



8-2012

# On the Same Page: The Experience of Instructors and Students as They Give and Receive Written Feedback in Higher Education

Michele Heide Williams  
mwilli57@utk.edu

---

## Recommended Citation

Williams, Michele Heide, "On the Same Page: The Experience of Instructors and Students as They Give and Receive Written Feedback in Higher Education. " PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2012.  
[http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_graddiss/1449](http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/1449)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact [trace@utk.edu](mailto:trace@utk.edu).

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Michele Heide Williams entitled "On the Same Page: The Experience of Instructors and Students as They Give and Receive Written Feedback in Higher Education." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Educational Psychology and Research.

Katherine H. Greenberg, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Ralph G. Brockett, Sandra P. Thomas, Schuyler W. Huck

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

---

On the Same Page:  
The Experience of Instructors and Students  
as They Give and Receive Written Feedback in Higher  
Education

A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Michele Heide Williams  
August, 2012

**DEDICATION**

For my sister, Janet.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to acknowledge my family, the source for all of the good things in my life. I would like to thank my dear friend, Carolyn Hacker. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee for their support and understanding, in particular Dr. Katherine Greenberg for her encouragement and belief in me.

## ABSTRACT

Academic writing in higher education remains a chief means of assessing student understanding, making instructor response to student writing an important way of providing summative and formative feedback for students. Writing and response offer insights into the ways in which students construct understanding within disciplinary contexts and the ways in which instructors facilitate those efforts. The present study explores two aspects of writing in higher education: 1) the experience of faculty members who require and respond to writing from students, and 2) the experience of students as recipients of instructor responses to their academic writing. To explore the experience of response, this study employs existential phenomenology as a method of investigation. Data for this study were obtained by open-ended interviews.

Following procedures suggested by Thomas and Pollio (2002), the transcripts of the interviews were analyzed until a thematic structure formed. Four figural themes and one ground theme formed the structure of the experience for each group. The instructor-participants' experience was structured against the ground: *Providing feedback is a responsibility that I take feedback seriously*. Emerging from this ground, were two themes specific to the instructors' experience: *I want to join in a dialogue with the student*; and *I get caught up in the papers*. The students' ground theme was: *You discard the things that don't work and hold on to the things that do work*, representing the students' need for useful feedback, and their resolve to maintain control of their thoughts and the writing process. Against this ground theme, stood two student themes: *It's nice to have another opportunity to do the best that you can....* and *I know what it must be like to be an instructor*. Two additional themes were shared by both the instructors and students and constituted figural themes three and four for both groups of participants: *I remember feedback from the past....* and *I don't think they read what I wrote!*



## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	2
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Theoretical Framework: The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty .....	6
Significance of the Study.....	7
Reflexivity Statement.....	8
Background of the Researcher as a Writer .....	9
Bracketing Interview .....	11
Delimitations and Limitations of the Study.....	14
Conclusion.....	14
Chapter 2 .....	16
Review of Literature .....	16
Scope of the literature .....	17
Historical overview .....	19
Chapter 3 .....	40
Method .....	40
The Evolution of Ideas in Phenomenology .....	41
Existential Phenomenology as Philosophy and Method.....	42
Participants .....	44
Instructor Participants .....	45
Student Participants .....	45
Data Collection .....	46
Bracketing .....	47
Data Analysis.....	47
Data Quality .....	49
Reliability.....	49
Validity .....	49
Generalizability.....	50
Protection of Participants .....	51

Summary .....	51
Chapter 4 .....	53
Findings.....	53
Figure 1. ....	55
Instructor themes .....	56
Student themes .....	58
Interrelated Instructor and Student Themes .....	64
Chapter 5 .....	70
Summary.....	70
Summary of the findings.....	73
Discussion of the findings .....	75
Conclusions .....	85
Implications for practice .....	86
Implications for future research.....	86
Conclusion.....	87
List of References .....	89

## Chapter 1 Introduction

*Inclination speaks out: 'I don't want to have to enter this risky world of discourse, I want nothing to do with it insofar as it is decisive and final; I would like to feel it all around me, calm and transparent, profound, infinitely open, with others responding to my expectations and truth emerging, one by one. All I want is to allow myself to be borne along within it, and by it, a happy wreck.' Institutions reply: 'But you have nothing to fear from launching out, we're here to show you discourse is within the established order of things. . .'*

*–Foucault (1972)*

My inclination, like that of Foucault, desires transparency. As I write, I would prefer to be enveloped by a seamless, liquid medium through which I'd travel from one subject to another with no rough passage between discourses. But instead, as a writer, I travel a shifting terrain with crumbling yet persistent boundaries. As Foucault (1972) confirms, “We are not free to say just anything” (p. 216).

In academic writing, where academic discourse is manifested materially, writers face uncertainty and desire in our attempts to explore, communicate meaning and fulfill expectations. According to Foucault, institutions counter the uncertainty of discourse by ritualizing written expression and imposing order on discourse with rules and standards. In higher education, institutional standards are often enforced through instructor response in the margins of students' academic papers.

As it regards academic writing, the term *response* has a much more specialized meaning than the commonly understood definition of a “reaction” or “reply.” The term, as it applies to

instructor response to writing, has come to mean the commentary written in the margins or at the end of students' papers that is meant to communicate areas for improvement, corrections, questions, guidance, critique, expectations, evaluations, and interpretations (Gocsik, 2007). It is also often used as justification for a final grade, but does not usually include the grade. It bears mentioning that not all instructors provide students with response to their academic writing. Particularly within the context of summative evaluation, some instructors may provide students with a grade and no written response. The experience of these instructors is beyond the scope of the present study.

The interaction between instructor and student in the margins and at the ends of academic papers involves more than pedagogy. According to Greenhalgh (1992), a response to a draft goes beyond semantic communication to the interplay of "a social relationship between reader and writer, teacher and student" (p. 402). Whether the instructor's response is brief or lengthy, written across drafts or summatively on one draft, response to writing is subject to what Knoblauch and Brannon (2008) term "a web of influences" (p. 15), these include the context of the classroom, past experiences of both student and instructor, the relationship between the student and the instructor created both in the classroom and in the margins of previous papers, the content of the discipline, and the community of discourse within which the student writes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Instructors use response as a means of maintaining a productive dialogue with students and providing them with guidance as they develop understanding (Tuck, 2011). However, responding to writing is a labor intensive activity for the instructor who must make sense of the students' written expression, assess the disparity between the instructor's own expectations for the writing and what exists on the page, and then craft comments that will facilitate

improvement. This enterprise does not always yield results that are commensurate with the amount of effort exerted in commenting. As Harvey (2003) explains,

We seem driven ... despite knowing that the student may not appreciate or make use of it [response] .... The first ten or so papers can be kind of fun; the next ten and beyond will be increasingly less so, to the point where one flags, delays and avoids, feeds the dog, cleans the bathroom, makes more coffee, eventually forces oneself through to the bitter end (Harvey, 2003, p. 47).

Institutional mandates and increasing workloads for instructors aside, response to writing is further complicated by the situated nature of language and its impact as a cultural signifier. According to Lea and Street (1998), written feedback performs a gate-keeping function.

Written feedback on student work, is not merely an attempt at communication, or at learning a 'discipline', or at socialisation [sic] into a community—although it clearly has elements of all of these—but is also embedded in relationships of authority as a marker of difference and a sustainer of boundaries (p. 168).

Written feedback on papers communicates appropriate forms of knowledge and ways of knowing to the student that change according to communities of discourse. In his essay, “Inventing the University,” David Bartholome (1985) describes the problem in this way:

The student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience, as though he were a member of the academy or an historian or an anthropologist or an economist; he has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language while finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the

history of a discipline, on the other hand. He must learn to speak our language. Or he must dare to speak it or to carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will most certainly be required long before the skill is "learned." And this, understandably, causes problems (134-135).

The impact of instructor comments on student writing can be considerable and can influence the way students perceive themselves in the academic community. And yet most studies confirm that students prefer any comments to none at all (Haswell, 2006).

For students, writing requires a construction of identity as a writer that is continually being formed by experiences past and present. It is a highly mutable identity that can ebb and flow in competence across various writing experiences (Gambell, 1991 and Ivanic, 1998). According to Graham (2006), an instructor's response to a student's writing can affect a student's sense of efficacy as a writer and a student, depending upon his or her perception of how the writing has been received by its intended audience. In turn, efficacy influences motivation. Bandura (2006) found that beliefs of personal efficacy are the foundation of human motivation, and these beliefs influence expectations of the potential outcome of students' efforts—for example, performance on future writing assignments. Beliefs that people have about themselves are key elements in a system of self that includes the abilities to symbolize, learn from others, and engage in self-reflection (Bandura, 1989). "Beliefs that individuals hold about their abilities and about the outcome of their efforts powerfully influence the ways in which they will behave" (Panjares, 1996, p. 543). Panjares (1996) found that self-efficacy perceptions had a direct influence on students' writing performance.

In a short film entitled *Across the Drafts: Students and Teachers Talk about Feedback*, student participants in the comprehensive Harvard Study of Undergraduate Writing offer their

perspectives on the feedback that they receive on papers. One of the students talks about the personal nature of feedback on a paper. He explains that in a classroom setting, the instructor addresses the entire room full of students with his or her comments. On a paper, the instructor's address is taken much more personally because there can be no mistaking toward whom the comments are directed. Two other students suggest that in twenty years, they believe they will be more likely to remember the feedback on a paper written in college than to remember what the paper was actually about (Harvard Study, 2002).

However, students can remember or utilize instructor responses only if they understand them. A number of factors can interfere with students' understanding including seemingly obvious circumstances like a students' inability to read the response, reading but not understanding the response, and understanding the response but lacking the knowledge needed to follow the directive (Hahn, 1981).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The present study looks at the complexity of the lived experience of response. It explores two aspects of writing in higher education. First, it deals with the experience of faculty members who require and respond to writing from students. The second aspect of this study involves the experience of students as recipients of instructor responses to their writing.

### **Research Questions**

Through phenomenological interview, I will explore the lived experience of each participant with the following questions:

- How do instructors experience their responses to student academic writing?
- How do students experience instructor responses to their academic writing?

To explore the experience of response, this study employs existential phenomenology not only as a method of investigation, but also as a part of the philosophical framework informing this study. This philosophy and method is based upon the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty**

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) was a French philosopher and psychologist who served as the chair of child psychology at the Sorbonne in 1949, and in 1952 was the youngest appointee ever elected chair of philosophy at the College de France— a position he maintained until his death (Flynn, 2011). Influenced by the neo-Kantian philosophy of Hegel, and later Husserl, his research in biology and psychology led him to conclude that the results of scientific research on perception actually contradicted the ontology that undergirds it (Flynn, 2011). He argued that perception could not be objectively studied because we cannot step outside of our experience of "being in the world." Merleau-Ponty (1962) explains, "All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. (ix)" Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes science as a "second order expression" because it is a rationale or explanation of the world rather than the actual experience of being in the world.

Existential phenomenology blends the focus on experience with the authenticity of our existence in the world to form a philosophy and method of research. The research implications of existential phenomenology will be discussed in detail in the "Method" chapter of this dissertation. Phenomenology reflects the ontological and epistemological stance of the methodology used in this study.

Merleau-Ponty (1973) addressed the issue of language in a number of his works. In *The Prose of the World*, published posthumously in 1969, Merleau-Ponty calls the authority of texts

into question and likewise the centrality of language, “. . . language is never the mere clothing of a thought which possesses itself in full clarity” (Merleau-Ponty, 1973; p. xiii). The illusive nature of language is a product of the history of language itself. Language, like other cultural institutions, is handed down to us through history, therefore it is never fully our own.

Merleau-Ponty (1973) juxtaposes language as an institution, coming to the writer from history or *sedimented*, against the creative use of language. A writer must by necessity use the institution of language to be understood, but she must travel the boundaries and frontiers of that institution in order to say something new.

To express oneself is, therefore, a paradoxical enterprise. . . . It is an operation which tends towards its own destruction, since it suppresses itself to the extent that it ingratiates itself and annuls itself if it fails to do so. (p. 35)

This circumstance requires a writer to at once deform and form patterns to make language personal. Merleau-Ponty uses the term *coherent deformation* to describe this paradoxical act.

