 12, 13, and 14, Nasheeta omitted that particular sentence where feedback was given.

Observation of Nasheeta’s first and second drafts shows that other than omitting the last two sentences in the introductory paragraph of her first draft, there are no major differences between her two drafts in terms of content and organization of information. Nasheeta followed my feedback closely, and most likely omitted those two sentences because I commented to her that they were off topic and should be taken out of her introduction. However, there was no way for me to know whether Nasheeta understood basic paragraph structure, and through self-editing, would have removed these sentences on her own, or whether she omitted these sentences because of my feedback cue to do so.

Although Nasheeta was familiar with some of the punctuation conventions of English, she did not always apply them. For example, in the first interview I had with
Nasheeta, she told me that a comma could not be placed after the subordinator “because.” Nevertheless, the three times she used the subordinator “because” in her revision, she incorrectly inserted a comma after it. Also, in the concluding paragraph of her revision she removed the comma that she had incorrectly placed after the coordinating conjunction “but.” However, she failed to insert the comma before the “but.” Nasheeta’s omission of the comma is perhaps attributable to carelessness rather than a lack of understanding as to where the comma should go because in the first interview I had with her, she specifically stated, “I need to put a comma here” when I pointed to the error, and indicated that she knew that the comma should be placed after the coordinating conjunction and not before it.

Furthermore, Nasheeta’s first draft revealed persistent comma splice and run-on sentence errors which went uncorrected in her second draft. While in my classroom observations and discussion with Nasheeta, she showed some understanding of how clauses worked, her second draft was filled with long, rambling sentences that contained three or more subordinating and/or coordinating conjunctions. This is in spite of the fact that I provided her with feedback cues and indicated that she had a couple of run-on-sentences. The following sentence from her second draft, for example, contains three subordinating conjunctions and two coordinating conjunctions:

The most hard thing is shopping for them because, its very different from the United States because here in the United States people just have to go inside the store and get whatever they want but in Pakistan you have to bargain a lot and for that, you have to speak the language in Pakistan because, usually store workers don’t understand English.

Equally prevalent in her second draft was Nasheeta’s continued misuse of pronoun shifts. For example, in the introductory paragraph of her second draft, when referring to the key subject referent “people,” Nasheeta shifts pronoun usage from “they” to “the visitor.”
Then, in her first body paragraph, where she again refers to “people,” she shifts in pronoun usage from “you,” to “they,” and back to “you” again.

It is difficult to know to what to attribute Nasheeta’s persistent run on sentences and misuse of pronouns. The revision Nasheeta wrote was sloppy, and judging by the careless spelling errors, appeared to have been hastily written. Therefore, it is likely she did not proofread her essay before turning it in to be graded. It seemed to me that she did not care enough about her revision to spend time cleaning it up, and relied on me to fix her errors. Another explanation could be that pointing out each error in isolation, as I did in the first interview I had with Nasheeta, was enough for her to focus on each error and get her to call upon her knowledge of how to fix her error, but it was not enough to implement what she knew effectively when she was working independently on her revision. In other words, knowing the grammatical rules, did not necessarily translate into a successful revision. The analysis above suggests that Nasheeta mostly fixed errors she understood; she did not understand many of them, and these are the ones that most often were left unfixed. I also do not know the reason why Nasheeta made new errors or why her level of accuracy did not improve in her second draft, as her revision was neither longer nor more complicated than her first draft. It may be the case that she did not care much about improving the quality of her writing nor have the motivation and attention span to do so, due to the low number of successful corrections of low-level errors, and the new careless errors that she had made in her revision. Another explanation might be that Nasheeta, like many Generation 1.5 students, may have “become frustrated with formal grammar instruction, as this requires a level of maetacognitive language skills with which they are unfamiliar and uncomfortable” (Blumenthal, 2002, p. 50). During the second
interview I had with Nasheeta, she was quick to note her difficulty with English grammar:

I’m not good with grammar. Even in this [ESL 093 writing] class. That’s the only thing. I’m not good with grammar. The little words like “went” and gone.” I know them. I can say them. But with the writing, they give me a hard time.

In another instance when I pointed out a sentence fragment in an essay she was writing in class and told her she needed to add an independent clause to complete the sentence, she remarked, “I don’t know why, but I just hate clauses.” This seems to be further indication that her understanding of grammar rules may have been impeding her ability to correct some errors.

Although it was clear that Nasheeta exhibited confusion about some of the grammar rules in English, it may be the case that she was not ready or willing to “getting rid of the errors still remaining in [her] language” (Gawienowski & Holper, 2006, p. 118), as these errors did not interfere with her ability to communicate effectively in spoken conversations, and writing may not have been a skill that was as important to her as speaking. In the interview Nasheeta told me, “By talking I just catch the word. I just get it. But writing it, I get confused.” While it was clear to me that Nasheeta found English grammar overwhelming, I felt that perhaps she was not spending enough time trying to learn it and improve upon her writing skills. However, Nasheeta gave confusing information about this when she explained what she perceives to be her main problem when she rewrites her essays.