As students navigate academic writing, they must follow institutional and historical standards and norms of the academy while at the same time creating original work.

### **Significance of the Study**

Higher education imposes an explicit and implicit mandate that instructors and students must write. According to Graue (2006), academic writing “connects members of the academic community. It provides cultural capital, builds a knowledge base and translates into economic capital. (p. 515).” In higher education, academic writing remains a chief means of assessing student understanding; making instructor response to student writing a significant means of summative and formative feedback for students. The importance of response to writing has been a consistent area of interest for scholars for the past three decades.

To understand the experience, phenomenology offers a means of systematic investigation of experiences of everyday life (Thomas and Pollio, 2002). This study looks at the experiences of instructors and students in a college of education at a major university in the southeastern United States to explore the ways in which those whose discipline concerns itself with teaching and learning view the experience of giving and receiving responses to writing.

Writing and response offer important insights into the ways in which students construct understanding within disciplinary contexts and the ways in which instructors facilitate those efforts. Phenomenology captures the interconnectedness between the person and the world, or in this case, between the reader and the writer. Phenomenological research produces a deeper understanding of an individual's experience which can lead to several positive consequences including increasing the sensitivity toward those involved in an experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). Increasing awareness of the experiences of instructors and students has implications for increasing the understanding of the phenomenon of response and for improving practice.

As a student who has had numerous experiences with instructor response to my own writing, and as an instructor who has provided responses to students' academic writing, I approached the phenomenon with a number of assumptions based on my encounters with response. As a result, it was necessary to examine feelings that might cause me to approach this study with judgments and conclusions that could impede or overreach the lived experiences of participants. Part of the process of gaining awareness is achieved through a reflexive self-examination.

### **Reflexivity Statement**

Qualitative research requires an acknowledgement by the researcher of the reciprocal influences of the researcher on the phenomenon she studies and vice versa. According to

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), “This is not a matter of methodological commitment, it is an existential fact. There is no way to escape the social world in order to study it; nor fortunately, is that necessary” (p. 15). What is necessary is a thoughtful and intentional reflection on my own lived experience and the connection between that experience and the phenomenon that I have studied. This process is known as reflexivity (Hatch, 2002). In the following sections, I will discuss the personal and professional experiences with writing that led me to this study, my assumptions prior to beginning this study that were explored by means of a bracketing interview, and the ways in which I addressed these prior assumptions, holding them in abeyance as I collected and analyzed the data.

### **Background of the Researcher as a Writer**

My experience with academic writing begins with my family, my mother for whom English was a second language and my father for whom high school English was a troublesome requisite for playing football and enlisting in the Air Force. My two siblings were much more interested in science than language. As a result, I became the *de facto* authority on correctness in writing at my house. I was consulted for homework papers, letters to family, and crossword puzzles. My facility with written English allowed me to take “advanced” classes in secondary school. This advantage meant going to class with the upper middle class young people in my town. I sat among the sons and daughters of doctors and scientists from the nearby branches of NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration . As I recall, this socioeconomic divide was irrelevant to my classmates and I, but it was sometimes a point of reference for some of our teachers. So much so, that when I became a high school teacher, I was especially sensitive to students who seemed to be outliers in the classroom milieu. However, for the most part, I loved school with the exception of 8<sup>th</sup> grade English. Our teacher, Mrs. Baker

was a tall blond woman whose 1960's bouffant made her look like a Dairy Queen butterscotch dip cone, only lacking the sweetness. Apparently, the book report I had written for her had used language sophisticated enough to prompt her to accuse me in front of the class of copying a blurb from the book's dust jacket and to give me an F – in spite of my immediate offering of the book with the jacket blurb for her to compare. My experience with Mrs. Baker has served as a frequent reminder of the damage that can be done to a teacher-student relationship when an instructor's response reflects personal biases and hasty judgment. Other than this rather horrible episode– that can still make me mad if I think about it too long– I very much enjoyed my English classes right through to my Bachelor's degree in English. Writing was usually a source of positive feedback from my teachers and from my friends, who often asked me to proofread their papers.

After earning my Bachelor's degree, I became an English teacher. My supervisor during student teaching at a high school in rural Mississippi was a diminutive yet formidable African American woman with the inapt name, Bette Ford. Having been educated in segregated schools, she imparted to me her determination to teach her students to value clear, formal, and correct expression, helping me to see English as a class signifier and a means for our students of escaping poverty. When I began my own career working with at-risk students in the same high school, I felt a responsibility to rid the writing of my students of error as a means of preparing them for success after high school.

After six years, I returned to college to complete a Master's degree in English. My assistantship teaching freshman composition courses required taking a course in teaching writing. My first night of class, the professor told us "I'm not interested in correct grammar. In fact, I am a terrible speller." I was shocked. However, it was not long before I began to see the

sense of what Dr. Hodges was saying. I saw tangible evidence in my Composition I and II courses that when students were initially free from the tyranny of the comma splice or pronoun reference error, their sentences became richer and more complex, and they could find and even enjoy their own voice as writers. Feeling a sense of authorship and meaning motivated students to learn the rules of grammar as a worthwhile way of polishing their writing.

I returned to teaching after my Master's degree, and became the administrator at the school where I had taught. After nine years as a school administrator, I began the doctoral program in educational psychology because I was interested in teaching and learning in a broader sense. Teaching classes as part of my graduate assistantship gave me the opportunity to talk to students about their papers. What would begin as discussions about the papers I had assigned them would often turn into discussions about their experiences with academic writing in general. I found that much of what they would say about their writing abilities was based on past instructor responses to their writing. It was these experiences with students that led to the research for my dissertation.

### **Bracketing Interview**

Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes the inevitable significance of the observer and the meaning inherent in act of observing,

Generally speaking, the description of phenomena does not enable one to refute thought which is not alive to its own existence, and which resides in things. For phenomenology, the person does not exist outside of their world and the world does not exist outside of the person. In phenomenological terms, they "co-constitute" one another. (p. 26-27)

Because I cannot step outside the world of which I am a part, I had to examine the assumptions, presuppositions, theories and feelings regarding the experience of writing that could influence my interactions with participants and the analysis and reporting of the data. To become more aware of these aspects of what Husserl termed the “natural attitude,” I participated in a bracketing interview (Appendix, p. ). During this twenty minute interview, members of the Applied Educational Psychology Phenomenological Research Team, under the supervision of Dr. Katherine Greenberg began with the question, “ What stands out for you about responses to student writing?” Research team members asked follow-up questions based on my responses to this initial question.

These questions and the subsequent analysis gave me the opportunity to uncover attitudes, theories, and feelings; some of which I was already aware and some that the interview helped me to recognize. Additionally, because the interview and analysis were conducted by the Applied Educational Psychology Phenomenological Research Team rather than an individual, the team members were able to point out aspects of the bracketing interview during the analysis itself and to challenge my assumptions regarding the phenomenon of response to academic writing.

The bracketing interview uncovered a number of assumptions that I held regarding response to student writing. Most notable was the strong influence that my prior training in the teaching of writing had on my attitudes toward the purpose of response. Throughout the interview, I reiterated my belief in “process over product,” in other words, viewing writing as an on-going process rather than a product produced by students. This understanding helped me to recognize a prejudice that I held regarding the “proper” way to respond to writing. I was giving priority to writing as a means of individual expression rather than academic writing as a means

of researching and reporting with adherence to institutional standards. This realization was surprising to me considering my chosen field of education where the latter is a much more common form of writing. I verbalized assumptions that promoting personal expression freed students to become more proficient writers. I explained that less directive instructor response gave students ownership or “author-ity” over their own writing using the words, “free themselves” ; “opens doors”; and “bringing out their voice rather than constricting it” to describe what I thought about this notion of individual freedom.

Additionally, I found that in many ways I still approached response as an English teacher as opposed to a teacher in the field of education. I also found that my prior experiences with instructor colleagues outside of English had caused me to form the assumption that some instructors would feel that “It’s not my job to teach someone to write.” I did not make that assumption about all potential participants, because of my prior relationship as a student in some of the instructors’ classes. Having received response to my own writing from some of the participants, I assumed that they would be more facilitative toward students who required additional scaffolding of their writing skills. I based this assumption on my experience and the experience of colleagues in the program, some of whom were international students.

My past experiences teaching and advocating for marginalized learners and students who struggled with writing both in higher education and in high school had led me to assume that some instructors would see writing strictly as a tool for summative evaluation as opposed to helping students construct understanding through writing. I became aware of my bias against a performance-based approach when I reviewed my use of metaphor, “Is their purpose to help students learn through writing or to empty the contents of someone’s head?”

Other themes that emerged from the bracketing interview revealed my attitude that the purpose of response was to communicate and build relationships with students. This attitude was influenced by my own experiences with students who had approached me to discuss my response to their papers and then continued to communicate and build rapport with me afterward. It was also influenced by my experiences as a student who had received responses from instructors that helped facilitate an instructor -student relationship or – in a few cases– damaged my relationship with that instructor.

My past experiences teaching students and as a student also fostered a belief that student participants would become emotional when discussing their experiences with response. I had formed this assumption after several interactions with students who became angry or cried when discussing responses from me or other instructors to their writing.

### **Delimitations and Limitations of the Study**

Because the instructor and student participants studied are from a higher education setting, the findings from this study may not be relevant to K-12 or ELL contexts due to the very different levels of fluency and facility with academic writing among these groups. The small sample size reflects the phenomenological focus on essences of the lived experience across participants rather than a representational sample.

### **Conclusion**

In the chapters that follow, I will review the literature that has informed the scholarly dialogue by following the changing and evolving focus on various aspects of response to student writing in chapter two. Chapter three will describe the method used to conduct this phenomenological study and the steps taken to maintain the quality of the data collected. In chapter four, I will present the findings and explain the essences that emerged as a result of the

analysis to capture the lived experience of the participants. Finally, chapter five will present a summary and conclusion from the study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

The aim of the present study is to describe the experiences of instructors and students as they give and receive responses to academic writing. Writing represents a material manifestation of the ways in which students construct understanding within academic contexts, and response to writing denotes the ways in which instructors perceive these attempts and respond. Academic writing is the major means by which students demonstrate their understanding to instructors (Graham, 2006) and written response to student writing is the predominant means of giving feedback to students on these ideas. Response to writing offers insight into teachers' and learners' theoretical frameworks, existing understandings, and cognitive processes. "The permanence of writing makes ideas readily available for review and evaluation; its explicitness encourages the establishment of connections between ideas; and its active nature may foster the exploration of unexamined assumptions" (Graham, 2006; p. 451). Moffett (1982) connects writing with Vygotsky's concept of inner speech and mediation, "...inner speech and meditation concern forms of thought, the composing of mind that constitutes the real art and worth of writing" (p. 231). Response practices also give us insight into the academic and disciplinary contexts in which writing and response occur. Greenhalgh (1994) asserts that a response to a draft goes beyond semantic communication to the interplay of "a social relationship between reader and writer, teacher and student" (p. 402).

In spite of the importance of academic writing and response to the understanding of cognitive processes and classroom contexts, the research that addresses response to academic writing is limited and contested. The reasons for this situation are multiple and linked to larger problems that exist with regard to research of academic writing and what counts as claims of

knowledge. The present review of literature will provide a brief history of academic writing and research into academic writing to provide a context for the study of response, a discussion of the problems that exist in the current research, and the new perspectives that are offered by a re-visioning of the purpose of response to academic writing.

First it is necessary to identify the scope of this literature review, including what research has been included and excluded from review. The methods used to obtain the research articles for this review will be discussed first.

### **Scope of the literature**

A thorough collection of relevant literature regarding response to writing presents a variety of challenges including traversing a number of discourse communities and scholarly journals operating, at times, in isolation from one another. The terms used to describe *response* and thus conduct subject and keyword searches using the term *response* are also problematic due to the very specialized meaning for the term *response* in this context. *Response* is a term used most frequently by those in the field of composition and rhetoric. Researchers in education are more likely to use the term *feedback*. Additionally, there are a variety of synonyms for the term *response*, as well as terms that involve instructor response, including *feedback*, *comments*, *commentary*, *writing instruction*, *writing assessment/evaluation*, and the *training* of writing.