J.P. If you were to put more time in, do you think you would have a better result or would it be the same?
N.K. No. Of course, it would be a better result. I just need to spend more time.
J.P. Is that part of the problem? The time?
N.K. No. It’s not more time I would say. It’s more effort.
J.P. So you think sometimes you could put in more effort?
N.K. I think I could. But sometimes there is stuff I want to do better, but at the end of it, I see that it was not as good as I thought it could be.

J.P. So do you hand it in [the essay] to the teacher anyway?

N.K. First I read it over and over [to see] if I think it’s O.K. Then I’ll hand it to her in, and - let’s see what she says to me. Like if I get a grade of “4” and you say I could rewrite it, I’ll see if I could do it better. You give like a second chance. But let me see what she’s [the teacher] gonna say about it.

Nasheeta says a number of things in this exchange, and it is not really clear what her primary explanation for her problems is. First she said that she needed more time (perhaps in response to my leading question). Then she said that time was not the problem, but rather a lack of effort on her part. However, she then contradicted herself by saying that she read her revision “over and over.” And then, she indirectly admitted to being passive and relying on her teacher to point out her errors.

Although Nasheeta professed to reading her revision over and over again, and told me that she asked her older brother, whom she said was very good at English grammar, for help before turning it in to be checked, her end results did not generally support these contentions. While it is possible that Nasheeta may have read her work over and over and missed many of her errors, her case may have been much like the cases of the Generation 1.5 students whom Gawienowski and Holper (2006) assert “at this age do not want to think very deeply about the language” (p. 118). Still, I could not be completely sure as to whether Nasheeta was not keen on doing the work to improve her writing skills, or whether she found the demands of self editing to be overwhelming, and she lacked the skills to do so. I cannot be completely certain whether she had the self-confidence or the ability to notice errors on her own and chose not to take the time to do so, or simply lacked the skills needed to improve her essays from first to second draft, or perhaps some combination of both.
In summary, it seems that with regards to motivation, Nasheeta’s case is a little less clear cut than Hakesh’s. Unlike Hakesh, Nasheeta professed to have actual difficulty with grammar and did demonstrate that as well in her lack of understanding of so many the corrections even though she claimed to have proofread her essays. It is easy to assume that her writing problems are related to a lack of motivation, given that she was always late to class, did not complete assignments, and dedicated little time to studying for her exams. Yet, Nasheeta’s assertions suggest that she may have had difficulties that interfered with her motivation or that made her seem less motivated than she was. The difficulties Nasheeta had in revising her paper may be more about a limited capacity to make corrections to her second draft because of a lack of understanding and/or clarity of the feedback she received or lack of appropriate knowledge to interpret it than the motivation and drive to improve her writing skills. At any rate, her case demonstrates, somewhat differently than Hakesh’s, that the quality of her revision is not based solely on her understanding of teacher feedback.

Darshan

Darshan, who immigrated from India, was a 19-year-old, second semester Hillsdale County College student, at the time data was collected in the fall of 2008. He completed his junior and senior years in a high school in the U.S. after arriving in this country. During his senior year, Darshan moved out of ESL and into mainstream classes. He recalled having to write an essay every two weeks in his senior year, but receiving little feedback on them. He added that he was never taught how to revise his writing in his high school English class.
Darshan was one of the five student participants from Alex’s group (Group A). The semester following the study, Darshan enrolled in a section of my ESL 092 Structure Intensive IV Class along with Hakesh, Hiten, and Nasheeta. Thus, I became much better acquainted with him during that 14-week semester. Like Alex, who told me that Darshan was “a good student who never gave [him] any trouble,” I found Darshan to be a serious and conscientious student.

In many ways, Darshan’s behavior in my ESL 092 class could not have been more different from Hakesh’s and Nasheeta’s. Whereas Hakesh and Nasheeta were restless and easily distracted, Darshan was a quiet student who was more focused and task-oriented. He was always prepared when I called on him in class. Hakesh, Nasheeta and Darshan all had the typical Generation 1.5 struggles with grammar and writing; however, in my ESL 092 class, Darshan’s performance on quizzes and tests were evidence that he was more diligent about doing his homework and studying for exams than Hakesh and Nasheeta. In fact, Darshan earned a final grade of “B” whereas Hakesh earned a “C” and Nasheeta earned a “D.” It is hard to say whether Darshan came in higher skilled to begin with because both he and Hakesh were placed into ESL 092, while Naushila had advanced into ESL 092 after passing ESL 073 with a final grade of “C.”

Because of their very different personalities, I was surprised to see Darshan and Hakesh sometimes talking together after class. Darshan later explained to me that he and Hakesh were casual friends, but that he did not sit near him in class because he did not want to become distracted.
Darshan’s Essay

Similar to Nasheeta, Darshan wrote a great deal, relative to the other students, in a rather short period of time. However, based on my analysis of his second draft and the second interview with him, I got the impression he was far more attentive, committed, and perhaps more skilled at writing essays than Nasheeta was. Darshan’s first and second drafts, put side by side, appear below.
Grades Are Important!

Do grades encourage students to learn more? Schools give tests to students, starting from kindergarden and they teachers give out grades too. As per our school board, grades are important and school board also believe that grades encourage students to learn more. But as per my knowledge, I don't support that grades are important. I disagree with statement that grades encourage all students to learn because of discouragement, lack of correcting methods, and huge wall between student good and least students went to be.

My first reason why I think that grades are neither important nor encouraged because bad grades discourage students. Last year's education report America says that 88% of students don't go to college after their Senior year in high school. 42% students only finishes their associate and don't study further. 28% students finishes their bachelors and leave college and only 6% of total students finishes their masters. Students tend to lose skills because of discouragement.

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So my first reason is firm that grades don’t encourage most of the students.

The second reason why I believe that grades don’t encourage students is because, after grading test papers, teachers don’t teach what students get wrong. Tests are made for teachers to know what students know and don’t know. If student don’t know something then teachers should reteach that topic to that particular student or in class. For example, Teacher 1 had a class of 100 college used to give random tests and check them. Teacher would have twenty questions on paper hundred points test; however, she would take off ten points for each wrong answer. Most of the time she would mark mistakes on would mark or correct mistakes. The Teacher wouldn’t try to explain students about students’ mistakes made mistake on.

So my second reason is proved that their should not be grading system.

In short, grades don’t encourage students to learn anymore. In most cases, grades harm students in many ways.
As Table 11 (below) shows, of the 16 errors identified and discussed, Darshan fully understood only 4 corrections, partially understood 3 corrections, and had no understanding of 9 corrections. Yet, he was successful at correcting 5 of those errors he did not understand and successful at correcting 2 of those errors he partially understood, and he corrected all 4 of the errors for which he did understand the corrections. Darshan changed chunks of his text, so some of the feedback related to grammar was unused.

Table 11

**Darshan’s Understanding of Feedback and Success at Revision**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error #</th>
<th>Error Type</th>
<th>Initial Understanding of First Draft</th>
<th>Correction on Second Draft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fragment</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>Partial Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Punctuation (comma splice)</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Punctuation (comma splice)</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Possessive</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Capitalization</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Punctuation (comma splice)</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Verb Form</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Not Attempted*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Not Attempted*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Punctuation (comma splice)</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Singular/Plural</td>
<td>Partial Understanding</td>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Punctuation (comma splice)</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Verb Form</td>
<td>No Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Punctuation (run on)</td>
<td>Full Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>Partial Understanding</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Darshan changed his text; thus, he the feedback he received on grammar was unused.

The results of a comparison between Darshan’s first and second drafts, however, showed that while his second draft is more grammatically accurate than the first draft, it is not a more successful essay. The most significant problem with both the first and second drafts of Darshan’s essays is that his supporting evidence does not, in either case, match his thesis statement. More specifically, neither of the two topic sentences in his
two body paragraphs have a clearly stated main idea; thus, the remaining sentences of these paragraphs are jumbled and confused. Furthermore, Darshan leaves out a third body paragraph to support the third point he makes in his thesis statement.

In connecting the feedback Darshan received on his first draft to the changes he made in his second draft, I noted that his teacher had written two content related feedback comments. However, in the second interview I had with Darshan, he remarked that he could not read his teacher’s handwriting:

D.D. Some of them [the comments] it was hard to read.
J.P. What do you mean – hard to read?
D.D. Like these notes. I can’t read his handwriting at all.
J.P. O.K.
D.D. But I guessed it and changed it.
J.P. You guessed?
D.D. Yeah I guessed that that’s what he’s trying to say.

Clearly, teacher commentary is rendered ineffective if students are unable to read it. The comments Darshan’s teacher made were “Does this mean that those students got bad grades? Logic.” and “Support needs work as does expression.” However, these vague comment and other cryptic comments such as “explain” (which I had written on Hakesh’s first draft), “too vague,” and “more details needed” are confusing for students and “do not enable students to revise their texts” (Zamel, 1985, p. 89). In fact, Underwood and Tregidgo (2006) note the “interesting irony” that Sommers (1982) points out when she observes that teachers “hold a license for vagueness while the student is commanded to be specific” (p. 153).

There are some positive points that can be observed in Darshan’s second draft. First, in his introductory paragraph, Darshan changed his long wordy thesis statement that was a sentence fragment, into a somewhat clearer statement that followed the rules of
parallelism. Darshan pointed out to me in the second interview I had with him that after rereading his first draft, he felt that his original thesis statement (that his teacher had written in the margin was good) was too wordy and lacked coherence. He, therefore, changed it, without any prompting from his teacher. Darshan also changed his concluding paragraph so that the paragraph had more coherence. This change, too, he made without any written suggestion from his teacher.

Overall, there was evidence that Darshan reflected upon his writing and had the ability to self-correct some of his errors, even without clear feedback from his instructor. Darshan also appeared to recognize the importance of giving himself the time he needed to be able to see and solve the problems in his writing. For example, in the second interview, he pointed to one of the comments his teacher had made on his first draft and indicated that he had to think through the problems in his essay:

You see right now. I am confused over here. I’ve got to think about things. [Then] I would know what’s supposed to go over there. And I wouldn’t make that same mistake.