In spite of its importance, relatively little has been written on the topic of response to student writing, especially studies that include the lived experience of both students and instructors. As a result, it was necessary to broaden the search to include studies investigating response practices of instructors alone, and studies that address the perspective of students alone. Additionally, studies that examine feedback alone are reviewed; though not all aspects of feedback research are included. For example; research on rubrics, automated feedback, or other

means of standardizing instructor feedback to student writing are not included in a significant way. The present study focuses on the lived experience of responding to student texts and does not address forms of feedback that are intended to be uniform in nature. Also limited is the amount of literature that addresses assessment, with the exception of those studies that address the ways in which instructors use response to explain a grade or to address a specific problem for revision, and research regarding instructors' perception of their roles in responding to student writing which may include that of an evaluator. Some research studies related to the revision of academic writing are used when the revision includes the application and/or consideration of instructor feedback. Research studies involving peer review and multiple draft workshops that do not include instructor response are also beyond the scope of this review. The majority of the studies included in this review are focused on academic writing in higher education contexts with a very limited number of studies that address writing within K-12 contexts. Only when the findings are general enough to have implications for academic writing in higher education are these studies reviewed. The review of research into L2 (second language writing) response is also limited because arguably the purpose of feedback and the roles that instructors assume when providing feedback to L2 students can be different in purpose and in context from academic writing performed by students for whom English is a primary language. Additionally, the studies for review are from countries for which English is the primary language. Most of the studies included in this review are from the United States, and Great Britain, with a small number of studies from Australia and Canada. It is important to note that academic writing in higher education is taught within the disciplines in Great Britain and Australia and not in separate English composition courses, as is the practice in the United States

Studies utilizing a wide variety of research methods have been included in this review. Some studies follow more traditional formats in the explanations of methods and procedures used in gathering data while others are less rigorous. This inconsistency is partly a product of the age of the articles as well as disciplinary norms regarding expectations of format and the detail with which research is reported. Conceptual articles have been included for their importance and the influence that they have had on practice and subsequent research.

### **Historical overview**

The philosophical tensions regarding the study of writing span more than 2300 years. These tensions regarding the purpose of writing have a strong influence on instructor response to student writing in the twenty-first century. From the beginning, according to Winterowd and Blum (1994), topics of interest in the study of writing have been influenced by the work of Plato and Aristotle whose philosophies represent the beginning of a schism in the research and teaching of writing that exists today. From Plato comes the insistence that the objects of art (i.e. ideas or forms) are first apprehended by the senses, and then exist in our minds as an ideal. Therefore writing – and thus the goal of responding to writing– is seen as helping the writer develop individual voice and expressivity of this personal ideal. From the Aristotelian point of view, art– and thus writing –reproduces or mirrors reality. From this perspective, the teaching of writing must focus on form, precision, and accuracy in reproducing reality with the written word. One of the most fundamental dilemmas in responding to writing in any discipline is deciding whether one must focus more on writing as the expression of ideas or writing as reporting information and following the rules of a community of discourse. The practice and study of response to writing has reflected this same dilemma, and over time, instructors and

scholars have shifted focus from helping students develop competence and mastery to developing students' individual voices and back again.

Though the philosophical study of writing has a long history, empirical research into writing has only existed for about one hundred years. Research that specifically addresses response to writing has been a focus for about thirty years.

### *Early Studies*

Writing research and research that specifically addresses response follows a trajectory very similar to that of research in education— from the prescriptive to the descriptive (Prior, 2006; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Writing research, like research in education, began with an emphasis on quantitative research methods in an effort to be associated with the natural sciences.

Early studies investigating instructor response to writing utilized a strong quantitative emphasis as a means of gaining legitimacy.

Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963) set the terms for the conduct of research in the domain of English back then, attempting to move the field of composition research into a new and unprecedented era of stature by positioning the experimental study— with variables reduced to frequencies that could be statistically compared to identify effective means of teaching—as the pinnacle of scientific inquiry in composition studies. (Hillocks, 1986; p. 390)

This pursuit of effective means of teaching writing led to an obsession with correctness (Santa, 2008). Research in response to writing focused on the diagnosis and eradication of error and on directing students toward an ideal of academic writing (Buxton, 1958; Baldwin, 1960; and Stiff, 1967). These studies ignored students' experiences, instead focusing on improvement in writing as determined by comparison to an ideal standard (Baldwin, 1960) or by a group of

riters (Stiff, 1967). The methods of research employed error counts, closed-ended questionnaires, and pre- and post-test essay evaluations, and instructional practices emphasized formal templates like the five paragraph theme. The language used to describe response to writing reflected a sense of clinical judgment. Some representative examples of these terms include “correction techniques” (Stiff, 1967); “theme correction,” (Dusel, 1955); and “evaluative comments” (Gee, 1972), and teacher “treatment” (Beach, 1979). However, in the mid-twentieth century the “winds of change” (Hairston, 1982) began to blow for those interested in writing research.

### ***The Cognitive Revolution***

Two major events precipitated this change, one was the Cognitive Revolution in education, and the other was a ground breaking conference on the teaching of writing at Dartmouth College in the summer of 1966 (Prior, 2006). These two events and other influences including Chomsky’s research and the work of Lev Vygotsky initiated a change in the view of writing as a product to writing as a cognitive and expressive process.

The cognitive revolution in writing response was interpreted in different ways by different disciplines. With few exceptions; researchers in education, educational psychology, K-12, and L2 regarded the cognitive revolution as offering the promise of instruction based on empirically supported techniques. For most scholars in composition, the cognitive revolution transformed the focus of response from the enforcement of arbitrary rules and maxims into writing as a meaning making process and means of personal expression and growth (Nystrand, 2006). In both cases, the cognitive revolution inspired not only a change in pedagogical practices of responding to student texts, but a reconceptualization of the nature of these practices.

### ***Empirical Approaches***

Education researchers sought to base instruction and response practices on empirical findings rather than on the rules and traditions of rhetoric. Cognitive research offered an approach to writing instruction that was based on valid and replicable results from studies that investigated thinking processes in action.

Echoing psychologists all the way back to John Dewey (1884) and William James (1890), the new writing researchers posited the individual writer's mind as the seminal organizing principle of writing; they sought to explicate the cognitive structure of writing processes that transformed thought and agency into text. (Nystrand, 2006; p. 12)

This re-visioning of the purpose of instructor response lead to changes in terms used to identify response to include the term "written feedback," (Perpignan, 2003) a term reflective of the information processing model which influenced cognitive theory. The prevailing purpose of much of the research was to determine the most effective types of feedback, what feedback encouraged writing and revision, and the purposes of feedback.

The investigation of cognitive processes necessitated that more researchers include qualitative research methods. While quantitative studies of student revisions in response to instructor feedback might measure length as an indicator of revision, the use of descriptive methods like text analysis allowed researchers to investigate the rhetorical structures of the changes made by students (Faigley and Witte, 1981).

The empirical approach to writing; inspired by the work of cognitive theorists, sought to understand the underlying cognitive structures involved in how writers *do write* rather than the previous emphasis on how students *should write* (Nystrand, 2006). Most notably, Hayes and Flower (1981) constructed a model of skilled writing that identified the cognitive processes

involved by using think aloud protocols with expert and novice writers. Later, Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987) model of writing proposed that writers compare a "mental text" of their writing with what they have actually written. Maintaining the clinical language of their formalist predecessors, Bereiter and Scardamalia described the process as the CDO model. Writers "compare" an ideal mental text to their actual text, "diagnose" the variations between the two, and finally, "operate" on their text to enact the revision (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987). Hayes, Flower, Schriver, Stratman and Hayes (1986) later revised their previous model to incorporate the diagnostic aspect described by Bereiter and Scardamalia. Both models assert that expert writers are more proficient at diagnosis than novice writers, and that this diagnostic skill is essential for successful revision. Later studies in the function of working memory in the writing process further expanded models of the writing process (Kellogg, 1996).

While these models were groundbreaking and provided the basis for understanding student writing in a new way, they offered only cursory attention to the role of response in the writing process. Discussions of factors outside of the writer's head— such as instructor response— were considered in terms of audience awareness and little more. The specific influence of instructor response was not mentioned in spite of the significant influence that instructor feedback can have over the writing process. However, these studies have yielded important information regarding the decisions that writers make about changing and correcting subsequent drafts of their writing. These researchers found that student writers do the most substantive revision when they address the problems in achieving rhetorical goals, such as persuasion or exposition, but that beginning writers are often unaware of what those goals are (Flower, Hayes, Carey, Schriver, and Stratman, 1986). In spite of the cursory role that instructor response played in cognitive models of writing, instructors and researchers in both education

and composition embraced these models and used them as the basis for new, cognitively based research which began to make significant changes in response practices.

Studies into response or feedback based on the cognitive processes involved in academic writing include studies that illuminate the characteristics of good academic feedback in general. For example, Hattie and Timperly (2007) found that within educational contexts, effective feedback provides information about improving at a task rather than just providing praise or criticism. Shute (2008) identified three benefits of formative feedback. First, it points to the learner the gap between the current and desired level of performance, motivating increased effort. Secondly, supportive feedback reduces cognitive load by scaffolding difficult tasks. In the case of writing for example, this support might come in the form of suggestions for variations in sentence syntax. And finally, formative feedback can aid in the correction of errors or misconceptions.

Ziv (1984) studied the type of comments that were most effective at improving the writing of college freshman. Using an analysis of taped recordings of students' reactions to her comments; she found that less experienced writers preferred more explicit cues directing them to strategies for correction. When given more implicit cues such as "rephrase this", inexperienced writers often deleted the sentence because they lacked sufficient knowledge to carry out the cue. She also found that teacher corrections were less helpful than explicit cues because while students made the corrections, they did not understand why the correction was needed.

A number of studies found that the most effective feedback informs the learner how to improve their writing rather than just providing praise or criticism. Dunsford (2006) counted and compared the revisions of 62 undergraduates based on the type and location of teacher comments. She found that more directive feedback from instructors increased the likelihood that

students would revise. Comments that identified problems and provided revisions strategies were most frequently associated with student revisions. Carifio, Jackson, and Dagostino (2001) compared the effects of specific types of comments on student revision. One group of undergraduate student writers was given feedback that offered diagnoses of flaws and prescriptive comments; while a control group was provided with a set of comments that just identified flaws. The study included a pretest, five essays, and a post test. They found significant improvement in revision skills among both groups of students, but that the quality of the experimental groups' essays showed more improvement.

In spite of studies that identified the characteristics of feedback that enabled students to identify and correct problems, studies that supported the broader contention that feedback improves the general quality of student writing proved more elusive. In a study of 51 social work students' essays, Crisp (2007) found that feedback from instructors improved students' scores in only 15 percent of the subsequent iterations of the essays. Two thirds of the essays showed no significant improvement in the problems identified for correction by the instructors, and the remaining 15 percent of the essays actually decreased in quality.

Part of the problem can be attributed to a lack of consensus regarding what constitutes quality in the assessment aspect of response to writing. While a review of literature regarding the standardized scoring of writing is beyond the scope of the present review, some confounding factors inherent in attempts to evaluate student writing bear mentioning. In a linguistic analysis of first year college student essays, Puma (1986) found that the quality of student writing decreased (in this case, became more like spoken language than formal writing) when the students' perception of intimacy with the audience increased. This study demonstrates that not

only does the student's understanding of the writing assignment play a factor in the quality of writing, but to whom the student directs the writing can also influence the nature of the writing.

Barritt, Stock, and Clark (1986) conducted an analysis of discussions between raters of college freshman essays in which the raters explained the reasons for their scores. The researchers found that rater expectations had as much to do with their perceptions of the quality of an essay as did the writing. Rater expectation figured prominently in a study by Rigsby (1987) who found that raters gave higher scores to students whom they understood to be upperclassmen. Yet far from being an impediment to understanding response or improving student writing, these studies pointed to a need for research that broadens the investigation of the ways in which students perceive and use response.