However, it is hard to know how Darshan would have revised his paper had he been given more explicit help on making a good argument in his essay. It is quite possible that Darshan did not have the topic knowledge to answer the essay question effectively, as studies (Ackerman, 1990, as cited in Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1987) have suggested that writers produce better quality papers when they have familiarity with the topic.

Darshan implied that just having his errors pointed out was sometimes enough for him to figure out how to correct some of them, even those he did not understand.

J.P. What about here when he underlines? Did you understand what he [your teacher] wanted you to do?
D.D. When I read it in the library, like today in the morning. When I
redid it, I understood that there were a couple of mistakes.

J.P.  You understood you made mistakes.

D.D.  So I changed them.

His response to having errors pointed out affirms Ferris and Roberts (2001) and Chandler (2003), who noted that simply underlining the error may be adequate for some students “to notice a mismatch between their interlanguage and the target language” (p. 293) and self-correct their own errors.

Darshan was far more successful in addressing technical errors than content issues in his revision. However, while linguistic accuracy is a first step, the analysis above clearly shows that it does not necessarily lead to improved writing skills or to an improved essay, and that linguistic accuracy alone certainly is not adequate to succeed in college. In other words, all the error feedback in the world (regardless of style and format), plus a great deal of motivation and good will on the part of the student, do not actually equal improved writing, just technically improved writing. This suggests that teachers need to pay at least as much attention to meaning and meaning related issues in their students’ essays than to surface level grammatical issues. This is in line with Johns (1986), who asserts that “it is important to focus upon the generation of meaning before the imposition of structure” (p. 73), and Lee (1997), who points out that teachers need to prioritize when giving feedback on their students’ essays. Although there is no definitive formula as to how much feedback teachers should provide on grammatical issues and how much they should give on meaning related issues, it is clear that the amount of attention paid to meaning and the development of ideas was inadequate in all three essays analyzed for this study.
In brief, in considering his traits as a student writer, the data suggested that Darshan was able to overcome unclear feedback because of what appeared to be a very high level of motivation and determination, and that motivation then might have “trumped” his teacher’s hard to understand feedback style. His case, as do the other two cases, indicates that factors such as motivation and the drive to succeed may play a fundamental role in the relationship between feedback and revision. At the very least, it suggests that more is in play than the style of teacher feedback when students sit down to revise their work.

**Discussion**

In this chapter I have sought to address the question that emerged from the anomalous findings in Chapter IV; that is, “What can account for the fact that there is not always a connection between student understanding of correction feedback and successful correction?” Using a more descriptive approach to analyze the data on three students allowed me to explore this question in detail.

The undergirding finding that connects the cases of these three students is that the feedback and revision relationship does not exist in a vacuum, but rather is shaped by far more than the nature of the feedback itself. This suggests that there is no one “silver bullet” approach to feedback that will work for all students in all situations because who the students are influences the outcomes of feedback when they go to revise their work. The findings were consistent with Guenette’s (2007) assertion that:

…there is no “corrective feedback recipe.” The success or failure of corrective feedback will depend on the classroom context, the type of errors students make, their proficiency level, the type of writing they are asked to do, and a collection of other variables that are as of yet unknown. (p. 51-52)

While the data raises up questions about the role of motivation for sure (especially in Hakesh and Darshan’s cases), it also brings up questions about students’ beliefs about
writing and revision, their skills with regard to self editing, their actual capacity to apply grammar rules in practice, their feelings about English and ESL classes, and the instructional context beyond the feedback.

The findings suggest that these three students differed in their feelings about being ESL students, their attitudes towards writing and motivation, and their linguistics abilities that influenced the ways in which they used their teachers’ feedback when they revised their writing. With regard to academic writing, all three had varying difficulties with English grammar that appear to mirror discussions in the literature about the writing issues of Generation 1.5 students (Roberge, 2002; Singhal, 2004). Yet, other factors seemed to play a role in differing responses to feedback. While in Hakesh’s case, his apparent lack of motivation and low level of interest appeared to be the main reasons for his seemingly perfunctory efforts at improving his essay, in the case of Nasheeta, she may not have understood the basic concepts of essay writing. She also appeared to lack an interest in improving her writing skills. Darshan, on the other hand, was the most motivated of the three students, and appeared to have spent the most time and effort on improving his writing skills. In spite of the very vague feedback he received, he made significant improvements to his second draft.

The findings of these three cases illustrate that further study is needed to understand with greater assurance the more subtle and complex details of the factors which shape what Generation 1.5 students bring to the feedback setting. This is something my study design was really not set up to do. Therefore, it can only begin to raise questions about the many factors that seem to contribute to how well a student can revise a paper based on a range of teacher feedback styles.
A second finding that comes through again and again is that an accurately written essay does not necessarily make it a good essay, and that feedback on error, therefore, is not in and of itself, enough to help students become better writers. In emphasizing surface-level features over content, teachers may also become “so distracted by language-related local problems (which probably happened to me in responding to Hakesh’s essay), that they often correct these without realizing that a much larger meaning-related problem has totally escaped their notice” (Zamel, 1985, p. 86).