Using concepts from social cognitive theory, some studies investigated the relationship between affective aspects of writing: self-esteem, writing apprehension, and outcome expectancy. Panjares and Johnson (1994) studied undergraduate pre-service teachers over the course of one semester. They found that students' beliefs about their composition skills were predictors of writing performance. General self-confidence and writing apprehension were not predictive of performance on writing tasks. Wiltse (2002) examined journalism students' use of global and local feedback from instructors to revise first drafts of news stories. He examined self-efficacy, outcome expectancies, and writing apprehension for their relationship to students' use of instructor comments. The only significant finding in this correlational study was that students reporting anxious and avoidant behavior (writing apprehension) were less likely to use instructor comments than those with low apprehension toward writing. Self-efficacy and outcome expectancies had no significant correlation to use of instructor comments. These

contradictory studies speak to the situated nature of the writing experience and its influence on students' perceptions.

Supported by studies that indicated that more detailed and specific feedback led to fewer errors in writing, researchers have looked for ways to provide high quality feedback while understanding the time constraints and large class sizes that make it difficult for instructors to provide this type of feedback. Kellogg and Whiteford (2009) reviewed research that connects deliberate practice with the training of writing skills. They found that high quality practice requires detailed and specific corrective responses from instructors to scaffold students' writing efforts. They suggest automated feedback as one possible solution to the problem of growing class sizes and government mandates to increase opportunities for writing practice.

A number of studies that include academic writing in higher education suggest the use of technology to assist instructors in providing automated feedback to students. These studies review the use of automated feedback for revision with mixed results (Villanon, et. al 2008; Deane, et. al 2008). A report sponsored by Educational Testing Service (Deane, et. al 2008), a major creator and distributor of standardized tests in the United States, found that "the availability of automated scoring raises the possibility of scoring writing assessments quickly and providing very timely feedback as well as making periodic assessment more feasible and affordable." The problem with automated response to writing is that it ignores the contexts in which academic writing takes place.

While education researchers have explored the role that cognitive processes, specific types of instructor feedback and student expectancies and beliefs may have on their use of response and revision, contextual factors that may contribute to the understanding of response practices are missing from the scholarship. Some education researchers acknowledge the dearth

of models that include the broader influences of culture and society, suggesting that cognitive models of writing and response provide an incomplete picture (Graham, 2006).

### *Theoretical Approaches*

Like researchers who emphasized a more empirical approach, scholars in composition were also interested in the ways in which response could improve student writing. Writing as learning became a popular mantra of this movement, as captured by the title of Peter Elbow's 1994 article, "Writing for learning—Not just for demonstrating learning", and his proposal that response be an ongoing conversation between student and teacher (Elbow, 1994). The purpose of instructor response was a means of responding to students' developing ideas and facilitating reasoning processes through writing (Hillocks, 1986). In contrast to the more Aristotelian emphasis on the reproduction of reality based on standards for quality writing suggested by empirical research-based approaches, composition scholars were interested in facilitating Platonic personal expression as a means of improving student learning and writing.

Faigley and Witte (1981) found that when students focus only on process and do not feel a personal sense of purpose or social value to their own writing, process becomes an empty exercise of going through the motions of the composing process. Clearly more personally meaningful and expressive writing encouraged student investment and motivation to persist in revision.

Composition researchers began to focus on the type of response that encouraged deep student revision beyond the correction error and form. Unlike approaches in which a student receives directive feedback from the instructor; Hillocks's (1986) meta-analysis of writing research pointed to the advantages of an "environmental approach." The environmental approach allows the student to consider alternative perspectives on ideas and beliefs and ways of

knowing. This change in perspective is reflective of the social constructivist views of Lev Vygotsky.

With the focus on facilitative response came a change in the perceived role of the teacher from that of expert evaluator to that of reader/responder. This shift in the role of the instructor was influenced by reader response approaches to literary criticism and led to the common use of the term *response* rather than *feedback* or *commentary*.

The research of composition scholars Nancy Sommers (1981) as well as Lil Brannon and Cy Knoblauch (1982) suggested that one of the reasons that students found little use in the comments from instructors and implemented few of instructor comments was that those comments removed the student as author of their own paper and turned authority and authorship over to the instructor (Sommers, 1981; Brannon and Knoblauch, 1982).

After reviewing the responses of 40 teachers to a chosen sample of student writing, Brannon and Knoblauch (1982) concluded that when readers read the work of established writers, they mostly take for granted the “authority” of the author (well respected or well-known authors, particularly), and read with an effort to understand. The more authority that readers concede to the author, the more tolerant they are of particularly difficult or obscure writing. However, this relationship between reader and writer is altered in an educational setting, and this dynamic connection between the writer’s authority and the quality of a reader’s attention shifts with the instructor/reader now becoming the authority. According to Brannon and Knoblauch, “the reader assumes primary control of the choices that writers make, feeling perfectly free to ‘correct’ those choices any time an apprentice deviates from the teacher-reader’s conception of what the developing text ‘ought’ to look like or ‘ought’ to be doing” (p. 158). They argued that this loss of authority by the student over their own writing diminished motivation to write.

Other composition scholars also researched the ways in which instructor-readers construct the texts written by students. Like education researchers, Rigsby (1987) and Barritt, Stock, and Clark (1986); composition scholars found that expectations influenced perceptions of quality of student work. However influenced by post-modern literary theory, composition scholars were much more willing to take significant interpretive leaps. Using the lens of reader-response criticism, Murray (1989) questioned the ability of the reader to accurately discern a writer's intention when cultures and social backgrounds differ and thus values and norms for language use also differ. Murray concluded that instructors often encourage expression, but reward other more formal features of student writing. Probst (1989) applied the transactional theory of literary criticism to the reading of student writing. In transactional theory, the context, purpose and engagement of the reader constructs the meaning of a particular text. According to Probst, "... the student's paper ... is only a collection of ink spots on the page until the teacher comes along, and with his or her unique background and biases, transforms it into meaning" (p. 69). Warnock (1989) references literary critic Kenneth Burke as she asserts that, "Responses to student texts exist not simply on the page or in the air but in the context of people, purposes, and places" (p. 63). According to Warnock, "Responses are our ways of encompassing situations which, once encompassed, no longer exist as before" (p. 64).

Other studies assumed a more pragmatic approach while still investigating the ways in which the reader's expectations and perceptions influence the texts they read. Emig and Parker (1976) analyzed the expectations and experiences of a group of instructors at Rutgers University to explain why readers of the same papers can differ so dramatically in their responses to the same paper, finding that response differences could be linked to various instructors' disciplinary backgrounds. Zerger's (1997) study of 1300 faculty and teaching assistants outside of English,

found that faculty characterizations of what constituted “good” writing ran along disciplinary lines with those in the arts using words like “creative and eloquent” and those in the sciences using “analytical” and “theory-driven.”

These studies helped to establish that instructor expectations and perceptions play an important role in response and account for variations in judgment. Other composition researchers turned their attention to error. While education researchers concerned themselves with the ineffective cognitive strategies that produced error in student writing, composition researchers examined the construction of error and how it is perceived by the reader. Hairston (1981) asked participants from various professions other than teaching to read a group of sentences containing a variety of common errors and then rate them according to how much they were bothered by the errors. She found that women reported more irritation with error than did men. Respondents of both sexes reacted most strongly to glaring errors, or what Hairston calls “[social] status markers,” for example, using the verb constructions, “brung” and “has went.” She concluded that non-teachers were more conservative about errors in usage than those who regularly respond to student papers, and that what is most important to professionals, business professionals in particular, is clarity and economy.

Extending Hairston’s research, Beason (1982) examined the ways business people construct meaning in reaction to errors. His study included fourteen business people who were asked to rank errors in sample business documents. His findings revealed that the gravity of an error was easily mitigated or worsened by features of the text that surrounded the error such as word choice or syntax. He also found that the context of the communication also affected the participants’ perception of the error, for example whether the document is a formal letter or a sticky note. Most importantly, the error constructed in the mind of the reader an image of the

writer variously as “hasty” or “uninformed,” “poor communicator,” or “poorly educated.” Like Hairston and Beason, Kantz and Yates’s (1994) study of professors outside of English found that some errors are perceived as more egregious than others. They found broad consensus among these participants that a hierarchy of error exists. The worst errors were those that involved the spelling of ostensibly simple words or “words that everyone learns in first grade” (p. 44). These are homonymic words such as “to and too,” “their and there.” Among the least serious errors were those that involved commas. Kantz and Yates account for this perception by positing that comma placement conventions change, in that there is not easily teachable set of rules for comma placement and that this confusion and complexity causes people to decide that “they are just too much trouble to worry about” (p. 44).

This “social construction of error” as Chris Anson termed it (2000) is created in the mind of the reader. According to Santa (2008), the student writer is often viewed as the agent of the error, but Santa argues that the error is actually constructed in the mind of the reader/instructor, and the student as author of the error is actually shut out of the construction, since the writing does not register as erroneous to the writer. If it had, the writer would have, in most cases, corrected it. Central to this problem is discrepancy between the way writing and feedback are viewed by instructors, and the way writing and feedback are viewed by students.

Studies that address the ways in which students construct the meaning of instructor response reveal significant gaps in expectations and perceptions between instructor and student. Gambell (1991) studied elementary education pre-service teachers in an investigation of the students’ perceptions of written comments using an open-ended survey. His findings suggested that students found detailed comments helpful, but believed comments were inconsistent from one professor to another and that feedback was often not thorough enough.

Dohrer (1991) used drafts, interviews and think aloud protocols to study undergraduate students' views of instructor comments in a writing course. After reviewing the data, Dohrer found that he could not isolate students' reactions to single comments from the totality of comments on a paper or from the relationship between the student and instructor. "A comment that is sound in one context, because it encourages a student seriously to reconsider the text, may be ineffectual or even ignored in another situation because of its being overwhelmed by other comments" (p. 51).

According to Lea and Street (1998), while instructors may have fairly well defined ideas of what constitutes good writing, students are less aware of these standards. As in Dohrer's study, students reported that writing that was deemed acceptable in one course was often not deemed acceptable in another course. As a result, students approached writing assignments feeling "that their task was to unpack what kind of writing any particular assignment might require. . . . It was much more than using the correct terminology or just learning to do 'academic writing'. . . and more about adapting previous knowledge of writing practices, academic and other, to varied university settings" (Lea and Street, p. 162). As one of the participants in this study explained, "Everybody seems to want something different" (p. 162).

These studies increased composition scholars' interest in the situated nature of writing and response practices and the ways in which these practices influenced student writing. By the beginning of the new millennium, scholars would consider the contexts in which writing takes place, an integral aspect of the experience of response.

### ***The Post Process Era***

The process era studies that investigated the internal and external social and cultural landscapes of academic writing and response planted the seeds for the next phase of writing

research in the new millennium known as the post-process era. Teacher-researchers working with novice and marginalized student writers began to investigate academic writing as a sociocultural activity situated within social and cultural contexts. As a result, researchers developed an interest in the contexts of language use and the ways in which response to writing reproduces social and institutional power structures. According to Thomas Kent (1999), “Most post-process theorists hold three assumptions about the act of writing: (1) writing is public; (2) writing is interpretive; and (3) writing is situated . . . and therefore cannot be reduced to a generalizable process” (Kent 1999, p. 1). Influenced by critical theory and academic literacy studies, research in post-process response practices investigate response as an activity situated in everyday cultural, social and political practices.

Post-process studies in response support Kent’s (1999) conclusion that writing and response are acts of interpretation. “When we read, we interpret specific texts or utterances; when we write we interpret our readers, our situations, our and other people’s motivations. . .” (p. 2). Jeffery and Selting (1999) explored the discursive practices of instructors outside of the discipline of English. Using think aloud protocols, they asked seven content area faculty members to respond to samples of their students’ writing. They found that these instructors crafted identities for themselves and their students as they responded. The emerging identities were categorized by the researchers as “discipline specific guide,” intellectual mentor,” “assignment judge,” and “general editor.” The students’ identities were classified as “budding ‘-er’ or ‘-ist’,” “critical thinker,” “student,” and “author of text.” The results indicated that the faculty identity used most often was “assignment judge” and the most prominent student identity was “student.” The researchers also found that while faculty gave lengthy responses on tape for the researchers they wrote little or nothing on the students’ papers.