In Chapter VI, I will discuss what the findings of this study mean with regard to ESL and English composition pedagogy, and address the limitations of the study. I will also pose questions for future research.
CHAPTER VI
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, 
AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This practitioner research study grew out of two concerns. One concern centered around the frustration I was feeling over spending a great deal of time commenting on my students’ essays, only to see my students continue to struggle with the same linguistic problems in the second drafts of their essays and in their subsequent essays. In reviewing the literature on teacher written feedback, I learned that error feedback is a controversial issue in second language writing. While some researchers (Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2007) claim that error feedback is ineffective and “probably not worth the trouble for teachers to make” (Gray, 2000, p. 1), others (Fathman & Walley, 1990; Ferris, 2006;) maintain that error feedback may be beneficial to students in certain contexts. However, such researchers have been unable to prove that error feedback helps student improve their writing skills (Hartshorn, 2008). Because feedback is a central part of my ESL writing classes, as it is in most ESL writing classes, I wanted to conduct a study that would enable me to reflect on my own feedback practices in a systematic manner while simultaneously gaining insight into whether or not my students were benefiting from my feedback. More specifically, I wanted to understand how my students made sense of and used the error feedback I provided them on the second drafts of their essays.

A second concern was the mounting number of ESL Generation 1.5 students who were joining the more traditional population of ESL students that I had in my classroom. Generation 1.5 students, as Harklau (2003) point out, often lack the academic language
that is necessary for school success, particularly in the area of writing. I, therefore, became interested in learning more about my Generation 1.5 students and their experiences with second language writing. In order to understand the perceptions and interpretations Generation 1.5 students have of teacher written feedback, I employed a qualitative research approach to explore how three small groups of Generation 1.5 students understood the written error feedback on their essays across three feedback types, and the impact, if any, this feedback had on their second drafts. The rationale of this study led to the following research questions:

1) How frequently does a group of Generation 1.5 students understand the error feedback they receive on the first drafts of their essays, and what is the relationship between frequency of understanding and the type of feedback they get?

2) What impact, if any, does this feedback have on their second drafts? What types of feedback tend to yield change? What types of errors do students tend to correct? ignore? misinterpret?

In this chapter, I summarize the significant findings of this study based on the results reported in chapters IV and V. I then discuss the limitations this study and provide suggestion for future research. Finally, I present the implications this study has for teachers.

**Summary**

This qualitative study was conducted to provide an in-depth portrait of the ways in which students understood the written error feedback on the first drafts of their essays, and the degree to which they were successful in incorporating this feedback into the
second drafts of their essays. This study is primarily qualitative, although some of the qualitative data was analyzed quantitatively. The following are the findings that resulted from this in-depth study.

Finding Number 1

Question number 8 of my Student Interview Guide sought to ascertain the degree to which students understood their teachers’ feedback on the first 10–15 errors on the first drafts of their essays. As expected, the findings revealed that error correction feedback type had a direct effect on student understanding and that the more explicit the feedback, the clearer it was for students to know what they needed to do to fix their errors. As I indicated in Chapter IV, there was a linear and downward pattern in each group’s ability to fully understand the nature of their errors, from the group that received the most explicit feedback to the group that received the least explicit feedback.

In Group A, where students received error feedback in the form of circles around grammatical errors and slashes across punctuation errors, students demonstrated full understanding of 46% of their teacher’s feedback, partial understanding of 15%, and no understanding of 39%. The most common problems students stated they had were (a) not understanding the nature of and reasons for their errors, and (b) not agreeing with their teachers’ assessment.

In Group B, where students received coded feedback above the location of their errors, students had full understanding of 54% of their teacher’s feedback, partial understanding of 7%, and no understanding of 39%. It was revealed through the interviews I conducted that students at times either misinterpreted the meaning of a code or did not know the meaning the code represented.
In Group C, where the feedback was in the form of circles around the errors with key words placed above the errors, students had full understanding of 66% of their teacher’s feedback, partial understanding of 10% and no understanding of 24%. In some cases, students reported that they did not understand the specific grammar terms I had used in providing feedback. This finding seems in harmony with the findings of Ferris (1985) who found that students sometimes do not understand the specific grammar terminology their teachers are using when providing feedback.

**Finding Number 2**

Although the sample was small, and there was not enough data to draw conclusions (See Chapter IV, Table 7), it was clear that it was easiest for students to understand those errors for which there are firm, basic rules (i.e., mechanical errors such as spelling and capitalization). Conversely, students appeared to have had a greater difficulty understanding feedback on morphological errors such as articles and verb forms, and lexical errors such as word choice and prepositions. This finding supports the claim of Truscott (2007) who observed that mechanical rules, such as spelling, are much simpler to fix and often can be corrected in isolation—i.e., correcting the spelling of single words without considering first the sentence—and Ferris (1999b), who found that errors in word choice, word form, and unidiomatic (or awkward) sentence structure, are often “untreatable” (p. 6), meaning that these error categories are complicated and that fixing them can not be reduced to following a simple set of rules.