Just as instructors craft identities for students, students also interpret instructor comments in light of identities they construct for their instructors. Studies by two composition researchers (O'Neill & Fife, 1999 and Fife and O'Neill, 2001) call into question assumptions regarding the primacy of instructors' comments in students' construction of understanding regarding their writing. In interviews with students, O'Neill & Fife (1999) found students constantly interpreted teacher comments through their construction of teacher personalities and roles: "She's more like friend than a teacher" (p. 41). In a later study, Fife and O'Neill (2001) found that students' perceptions of instructor comments went beyond the comments on a particular paper and that a "multiplicity of factors contribute to students' perceptions of teachers' comments" (p. 192). They identify three key ways that students interpret response to their writing: (1.) Comments are read in the context of the previous teachers' comments; (2.) Comments are read through the student's perception of the teacher's ethos; and (3.) Comments are interpreted as just one facet of a broader framework for response that the teacher sets up in the class (p. 194). They suggest that instructors learn the ways that students see response to better understand the context of the "response situation" (p.190).

Students' constructions of instructor-responders are not the only influence on students' perceptions of response. Other studies have investigated how students' constructions of themselves as writers influence their perception of instructor comments. Young (2000) found that non-traditional university students with self-reported low self-esteem perceived even positive written comments from instructors as negative in tone. On the other hand, students who reported high levels of self-esteem interpreted the majority of comments as positive, even those that pointed out problems with their writing. Ivanic's (1998) study of non-traditional female university students found through participant interviews that students' decisions regarding

whether to accommodate or resist instructor response to their writing was influenced not only by the students' feelings about themselves as students, but also by their feelings about the value of their own personal histories, and their sense of familiarity with the instructor.

Not only do post-process researchers establish that the act of reading and writing are interpretive; post-process theory assumes that writing is situated. Previously, process theory was based on the assumption that to communicate effectively, writers need a cohesive set of beliefs about what other language users will understand, accept, or react to in our communication with them (Bloom, 2003). This aspect of cognitive process theory gave rise to universal strategies and techniques of effective writing. Post-process theory contends that no two people ever hold precisely the same set of beliefs about the understanding of other language users. We interpret the utterances of others in ways that are always situated in our own shifting beliefs, hopes, desires, and fears about the world. According to Bloom (2003), “. . . our acts of writing are always dependent on a situated improvisatory hermeneutic dance... that can never be reduced to a predictable or generalizable process.”

Evans (2003) used interviews and text analysis of instructor responses to investigate communication models that two instructor/scholars in higher education used as they wrote and spoke to and about students. Both instructors participating in the study subscribed to the post-process view that context influences understanding and that no two people will interpret an utterance in the same way. However, in practice, these instructors shifted back and forth between a post-process model of understanding and a transmission /deficit model of understanding. The transmission model of communication assumes “that stable, fixed meanings can be neatly transmitted from person to person” (Evans, 2003; p. 393), and the deficit model places the fault for lack of understanding on the receiver. Evans explains that this model is

prevalent during interactions in which there is an unequal distribution of power, she explains that in the deficit model, "... there is one 'obvious' interpretation—and those in power get to say what it is" (p. 419). Evans concludes that in spite of their training and their epistemological beliefs regarding the shifting nature of language interpretation, instructors can unwittingly slip back and forth between models of communication. She found that this phenomenon was most likely to occur when students failed to meet expectations while the instructor perceived the assignment to be fairly easy, and when the instructor perceives the student as less competent than others.

Evans's (2003) work raises important questions regarding instructor response and epistemological issues of knowledge construction in academia. The ways in which scholars and researchers, many of whom are also evaluators of academic writing, approach response offers a window into their ontological and epistemological points of reference. As Graue (2006) explains, "How scholars think about writing shapes how they approach the writing task, what writing means, and the standards used to judge the adequacy of examples of written communication" (p. 515). It is important to remember that instructors in higher education are not only evaluators of writing, but at various times, they are themselves writers whose work is evaluated by others. This fact influences their views of response to student writing. It also influences their views of the quality of research of other scholars resulting in epistemological tensions.

### ***Current Tensions***

The work of Brannon and Knoblauch (1982) and Sommers (1981) had enormous influence over response practices that linger today. But like the work of many composition scholars, Brannon and Knoblauch's work was more theoretical than empirical. In the last

decade, their work has been criticized as lacking rigor and transparency (Ferris, 2003). The methodological criticism is that even though Sommers and Brannon and Knoblauch collected an impressive amount of data, their methods were reported in very imprecise terms, and the study provided only statements of their major findings, conclusions and implications without any discussion of “models of analysis or quantitative presentations of the data” (p. 7). According to Ferris (2003), “We are left to wonder uncomfortably whether the sweeping statements that have been so influential were really based on reality or on the authors’ subjective impressions (perhaps colored by pre-existing biases) about their data.” (Ferris, 2003, p. 7). Ferris also offers a philosophical criticism that Brannon and Knoblauch and Sommers are operating from the assumption that writers are motivated by their desire to express themselves. Ferris describes this as an over idealized description of students’ motivation, particularly those who are forced to take a writing class and who may only be motivated by a desire to get a good grade.

Other post-process research, like that of Ivanic (1998) and Young (2000), has been criticized because of small sample sizes leading to a lack of generalizability (Mutch, 2003) or because they are more theoretical than empirical. However, these criticisms are small in number compared to the much more frequent circumstance of ignoring these studies outright. Reference works like *The Handbook of Writing Research* and *The Handbook of Educational Psychology* cite Nancy Sommers minimally and Brannon and Knoblauch not at all.

While reviewers may be justified in their criticism related to these studies lack of rigor, they miss what is perhaps most important about these articles and the reason that they were so influential. They were able to articulate what more narrowly focused, albeit more empirical articles were unable to address. They spoke to a burgeoning need fueled by cognitive and postmodern theories that researchers act to increase awareness of instructors’ discursive

practices and the ways in which instructors' own experiences influence the commentary given to students' papers. Their seminal work gave rise to the current recognition that writing and response are too complex to be explained by one unified theory, even one as influential as process theory.

In the last ten years, researchers investigating response to student writing have been driven by a desire to maintain empirical rigor while offering rich and detailed description of the phenomenon of response. In Chapter 3, a detailed discussion of the research method of the present study and its theoretical framework will be outlined along with efforts to insure data quality and to protect the interests of participants who contributed to this study.

### Chapter 3 Method

This study used the existential phenomenological method of research to investigate the lived experience of instructors responding to student writing and of students who receive responses to their academic writing. The activity of responding to student writing is, for the most part, a solitary activity. Likewise, students often receive response to their academic writing by reading those comments alone. Existential phenomenology as a method of research allows the investigator to gain a deeper understanding of the essence within these lived experiences that usually occur outside of the view of others.

Phenomenology takes the position that descriptions are always descriptions *of something*, and that experience always refers to something beyond itself that cannot be characterized independently of this relationship. Consequently, the world of objects always concerns such experiences (Hammond, Howarth, and Keat, 1991).

According to Polkinghorne (1989), phenomenological research produces a deeper understanding of an individual's experience that can lead to several positive consequences including increasing sensitivity toward those involved in particular experiences, expanding upon understanding derived from quantitative methods, and amending social action and public policy to make it more responsive to human needs. Davis and Sumara (2005) refer to the work of Merleau-Ponty when they point out that phenomenology recognizes that human beings are both biological and cultural and that ignoring or downplaying either view seriously restricts the discussion of learning and how it happens.

## The Evolution of Ideas in Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl is recognized by most scholars as the founder of phenomenology. Husserl contends that because human beings are just as much a part of this world as other objects about which knowledge is gained, we too are objects of that knowledge. Even though Husserl criticizes Descartes for his assumption of philosophical realism, in later work, Husserl identifies this assumption as a part of the natural attitude or the attitude of everyday life (Hammond, Howarth, and Keat, 1991). Our everyday experiences— for example, that a change in our vantage point might give us a better view of the same object— lead us to believe that the world exists independently of our experience of it. Husserl believed that if Descartes had consistently applied his own method of self-reflective doubt and followed it to its logical conclusion; he would have arrived at the idea of *epoche* or bracketing. In Husserl's view, a philosopher must suspend this natural assumption (aka bracketing or *epoche*). However, this act does not involve a denial of the existence of the real world; instead, it requires that one put this belief in abeyance. Valle, King, and Halling (1989) describe this suspension of the natural attitude in the following way:

This process of bracketing and rebracketing is the manner in which one moves from the “natural attitude” toward the “transcendental attitude.” This process of adopting the transcendental attitude is called the *reduction*, as one quite literally reduces the world as it is considered in the natural attitude to a world of pure phenomena or, more poetically, to a purely phenomenal realm. (p. 11)

Because bracketing and rebracketing is a never-ending process, a complete reduction is impossible. Yet, Husserl did believe in the possibility of *eidetic* or essence reduction which involves the discovery of essences (Hammond, Howarth, and Keat, 1991). For Husserl, it is the goal of phenomenology to discover these essences or structures of experience.

However, it would be a misrepresentation of phenomenology to describe it as a unified philosophy, and it is this idea of transcending the world through bracketing to discover essences that forms the point of departure for another type of phenomenology. Existential phenomenology rejects the concept of a transcendental ego whose structures can be investigated by this level of eidetic reduction.

### **Existential Phenomenology as Philosophy and Method**

Like transcendental phenomenology, existential phenomenology gives ontological priority to the lived world over the scientific world. Heidegger, a former disciple of Husserl, and later, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, took phenomenology in a new direction, namely back to human beings living in the everyday world. According to Merleau-Ponty previous philosophies and psychologies using scientific methods mis-described the world based on “scientific prejudice” and the error of objective thought (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Heidegger rejected the view that the existence of the world should be bracketed or reduced to produce pure descriptions that transcend the everyday. Rather, existential phenomenology sought to characterize the concrete experience of “man-in-the-world” (Hammond, Howarth, and Keat, 1991). Existentialists emphasize the concept of intentionality (an idea shared with transcendental phenomenology) but extend Husserl’s notion of “pointing beyond” the self to a more radical interdependence between subject and world (Hammond, Howarth, and Keat, 1991).

According to Roche (1973), for the existentialists, this represented a significant change in focus for phenomenology:

Consciousness was no more to be thought of as some Godhead, outside the world, painting the things in the world with the messiness of Platonic essences. Now

consciousness had an organic embodiment and a social situation relative to other such entities in the writings of Sartre and the other post-Husserlians. Consciousness *is* personal existence, not impersonal essence, as Husserl asserts. (p. 19)

However, just as phenomenology is not just one thing, neither is existential phenomenology. Most notably, within existential phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty sought to reconcile some of the more radical socialist elements of Heidegger and Sartre with the more idealist elements of Husserl.

“He [Merleau-Ponty] saw the ontological existentialist use to which Sartre and Heidegger put phenomenological description and experience, and he saw the intimation of his development in Husserl’s later writings. He seemed to see his own task in philosophy as that of re-establishing the evolutionary rather than revolutionary nature of this development. Thus the flight from the world to essence required by the *epoché* had to be made compatible with description of consciousness engaged in the world required by existentialism .” (pp. 26 -27)

Merleau-Ponty sought to reveal this compatibility by attempting to demonstrate that some usefulness remains in the consideration of essence, not in the sense of Absolute Truth, but that essence is useful when understood as merely another way of stating some social reality in order to compare it with approximations of some other social reality.