Based on the findings above, conventional wisdom told me that the students who fared best in understanding their error feedback would be the most successful at incorporating the feedback into their second drafts, and that students who had the least
success in understanding their error feedback, would be the least successful at incorporating the feedback into their papers. However, while understanding the feedback seems critical to correction, it is not necessarily sufficient in enabling a student to produce a successful revision. Therefore, the next step in analysis suggested the importance of comparing type of feedback to frequency of actual revision.

The results of the data analysis were unexpected and ran counter to conventional wisdom. Overall, the findings indicated that the students in Group A, who received the least explicit feedback among the three groups, corrected their errors more often than the students in both Groups B and C. Thus, it appears that, at least on the surface, the more minimal the feedback, the better the success students have at correcting their errors. Yet, because the data were counterintuitive, it raised the question of what might be contributing to student correction of error in addition to the style of teacher feedback.

While my quantitative analysis answered the initial questions of this study, the teaching of writing is “a multidimensional phenomenon” that calls for “a research methodology that will account for its complexity” (Kantor, 1984, as quoted in Beedles & Samuels, 2002, p. 18). Therefore, my quantitative analysis may have overlooked an unanticipated but important part of the feedback–revision equation, namely, what other factors shape students’ revisions including who the students are, their experiences in using teacher written feedback, and what they bring to the revision process that may influence the success of a second draft.

In my search for an answer to the question that resulted from my findings in Chapter IV, I used a qualitative approach to explore the nexus of teacher feedback and student variables, how they combined, and the impact they had on students’ ability and
motivation to understand and incorporate the feedback into the second drafts of their essays. Qualitative research provided the framework to explore, analyze, and interpret the social setting of the students involved (Berg, 2004). Moreover, the qualitative data collection strategies used allowed students to tell, in their own words, the problems, and successes they had with academic writing and using teacher written feedback.

I approached this part of my analysis using a grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Accordingly, I did not impose a predetermined theory on the data, but allowed the theory to emerge from the data. For this part of my analysis, I drew on the interview data I had from the students, as well as on the first and second drafts of their essays, course handouts, student records, informal conversations with some of their present and past teachers, and notes taken during the course of the study.

The undergirding finding that connected the cases of these three students is that the feedback and revision relationship does not exist in a vacuum in which the first directly influences the second without intrusion from any other factors, but rather is shaped by far more than the nature of the feedback itself. In other words, this suggests that there is no one “silver bullet” approach to feedback that will work for all students in all situations because who the students are influences the outcomes of feedback in revisions. Interestingly, as Beedles and Samuels (2002) note, “Much earlier in 1984, Kenneth J. Kantor had pointed to this absence of “a picture of the educational context” as being the most glaring thing lacking in many composition studies” (p. 18).

A second and equally important finding of this research was that while the teachers’ written feedback on the grammatical errors of a student’s essay often improved the grammatical accuracy of the student’s second draft regardless of the feedback style,
the revisions students made did not translate into a qualitatively improved paper. They only resulted in a more grammatically accurate paper. And while linguistic accuracy is clearly one objective in the ESL writing classroom, a heavy-handed emphasis on error correction may draw the attention of the teacher and student away from other important dimensions of the composition that need to be addressed to prepare students for college writing; namely, the contents and ideas that are expressed, and the organization and flow of those ideas.

**Closing Thoughts**

My choice of a practitioner research approach to my educational inquiry was impelled by my desire to develop and improve my teaching practice, and consequently my students’ learning. The practitioner research process allowed for direct engagement with my participants in a manner that I believe captured their real perceptions, understandings, and experiences with teacher written feedback. On a personal level, I have been both humbled and empowered through the process.

According to Stringer (2007), practitioner research “provide[s] educational practitioners with new knowledge and understanding enabling them to improve educational practice or resolve significant problems in classroom and schools” (p. 13). Engaging in practitioner research has enabled me to examine my own teaching practices and assumptions, and rethink and reformulate my practice in my desire to improve the learning experience for my students.

While conducting my research, it came as a big surprise to me the extent to which my students either did not understand or misinterpreted the feedback that I provided to them on their essays. Prior to this research, I had thought that, for the most part, my
written feedback was focused and clear. However, closer scrutiny revealed that this was not always the case. The findings confirmed that students in my group (Group C), as well as in the two other groups (Groups A and B), either misunderstood or could not read some of their teachers’ feedback.

The overarching lesson that I learned from this study, which could be beneficial to all teacher practitioners is that:

we might think we know how we teach, but until we actually collect data on our teaching and reflect on what that data might mean, we often are ignorant of many of our real strengths and real failings as teachers. (van den Berg, 2001, p. 370)

Although this study did not go in the direction I had expected, in retrospect, I should not have been surprised at the direction it took, as the feedback relationship “is not a simple cause and effect matter, but rather a complex one” (Herrmann, 1989, p. 4). As Goldstein (2001) points out:

a conceptualization of the process [of written commentary and student revision] as a linear one in which students write, teachers respond with commentary, and then students revise… ignores a process in which multiple factors interact in very complex ways that may in fact be unique for each study. (p. 87)

Thus, it should not be surprising that the “one size fits all” feedback strategy that the two participating teachers and I used in providing written feedback to our students did not yield the results we had desired.