It may be this less radical, even commonsensical approach to phenomenology that explains the appeal of Merleau-Ponty’s brand of phenomenology to many scholars both as philosophy and method. In any case, phenomenology as a philosophy provides theoretical foundations for a number of different qualitative research methods, particularly phenomenology’s focus on experience and consciousness (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998). For

example in the 1960's, ethnomethodologists in sociology turned to phenomenology to inform their methods as an alternative to the structural-functionalism that had dominated the field (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). Phenomenology as a method of research takes a number of different forms including experimental, hermeneutic, and social among others (Creswell, 1998). Likewise numerous fields; including nursing, communication, political science, psychology and education use phenomenological research methods. Responding to student writing and receiving that response are private acts that transpire between instructors and students and come to their full realization in the meaning that is intended and subsequently made by the participants in this act; therefore, an existential phenomenological approach to this inquiry is the most ideal method.

### **Participants**

According to Thomas and Pollio (2002), participants in a phenomenological study must meet two principal criteria. The first requirement for eligibility is that the participant has experienced the phenomenon in question; in this case, responding to or having received responses to academic writing. Secondly, the participant must be willing to talk to the interviewer about the experience. Participants in the present study met the above criteria for this study, and as a result the sampling method was purposeful.

Sample size in a phenomenological study, as with other qualitative research studies, is often a small number because generalization to a larger population is not a goal, but rather, the focus is on in-depth unique description which is facilitated by a small number of participants. The range of sample sizes in a phenomenological study usually varies between six to twelve participants (Thomas and Pollio, 2002).

### **Instructor Participants**

The participants were seven instructors in higher education with expertise in teaching and learning at a research university in the southeastern United States. The participants included five women and two men ranging in age between 28 and 60. Three of the participants were graduate teaching assistants with less than two years of higher education teaching experience. One participant was an assistant professor with six years of teaching experience in higher education, and three were full professors each with more than ten years of university teaching experience. All of the instructors taught both graduate and undergraduate students, with the graduate assistants teaching primarily undergraduates and the professors teaching primarily graduates. Instructors were selected based upon their practice of assigning academic papers and of providing substantive feedback on students' papers (as opposed to providing only grades). The instructors were invited by the researcher to participate in the study during an in-person meeting with each individual instructor. These participants met the criteria for participation because they all had assigned academic papers to their students and had engaged in responding to student writing as a means of providing feedback on those papers. According to the phenomenological method, this made them authorities on their own experience (Thomas and Pollio, 2002). All of the instructor participants assigned traditional academic papers to students, however the writing assignments given and commented upon by the teaching assistants were developed under the supervision of a coordinating professor.

### **Student Participants**

The six student participants consisted of two men and four women ranging in age between 23 and 55. Five of the students were upper division undergraduates in the college of education, and one was a first year Ph.D. graduate student in arts and sciences (psychology). The

education majors were pursuing teaching licensure in elementary education, school library/media, secondary social studies, and two students were pursuing special education licensure for mild/moderate disabilities. The participants were asked to volunteer through flyers and announcements made during their education core classes. The psychology student learned of the study through an education student who shared the flyer. These participants were selected because of their experiences of having written and submitted academic papers and their roles as recipients of response to their written work. Just as with the instructors, the students were authorities on their own experiences (Thomas and Pollio, 2002).

### **Data Collection**

Data for this study were obtained by means of face-to-face, open-ended interviews. The goal of the phenomenological interview was to learn about the phenomena in question; in this case, creating and receiving responses to writing. Following procedures suggested by Pollio and Thomas (2002), the instructors' interviews began with the question, "What stands out for you when you respond to student writing?" and the students' interviews began with the question, "What stands out for you about instructors' responses to your writing?" Subsequent questions were not specified in advance.

Within the phenomenological process, I posed additional questions only to clarify, validate, or summarize such as "Can you say more about that?", "What was that like?", and "Can you give an example?" The participant rather than I determined the content and direction of the interviews. The interviews were audiotaped so that the participants' exact words would be used during data analysis. I transcribed the interviews verbatim into written form. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and any other individually identifiable information (for example, the names of students, instructors, or places) was removed from the data.

## **Bracketing**

For the researcher, bracketing involves gaining awareness of and putting in abeyance any preconceived assumptions regarding the phenomenon of interest. In existential phenomenology this does not involve a total setting aside or suspension of assumptions, rather it is a recognition of increased awareness of the interdependence between subject and world (Hammond, Howarth, and Keat, 1991), or in this case, interviewer and participant. During the bracketing interview, I became a participant and was interviewed by other members of the phenomenological research team regarding my own experiences responding to writing and receiving responses to my writing. Results from the bracketing interview can be found in the reflexivity statement in Chapter 1.

## **Data Analysis**

Phenomenological analysis attempts to describe the structure of human experience as it is recounted by the participants. Even though participant and researcher may not have shared common cultures, histories, or backgrounds; participants are able to communicate and the researcher is able to understand those experiences because of a “common structure of consciousness” even if a common apprehension of the world is not shared (Curtis and May, 1978).

The analysis was conducted by members of the Applied Educational Psychology Phenomenological Research Team, under the supervision of Dr. Katherine Greenberg and by the University of Tennessee Applied Phenomenology Studies Colloquy facilitated by Dr. Sandra Thomas and Dr. Howard Pollio. The size of each research group varied depending on the number of members in attendance on a given day with the average size of the group ranging between four to eight members. Each individual transcript of the audio-taped interviews was copied and

distributed, one interview per session, to each research team member in attendance who initialed or wrote their name on the copy. Transcripts were read aloud by members of the team other than the primary researcher to allow the researcher to devote full attention to listening to the interview and to the analysis and discussion. After short intervals of reading, the team members paused to identify and discuss phrases or passages of the text that stood out for them as a meaningful aspect of the participant's experience. These units of meaning consisted of various lengths of text that a team member or members felt enlarged their understanding of the experience.

These meaningful phrases and passages were noted by each member on their copy of the transcript, and by the primary researcher who also took notes regarding the team's discussion of meaning. Transcripts were collected by the primary researcher at the end of each group meeting. After meeting, the primary researcher individually reviewed each transcript copy again along with the notes from the discussion. As nomothetic themes arose, the primary researcher compiled groups of themes supported by the words of the participants. Thomas and Pollio (2002) describe themes as "patterns of description that repetitively recur as important aspects of a participant's description of his/her experience" (p. 37). Theme names consisted of specific participant quotations that captured the essence of the theme. The researcher continued to look across all the interviews until patterns and relationships emerged to form a thematic structure that captured the phenomenon of response to writing. These themes and structures were then analyzed again by the research group to further refine or expand these themes and to create a final structure of the experience.

## **Data Quality**

To insure the rigor of data analysis in a phenomenological study, the qualities of reliability, validity, and generalizability are viewed in terms of consistency, plausibility, and insights derived from the proposed structure of the lived experience.

## **Reliability**

The pursuit of reliability in the traditional sense of the replication of results is a goal of studies that seek objectivity in research design. Alternatively, existential phenomenology embraces the subjectivity of an individual's experience, including the subject's active engagement in the world and his/her capacity to impose meanings. To achieve reliability, findings must be presented in such a way that the reader understands the researcher's point of view (Wertz, 1983). In other words, others must be able to see and understand the thematic structure, including enduring figural themes and their ground, whether or not they agree with those themes.

In the present study, reliability was achieved through individual and research team analysis of recurring themes to the point of redundancy. Additionally, these themes were presented to research group members who also had experiences both responding to academic writing and receiving responses to their writing. The themes that emerged from the participants' points of view also resonated with research group members' own experiences of the phenomenon.

## **Validity**

Validity in phenomenological research is approached from the methodological standpoint as well as the experiential standpoint (Pollio, et al 1997). Methodologically, validity is achieved

with rigorous and appropriate research methods. Experientially, the results should be found to be “plausible and illuminating” (Thomas and Pollio, 2002 p. 41). The methodological aspects of validity should act in concert with the experiential aspects. According to Pollio (1997), “The more rigorous and appropriate the methodology, the more plausible and illuminating the results are likely to be” (Pollio et al., 1997; p. 55; as cited in Thomas and Pollio, 2002, p. 44).

As mentioned above, transcripts were analyzed by one of two research groups whose members were trained in phenomenological analysis, The University of Tennessee Applied Phenomenological Studies Colloquy and the Applied Educational Psychology Phenomenological Research Team. The Applied Educational Psychology group consisted of members whose background in education provided the opportunity for deep analysis of educational as well as experiential aspects of the transcripts. The Colloquy group’s membership is interdisciplinary, providing the researcher with points of view that cross disciplinary boundaries and allow for fresh and sometimes different insights into the experience of participants. In both groups, the discussion included challenges to and/or consensus of interpretations by group members.

### **Generalizability**

As mentioned earlier, generalizability to larger populations is not the goal of a phenomenological study. The goal of the present study was not to describe characteristics of the students and instructors that could be generalized to other students and instructors, but rather to describe the structure of the experience of giving and receiving response to academic writing. By looking closely at the structure of the participants’ experience, this study hopes to provide insights that illuminate the experience.

## **Protection of Participants**

That the researcher protect human participants from harm is a requirement of institutions of higher education and more importantly, a moral and ethical imperative. In the present study the principal researcher took steps to protect participant confidentiality and minimize any potential psychological harm.

To maintain security of the data collected, recordings and transcripts were stored in a locked file in the office of the principal investigator and recordings were stored in a password protected file on a computer belonging to the principal investigator. These files and the computer were solely accessible to the principal researcher. Recordings were deleted at the conclusion of the study.

Consent was obtained by the participant's signature on two duplicate forms, one kept by the participant, and the other retained by the researcher in a locked file. The consent form contained a description of the research study, name, address and phone number of the investigator. Interviews were conducted in private office or conference room, approved by the participant that afforded privacy, safety, and confidentiality.

The potential risks of this study were minimal, and no participants reported experiencing distress of any kind. After the interview had concluded, a number of participants expressed having enjoyed the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

## **Summary**

Phenomenological research allows the researcher to illuminate the common essence of the experience of responding to and receiving responses to academic writing. It makes available the experience of response to writing, a largely private experience. Understanding the structure

of the experience from an instructor's point of view and from a student's point of view has implications for improving sensitivity to this very common and personal academic activity.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

This study's purpose was to explore the lived experiences of instructors who respond to academic writing and of students who receive responses to their academic writing. Using existential phenomenology as a method of research, seven instructors and six students were interviewed. As described in Chapter 3, these interviews were recorded and transcribed and then read aloud and analyzed word for word, giving priority to the words of the participants as they described their experiences.

The themes that emerged and that are reported below were specific expressions used by the participants to describe their experiences. These words and phrases represent global themes experienced across participants. Though some words were used again and again by participants in describing their experience, the actual number of times words were repeated is not of particular importance in a phenomenological study. Rather, it is the meaning of those words within the context of the experience and that meaning's ability to represent the experience to reader (Thomas and Pollio, 2002).

To understand the thematic structure of an experience, it is important that the researcher focus on what stood out for participants regarding their experiences with response. Thomas and Pollio (2002) describe the emphasis with the maxim: "...What I am aware of reveals what is meaningful to me" (p. 14). This relationship between that which stands out and that which is in the background, creates the basis for the thematic structure of the lived experience of response. Together, figure and ground form the Gestalt of the experience for instructors and students.

Two ground themes emerged from the phenomenological analysis of the participants' experiences. One ground theme describes the lived experience of the instructors:

***Providing feedback is a responsibility that I take feedback seriously .***

And one ground theme captured the students' experiences:

- ***You discard the things that don't work and hold on to the things that do work.***

The instructors and students who participated in this study were not selected for their relationships to one another (in other words, student participants may or may not have taken courses and written papers for the instructor participants); however, as the thematic structure began to emerge, it became clear that the experience of the students and the experience of the instructors interrelated with some common figural themes. The ground themes and figural themes are represented in Figure 1.