This practitioner research journey has left me more knowledgeable about educational issues related to feedback, and better equipped to handle the challenges I will face in the future. A valuable lesson that I learned from this research is that ESL teachers need to be more flexible when providing error correction feedback on their students’ essays and avoid using a singular feedback strategy for all students, as not all students are alike and will benefit from the same type of feedback. ESL teachers also need to help
students grasp the importance of error correction feedback and help them know what to do with the feedback once they receive it. This can be done by describing and modeling effective revision strategies or creating opportunities for whole group activities where students decide as a group how to respond to the feedback. If students understand the activities and feel they are achievable, they may work more diligently towards completing them.

Moreover, it is important to be selective in pointing out errors to students and provide quality feedback that is clear and tailored to their individual developmental level. In other words, students have to be able to read and understand the feedback in order to use it. Since Generation 1.5 students may be low-literate in both their native languages and in English, ESL instructors should be mindful of who their Generation 1.5 students are, and critically examine their own pedagogy so that it can be inclusive in order to meet the needs of these students. For example, the understanding of formal grammar terminology and ability to identify formal grammatical structures in their own writing was one of the most frequent difficulties that the Generation 1.5 students in this study faced in revising their essays. I have found mini grammar lessons within the context of the writing class to be an effective means of illustrating grammatical concepts and motivating students to apply these concepts to their own writing.

Teachers also need to prioritize their feedback and not focus solely on grammar as if their students’ essays are just a “series of separate sentences or even clauses, rather than as a whole unit of discourse” (Zamel, 1985, p. 86). This requires teachers to take an introspective look at the beliefs they hold when commenting on their students’ writing and a willingness to shake loose old habits. By changing their error correction feedback
behavior, teachers can better help students clarify and improve their writing. I have changed my own feedback behavior by differentiating between errors that do not interfere with meaning and those that do, and address those errors that do not interfere with meaning on the last draft.

Finally, I have repeatedly observed that Generation 1.5 students who place into college ESL classes after having completed their high school education in English-only courses object to and resent being placed in ESL courses. Moreover, it becomes an almost impossible task for teachers to motivate these students if they think they do not need to be in these classes. From the administration perspective, college institutions should, therefore, demonstrate more sensitivity to the various needs of their Generation 1.5 students and offer more than one placement option where possible. For example, institutions should consider offering Generation 1.5 students the option of taking developmental English classes, taught by ESL trained faculty, instead of ESL classes. From my experience, most Generation 1.5 students would rather be in developmental than in ESL courses. Institutions need to be explicit with Generation 1.5 students about their English language skills and the benefits of taking ESL or developmental classes. Furthermore, colleges with a high number of Generation 1.5 students might consider developing special ESL courses designed just for this student population and extend 3-6 college credits for taking these courses. Offering college credits could help reduce the students’ negative feelings of resentment and motivate them to engage in their own learning.

I hope that this research will be of use to others who face the same dilemmas that I have faced in the writing classroom. I am convinced that more teachers need to engage
in teacher research in order to gain an improved understanding of their teaching practice and how it impacts on their students’ success.

**Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

I have learned many important lessons in conducting this practitioner research study, and I believe that this research has much to contribute to the literature. However, I am aware that there are several limitations to this study.

First of all, I did not know the direction the study was going to take until data collection was well underway. Had I known the way the study would unfold, I would have conducted a third interview towards the end of the semester and probed further students’ impressions of and experiences in the writing classroom.

Second, the sample size was small. Only Generation 1.5 students who were enrolled in a high intermediate or advanced level ESL writing class participated in this study. Furthermore, the student selection was limited to the pool of participants who met the selection criteria in the three classes that were the focus of his study; that is, there were just four to five students enrolled in each class. It would be beneficial to extend this study by including more participants. More in-depth research into the revising performance of more students, along with their perceptions, will produce a clearer path to find data on the most effective feedback approaches to enhance students’ writing performance.

Third, I only analyzed one first draft and its subsequent revision for each participant. It would be beneficial to analyze the first and second drafts of students’ essays over the course of a semester. Moreover, this research has shown the need for doing a more longitudinal study in order to track the performance of participants in subsequent writing courses.
Finally, taking into account that “contexts… are anything but standard” (Goldstein, 2001, p. 79), further research is also needed into the characteristics and differences within Generation 1.5 students in the L1 and L2 composition classroom. As researchers continue to study this growing population of students, it is important to explore how background variables such as gender, nationality, prior knowledge, past academic experience, learning styles and in particular motivation, affect students’ performance in revising their essays. I concur with Guenette (2007) who asserts that:

…any type of feedback that does not take the crucial variable of motivation into consideration is perhaps doomed to fail. For students to improve their writing, we assume that, among other things, they have to be provided with appropriate feedback, given at the right time and in the proper context. They have to notice the feedback and be given ample opportunities to apply the corrections. However, when everything is said and done, unfortunately, if the students are not committed to improving their writing skills, they will not improve, no matter what type of corrective feedback is provided. (p. 52)
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX I. CONSENT FORM

Consent Form for Students
Generation 1.5 Students’ Perceptions of Written Feedback on their Essays from Multiple Sources: A Qualitative Research Study

Description: You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Janet Peleg, who is a student in the Language Education Program at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education. The purpose of this investigation is to determine how a group of ESL students respond to the different types of error feedback on their papers. Approximately 12 students between the ages of 18 and 21 years old will participate in the study, and each individual’s participation will last approximately 12 weeks.