<b>Instructor Ground: <i>Providing feedback is a responsibility that I take feedback seriously.</i></b>		
Instructor Figural theme : <i>I want to join in a dialogue with the student.</i>		
Instructor Figural theme : <i>I get caught up in the papers.</i>		
Interrelated Figural Themes	<i>I remember feedback from the past.</i>	Interrelated Figural Themes
	<i>I don't think they read what I wrote!</i>	
Student Figural theme : <i>It's nice to have another opportunity to do the best that you can.</i>		
Student Figural theme : <i>I know what it must be like to be an instructor.</i>		
<b>Student Ground: <i>You discard the things that don't work and hold on to the things that do work.</i></b>		

**Figure 1. The Thematic Structure of the Experience**

## Instructor themes

The experience of instructor participants was grounded by the theme of responsibility:

***Ground theme: Providing feedback is a responsibility that I take feedback seriously.***

Each of the participants approached the task of responding to writing with a sense of responsibility toward the students to facilitate their learning and growth in some way. All of the figural themes related to their experience of response stand against this background. This theme of responsibility related to various aspects of student writing including:

- *to help students to learn how to write better—Dr. Kaden*
- *to get them into the literature—Dr. Perry*
- *to write it and talk it and be open to feedback ... and critical response and then be comfortable with that—Dr. Phillips*

Against this ground of responsibility stand four figural themes of the instructors' experience.

Figural Theme 1: *I want to join in a dialogue with the student.*

Most of the instructor participants expressed the intention to establish a dialogue or conversation with students through response to their writing. They approached student writing as one side of a conversation or discussion; and, at times, an extension of classroom discussion. From this point of view, they viewed their response to writing as a reply to the conversation.

- *...Writing is probably where ... a big part of the learning takes place.... Because I think that process is part of the dialogue of being a researcher or an academic or wherever you are in terms of your learning process. It moves it from oral conversations that you are having in class to written conversations. And so writing and responding I think kind of model, for me, the process that then continues when you start to publish your work*

*because you will write something and reviewers will respond. And then you'll publish something and readers will respond. And so it just kind of goes on and on from there.*

—Dr. Phillips

- *I want to use a dialogue approach to help a person learn the hidden rules. What is it that happens when somebody is reading your paper? I think it is difficult to get on the other side and see from the reader's perspective about something you've written. So it's really helpful if someone will think out loud about what they are learning or not learning or are surprised at ... which is much more helpful than, ...” reword this sentence.”—Dr. Kaden*
- *When I write comments, I carry on a running dialogue with someone. So if you see lots of purple ink all over your paper, it doesn't necessarily mean that I'm being critical of it. It's not “Oh he tore my paper apart.” It's more like I'm trying to engage as best I can writing comments.—Dr. Perry*

Another aspect of the instructors' experience of response were the feelings, both positive and negative, that students' writing evoked. These feelings are represented by figural theme 2.

Figural Theme 2: *I get caught up in the papers.*

- *When somebody writes a really interesting paper ... I'll look up, and it may be two and a half hours and I've just finished the paper. ... but it can be a very, very pleasant two and a half hours. Because I often feel very pleasant when I'm doing that. That's part of this enjoyment that I now have. —Dr. Kaden*
- *[What stands out is] the great pleasure that it is to read a well-written paper. You know, it's just wonderful... I'm reading someone's proposal for a research topic, and it's a fabulous paper. It's just a wonderful flow of ideas, there are no grammatical errors, you know, it just feels good to read it. —Dr. Sinclair*

- *I have to tell you, I get excited when students get published. That's one of my favorite things... when someone comes back and says "This is a paper I wrote for you in a class, and I turned it into an article. I sent it off and here it is." Now, that's really gratifying. Not because I did it; they did the work. But hopefully I was able to give some encouragement. —Dr. Perry*
- *I sometimes get overwhelmed by the stack of papers and even now that can be intimidating, even more than it used to be. —Dr. Perry*
- *I try to introduce some things very subtly and say, "Think about this as well," and not try to just say, "These are all the problems I have with this method," because I do have problems with it just as a [former high school] teacher.—Leslie*
- *I might write in large letters with an exclamation point, and I'll tell the person when we're meeting, ... "Well you know, I was kinda yelling at you there a little bit." —Dr. Perry*
- *I was like "Ok people ..." And so not only did I give very critical and negative feedback on their papers, I posted this announcement about how basically everything they had submitted sucked. Which was probably not the best strategy. – Dr. Phillips*

In addition to these two figural themes, two more themes emerged from the instructor participant descriptions. Figural Themes 3 and 4 are interconnected to with student participants' experience. Therefore, these two themes will be discussed after the discussion of the students' experience which follows.

### **Student themes**

As the student participants described their experiences with response, they expressed a desire to communicate their thoughts and ideas clearly and to meet instructor expectations.

However their interviews also resonate with a surprising ring of independence and resistance to some aspects of instructor response. They communicate a need for useful and meaningful response while affirming that they will determine what aspects of the response will be used. This contingency is illustrated by the ground theme:

Ground theme: ***You discard the things that don't work, and hold on to the things that do work***

The first part of the ground theme reflects the students' determination to maintain the penultimate control over their writing even if it results in negative feedback or a lower grade from their instructors. The control over their writing is ultimately control over their own thoughts and writing process.

Ground: ***You discard the things that don't work, and hold on to the things that do work.***

- *The feedback was "You had better understand it the way I do. And if you don't, it isn't necessarily right." And the rebel in me decided I wasn't going to, because I had my own idea of what was going on there. So, evidently he didn't agree, and that's where I got my B – Zach*
- *She probably provided me with more things than I could even incorporate into my paper without doubling or tripling its length. So I'll probably just pick and choose from the things that are most important. – Kevin*
- *"...Obviously I didn't write it quite the perfect way because I don't think the teacher understood what I was trying to get at with the lesson ... but I knew that it would work because I had used it before. And so they are telling me, "But this won't work because of this..." And I'm like, Hmm, well, yeah it will because I've done it. But I didn't say that to the teacher because that would be completely disrespectful, but that's what was going on in my mind. –Melissa*

- *He just said, " Move this paragraph here, and say this here," and it wasn't very helpful...[I thought] I can do what I want, and I'm going to be okay because this is all just some formality. – Meg*
- *But if it's just a simple mistake, that's not something that's going to help me grow.– Ingrid*
- *If my grade is really high, then I will skim over the comments; and I don't really pay them a whole lot of attention.– Tina*

The students' also expressed a strong need for instructor response to help them write and to help them learn. This aspect of the ground is exemplified by the second half of the ground theme:

- ***You discard the things that don't work, and hold on to the things that do work.***

Those things that were determined to work ranged from guiding questions to negative feedback to new ways of thinking about what they had written.

- *... I'm trying to say something, and it's not coming out exactly the way I wanted. But if you come and ask me some of the right kind of questions, then it [my writing] usually makes a little more sense.– Melissa*
- *Sometimes I'm so involved in my own writing that I can't see the forest for the trees. And so it's helpful, and I really appreciate it when there's a little bit more feedback than just a grade. – Ingrid*
- *Show me where the holes are, show me where the shallow parts are . And say, 'This is where you maybe need to put a little more thought into it or think about some real world applications, real classroom applications.' – Kevin*

- *I'd rather hear, 'You could have built this idea further' or 'This doesn't make as much sense as I thought it was going to' or 'Nice try, I see where you were going but maybe if you tried something else.' 'Cause I expect that the teacher knows more than I do. And I want that feedback to learn more. 'Cause I have put everything I know into this. Everything I know about a topic, everything I know about style. Everything I know. But I expect the teacher knows more than I do.—Ingrid*
- *It wasn't that I did everything correct. He was giving me alternatives, he was like, 'This would be more correct if you go like this... '—Meg*
- *It's just refreshing to get other peoples' attitudes and how they're perceiving what you're writing. Because they're the audience. You are producing this but you don't know how it's being received, and I think it's just so cool to know how other people are understanding it. —Zach*
- *Well, that's what they wanted. Well okay, I see that.— Tina*

Four figural themes came forth from the ground of *things that work* and *things that don't work*. Themes 1 and 2 are themes which were specific to the students' experience of response. Themes 3 and 4 are interconnected to the instructors' experience.

The first figural theme for the students captures the participants' experience of revision. Only one of the participants verbalized resistance to the idea of revision or rewriting work, and this was related to feeling she had inadequate time to revise. The remaining participants viewed revision as an opportunity to improve. This sentiment is represented by the following passage:

Figural Theme 1: *It's nice to have another opportunity to do the best that you can.*

The participants described their experiences with revision not only in terms of improving a grade, but also as a means of learning more and personal or professional growth.

- *She did let me re-do it ... Which is really good... after I had written it, then she started explaining more.—Melissa*
- *If I don't have the understanding from it, and I have a chance to fix it; it shows the professor that I am trying to take what they are saying, and I am trying to make it better.—Melissa*
- *To ... see the feedback, and change your paper, and keep trying to change things until you've met the criteria. It's very educational.—Zach*
- *When I looked at the comments, I was like 'Oh, yeah.' But I saw it on Sunday, and the deadline for submitting the revision was like Tuesday, and I just didn't have time. There was other stuff going on, and it was just like "Well, that's not gonna happen." [laughs]. So, anyway it was my fault for not looking at it until Sunday. —Tina*
- *And the things that the teacher sees that I can do to improve will kind of help boost me up to bridging that gap and help me learn. If a student comes to class, and you just say 'Great, you did everything right. You know everything.' Then okay, thanks. That doesn't do a whole lot, really.—Ingrid*

In an effort to understand instructors' response— or lack of response— to their writing, the students constructed narratives describing the potential motivations, attitudes, and working life of their instructors. Most prominent among these constructions of instructor identity were speculations regarding the amount of time that instructors devoted to reading and responding to students' papers. These, sometimes very detailed, assumptions correspond to the next figural theme.

Figural Theme 2: *I know what it must be like to be an instructor.*

- *I can certainly see how a teacher would say, 'I've got 30 papers to grade' or '25 papers to grade, and I really don't have 30 hours,' or maybe one winds up needing extra help, and you wind up taking a little bit too much time on the last one and so, 'This one looks pretty good, and it's a good paper. ... I'll give them a good grade because they accomplished what I asked them to. So I'm going to move on.'* – Ingrid
- *I know college professors can't meet up with every student...but then I also take it upon myself that if I don't understand something that they are writing then I will ask them about it.* –Melissa
- *So, maybe he is busy; but he found time for this [paper]. If I look at it in context, ... maybe he's going to be retired soon and maybe he is more experienced, and maybe he has a procedure for doing things ...* Meg

Furthermore, students described constructions of instructors' lives in the form of the instructors' knowledge, expertise, or personal disposition. These units of meaning are still represented by Figural Theme 2:

- *Obviously [instructors]see tons and tons of papers through the course of their career so ...they have a pretty highly refined sense of what makes a good paper .... So, I value that input a lot.*
- *He used the red pencil, ... "WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU? YOU FORGOT THE PERIOD!" and "CAPITALIZE" and ... "STRESS THIS' in capital letters..... I saw him as a curmudgeon. But that was just who he was.* –Zach
- *When I saw the class average was an 84, I was like, well, he wasn't picking on me ...*  
– Tina
- *It's important to be a professor. It can change lives, and they don't realize this.*– Meg

Some of the preceding figural themes illustrate gaps in communication and understanding between instructors and students. However, two of the figural themes that emerged from the experiential structures of instructors and students were found to be interrelated. These themes can be characterized as: historical reflections on earlier experiences of school and work, and met and unmet expectations by both instructors and students.

### **Interrelated Instructor and Student Themes**

Figural Theme 3: *I remember feedback from the past.*

Figural theme 3 represents, for both the student and the instructor participants, a looking back to past experience to inform the present. The instructors look back on their experiences as students or writers whose work received response from others.