This study will involve the researcher conducting a maximum total of thirty hours of interviews, two of which you will participate in. The interviews will be audio-taped for the purpose of maintaining accurate records. These tapes will only be used by personnel involved in this study. Your participation in this study will take no more than two hours.

The research is confidential. Confidential mean that the research records will include some information about you, such as your age and native language, the number of years you studied in a U.S. high school, and the writing courses you have taken at Middlesex County College.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for three years.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation in this research study.

You will receive no payment for your participation in this study, and there are no foreseeable costs for you associated with your participation.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact myself at (732)548-6000, ext. 3498 or by email at jpeleg@middlesexcc.edu. Or you may contact my study coordinator, Professor Alisa Belzer, at (732) 932-7496, ext. 8114 or by email at alisa_belzer@gse.rutgers.edu
If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 732-932-0150, ext. 2104
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Subject (print) _______________________________________
Subject Signature _____________________________________ Date _______________
Principal Investigator Signature ________________________ Date _______________
APPENDIX II. AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: *Generation 1.5 Students’ Perceptions of Written Feedback on their Essays from Multiple Sources* conducted by Janet Peleg. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape the two interviews I have with you as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the research team.

The recording(s) will include your first name only.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and labeled with subjects’ names and date of interview. The recordings will be retained for a period of three years and then destroyed.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) ________________________________________
Subject Signature ____________________________ Date ______________________

Principal Investigator Signature _____________________ Date __________________
APPENDIX III. STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE I

1. Name ________________________________

2. Sex ________________________________

3. Country of birth ________________________________

4. How old are you? ________________________________

5. How many writing classes have you taken at MCC?

6. What U.S. high school did you attend? ________________________________

7. How many months or years did you attend there? ________________________________

8. Now I would like to go over your essay with you. Why do you think your teacher marked this? What do you think he/she would like you to do?

9. How much essay writing did you do in your high school ESL classes?
   (________ a lot ________ a little ________ none)

10. How often did you write a new essay?
    (________ once a week, ________ twice a week, ________ every two weeks)

11. In your last year of high school, did your English teacher give you feedback on the errors in your essay?
    (________ yes ________ no ________ sometimes)

12. What kind of feedback did your teacher give you?
    (________ direct written corrections ________ written symbols
     ________ written comments ________ oral feedback)
13. Did your English teacher ask you to rewrite any of your essays?

(________ Always    _________ Sometimes    _________ Never)
APPENDIX IV. STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE II

1. How, if at all, did you use your instructor’s feedback when you revised your paper? Can you point out specific examples in the two drafts of what you are talking about?

2. Did you have any questions or confusion about the feedback while working on your revision?

3. Can you explain to me how you decided to make the correction the way you did?
APPENDIX V. INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Could you describe your approach to teaching writing?

2. Have you ever taken any courses in ESL writing or had any training in ESL writing, or do you teach from your experience alone?

3. How much time do you usually spend commenting on a student’s paper?

4. What are some of the techniques or criteria you use when correcting papers?

5. What types of feedback or ways of commenting have you found to be effective?

6. What types of feedback or ways of commenting have you felt to be ineffective?

7. What do you think are some of the reasons students do not always follow up on your feedback?
APPENDIX VI. EXAMPLES OF CLASSIFICATION OF ERROR TYPE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error Type</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>If I don’t sleep enough, I feel sleepy whole day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awkward</td>
<td>Indian food is too spicy than any other countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalization</td>
<td>Many students leave College and don’t graduate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connector</td>
<td>He had many friends. Yet, he had no time to hang out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comma splice</td>
<td>Math was a difficult subject for me in high school, I hated it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragment</td>
<td>Because he dresses like a gangster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallelism</td>
<td>I was gaining weight and spend money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessive</td>
<td>I believe we should not judge a persons character quickly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition</td>
<td>I never had a doubt on any of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>It was the worst vacation of they lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run-on sentence</td>
<td>Communication is my main problem in school English is not my native language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singular/Plural</td>
<td>The majorities of people like to go on vacation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>I care allot about my grades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject-Verb Agreement</td>
<td>Tests are made for teacher to learn what students know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb Tense</td>
<td>Victor calls and asked if I wanted to hang out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb Form</td>
<td>I have went through it several times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>He uses baggy pants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Form</td>
<td>Some people express themselves by dressing different.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>