The reflection by instructors speaks to their ability to put themselves in the position of the student once more, to better understand the experience of response from the students' point of view. Some instructors look back on the experience with pleasure and some with pain:

- *I remember when I was a student and especially at the college level... then it was a one shot deal, and it was about the one chance. Even if they had given me guidelines, it was always a stab in the dark as to whether I would be, you know, meeting their criteria or whatever it is they were looking for. And I remember feeling very anxious about that; and sometimes when I would get a grade, I would think maybe it wasn't fair— especially if it was very subjective. Of course, you would compare notes with your friends, and you might look at someone else's and say, "Man! They got a 96. and I got an 88; and I think mine is better," or whatever. Under those circumstances, it was because I typically had sketchy guidelines or no grading rubrics, and there was a lot of subjectivity. So remembering what that was like for me, I've tried to do differently by my own students.*

–Tracy

- *When I got home, I wrote [my 8<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher] and I said, “This is what I’m doing now and that there is not a time when I’m grading students’ papers when I’m not diagramming sentences.” And so that’s, ...I mean I had such a good public school education, that you know, we learned the fundamentals. And I think it has served me well my whole life. I really do.—Dr. Sinclair*
- *Like the time somebody put this huge, huge question mark beside a paragraph, and that’s all that was there. It felt like a slap in the face. It was really very unpleasant for me....it just shut me down... So I’m always thinking about that when I’m looking at somebody else’s paper. – Dr. Kaden*
- *For my professional success, if it doesn’t really matter if an article’s not completely grammatically correct. Then why should I care if the dissertation proposal or the dissertation isn’t 100%?—Dr. Perry*

While the instructors reflected on past experiences as recipients of response, particularly in school; student participants recalled experiences outside of school to relate past job experience to the experience of receiving response to writing. These experiences with work informed their understanding of responses to their writing in terms of being evaluated, having expertise/competence, and having life experiences that gave them perspective on the experience of writing and response.

- *I also think it would be important to be honest with some critical feedback. I have talked to other students about it, and they may not feel like that– but I do. I take that back to my performance reviews. When I was working, there were some bosses that would just kind*

*of write all things positive.... to me that's not a very valuable performance review.*

*Because I know I wasn't a perfect employee.– Ingrid*

- *...In newspaper writing you don't get ... feedback unless you really just butcher a story or get the facts wrong... when you make a mistake, 50, 000 people have a copy of it.–Kevin*
- *Ok, the life of an artist.. I can't... I have to be able to put food on the table. It was time to go back to school. And... I 've been way more serious about it....And I don't make 80's [on my papers].–Tina*
- *He's very professional. Like every centimeter of his skin is like, "I know what I am doing." But he's also so normal and so...When he was giving me feedback, I believed him. And he made me feel like I did something good for this company; something good in my life.– Meg*
- *When I was doing therapy, ... disclosing things about yourself ... if it's for you it's wrong. If it's for the client, then it's okay. I think that some of the more punitive feedback that the teachers were providing was for them. I think they just had a bad attitude about teaching.–Zach*

For both the instructors and students, these recollections of experiences with school and work not only influenced their perspectives on giving and receiving response; these past experiences played a role in the construction of expectations that the instructors and students had of the other, some of which were met and many of which seemed to be unmet. The expectations for both groups of participants referenced feelings of disappointment or frustration with the lack of reciprocity for their efforts or a lack of acknowledgement. These feelings are represented by figural theme 4:

Figural Theme 4: *I don't think they read what I wrote!*

The instructors' desire to make a connection with students through response was hindered when instructors perceived that students were not utilizing feedback or instructions that would improve their writing. The instructors voiced an expectation that efforts before or during the writing process would be met with corresponding effort on the part of their students:

- *I try to help people and give them positive feedback, but if they are not going to take advantage of it ... I don't know.—Dr. Perry*
- *They have it in their syllabus, exactly how to structure their paper. And that's probably the most surprising; just how many people obviously didn't read the instructions.—  
Angela*
- *I don't believe that they actually did read the book, because every single one of them wrote papers that only referenced the first two chapters of the book – Dr. Phillips*
- *I feel frustrated because I haven't found a way to get people to evaluate their own work before they turn it in. —Dr. Kaden*
- *And it's basic, kind of fundamental...grammar, like subject-verb agreement, complete sentences. I mean things that I just am appalled at students doing at the college level.—  
Dr. Sinclair*
- *Why am I correcting stuff like this on a dissertation? This is something somebody should have had after being in one or two classes with me. —Dr. Perry*
- *...Someone gets called on it and they say "no I didn't plagiarize" and I would feel like that's a betrayal. —Dr. Perry*

For students, feelings of frustration or disappointment— that were intense at times— were related to the sense that their writing was not being read or to the perception that the instructors' effort in responding was incommensurate with the students' effort in writing. Others expressed

frustrations that their needs as students were not being met. These feelings were personalized by some student participants to include the instructors' feelings toward them and not just their writing.

- *If I'm not receiving feedback, I'm mad, I think because I have higher expectations for somebody to help me grow.*
- *I don't think that they really read what I wrote. I feel kind of disappointed... I feel they don't have time for us.– Meg*
- *It was disheartening not to get more feedback because I was really excited ...about the process and everything that it took me, and the epiphanies, and 'Wow! That's red, and red means something.' It was so gut-wrenching for me, and so hard for me to do... I guess I just wanted, not recognition, in terms of the grade, but recognition in terms of the effort. "I see you did this effort; and wow, you came up with something." To my teacher it might have been one plus one equals two. It might have been really not earthshattering for her. But for me it was, you know, I just built a rocket to the moon kind of thing. – Ingrid*
- *I mean there were only like two or three [comments]... and then I looked at the grade and thought, I don't understand! I don't make grades like that. What's wrong?! OOOH! – Tina*
- *If they think that you're on a higher level than you really are, then some of them tend to assume that you already know everything that there is to know about it, as opposed to trying to work with you on it.– Melissa*
- *I know how to write a clear and concise sentence, so sometimes if a professor focused too much on the grammar, then I might as well hand it off to a copy editor friend or*

*something. I'm looking for more input on the ideas part than on the grammar part. The grammar, I can give it enough time and give it enough proofreads and fix the grammar myself. But the ideas are what I'm paying the tuition for.– Kevin*

The overlap of these common themes illustrates the interrelatedness of the experience of writing and response and the strong need for communication with the other. It points to the common consciousness of experience that Merleau-Ponty (1962) identifies in his discussion of common ground.

... there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are inter-woven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator. (p. 413)

The feelings of disappointment and frustration expressed not only by the student participants but also the instructor participants speaks to the notion put forth by Merleau-Ponty that understanding and connecting with the thought-worlds of others is a difficult, yet possible, endeavor but one that resists the perfect fusion of minds. In the chapter that follows, the findings reported in this chapter will be summarized and discussed in light of Merleau-Ponty's theories of language and experience and compared and contrasted with conclusions from other studies of instructor response.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary**

Merleau-Ponty (1964) explains that, “Like the weaver, the writer works on the wrong side of his material” (p. 45). When students write and instructors respond, we offer words to express our thoughts without knowing how they will be viewed on the other side of the transaction. We know what we meant to convey: we have intention, but the construction of meaning by the receiver may not match what we hoped to represent. We may think we have woven a rich and vivid tapestry only to realize the creation of a muddled conglomeration of knots and loose threads. As a student and an instructor, I have experienced both sides of that cloth. What follows is a reflection on my shifting roles during and after the participant interviews as a means of further bracketing my experience.

During the course of this study, I felt that I was in a unique position because I was both an instructor and a student. The ways in which the instructors and students viewed my role was reflected in the language that they used to refer to me and in the ways in which they related their experiences to me. With the instructors, I felt at times as though they were speaking to me as the student-writer from the event they were describing. At other times, I felt as though they were talking to me as a colleague. They described their feelings of frustration or jubilation in a way that seemed to assume that I had had similar experiences when commenting on students’ papers. For the student participants, I was an instructor; and it felt at times that they were talking to me as if I were the instructor from the story that they were telling. Students shifted from third person to second person, and sometimes to imperative constructions. It felt as though they were trying to help me see the event from their point of view at the time or giving me advice that they would have liked to give to the instructors from the event. There were a few times during

the interviews when I had to silently ask myself, “Are they talking about me? About our class?” I soon realized that it didn’t matter. As I followed the participants’ leads they took me where they wanted to go and were on to the next description before I could ponder the question too much.

All of the instructors and one of the students were very knowledgeable about the nature of recorded interviews, as well. One of the students who had been a newspaper journalist stopped and changed his use of the word, *force* when asked to say more about helpful feedback:

*If I discuss a theory or an idea or if they want some real world application, how would I implement those ideas or theories?... Then they will kind of point me in that direction. Which I think of as helpful because it forces me... because you know sometimes in your head you think you know what you would do, but once you are forced to sit down and peck it out on a keyboard and process it and think about it, you tend to get even more clarity on your ideas. You tend to figure things out even more. You thought you had it figured out beforehand, but once you're forced to think it through more, you get even more clarity. Which has been helpful, I think.*

*I: Can you say a bit more about how it's been helpful?*

*P: Uhm, well it forces me...forces is the wrong word, it encourages me to think beyond what I was thinking initially when I first wrote the paper.*

The instructors were also aware of the interview process and referred to my study during the course of the interview. Toward the end of the interview, it felt as though one of the professors began to interview me:

*P: I've been toying around with the idea of writing a paper that does equate writing to dialogue, because I don't know that a lot of people think of it that way. I don't know*

*who the audience would be really but I have thought about that and talked about it with colleagues and people that I write with, but it could be sort of a helpful thing. So I think it's a good study for you to be doing. I mean I think it's going to be helpful to you to think about that stuff. So you've taught writing before?*

*I: Yeah*

*P: Yeah? Does any of this sound familiar at all?*

*I: Absolutely, I'm having trouble keeping my mouth shut.*

*P: [laughing] Yeah, I'm sure. I know you're not supposed to say anything. That's why I think these kinds of interviews are funny. It's like 'Yeah, there are things I'd like to say but I can't. Yeah. I think uhm...oh well this is what I'll say then.'*

Another instructor, Dr. Perry, mentioned the interview and study twice. Once at in the middle:

*P: . . . I know I'm jumping around a bit, but I know that's part of the phenomenological interview*

and again toward the end:

*P: I think it's an interesting study. I think it's important to study the writing process and to look at how people go through the evaluation. I know there are a lot of things I could think of afterwards, probably. [I and P chuckle] I'll probably be driving home thinking of some things. 'Why didn't I say this or this?' But I think I've captured the essence of it.*

Though I maintained the role of interviewer throughout the interview process and followed the participants' leads, at times I moved in and out of the perspective of interviewer, student, or instructor. The experience illustrates Merleau-Ponty's (2004) point that,

*...each person can only believe what he recognizes to be true internally and, at the same time, nobody thinks or makes up his mind without already being caught up in certain relationships with others, which leads him to opt for a particular set of opinions (p. 87).*

My experience with this study of response has deepened my understanding of the phenomenon of writing and response and the lives of the participants involved in the study. What follows is a summary of the findings initially reported in Chapter 4, a discussion of those findings, a presentation of conclusions, and a set of implications for practice and for future research derived from this study.

### **Summary of the findings**

This study used the existential phenomenological method of research to investigate the lived experience of instructors responding to student writing and the lived experience of students who receive responses to their academic writing. The instructor participants were seven instructors in higher education with expertise in teaching and learning at a four year university in the southeastern United States. The participants included five women and two men ranging in age between 28 and 60, consisting of three graduate assistants and four professors. The six student participants consisted of two men and four women ranging in age between 23 and 55. Five of the students were upper division undergraduates in the college of education and one was a first year Ph.D. graduate student in arts and sciences (psychology). The education majors were pursuing teaching licensure in elementary education, school library/media specialist, secondary social studies, and two students were pursuing special education licensure for mild/moderate disabilities.

Following procedures suggested by Pollio and Thomas (2002), the instructors' interviews began with the question, "What stands out for you when you respond to student writing?" and the students' interviews began with the question, "What stands out for you about instructors' responses to your writing?" Within the phenomenological process, the interviewer posed additional questions to clarify, validate, or summarize such as: "Can you say more about that?", "What was that like?", "Can you give an example?", and "What stood out for you?" The participant rather than the interviewer determined the content and direction of the interviews.

The participant interviews revealed a variety of aspects of the phenomenon of response. The thematic structure that emerged from an analysis of the instructor participant interviews revealed a ground theme of :

Instructor Ground Theme: ***Providing feedback is a responsibility that I take feedback seriously.***

Each of the instructors expressed a feeling of responsibility to assist students in learning some aspect of academic life through facilitative response to the student writing. This sense of responsibility formed the background of the figural themes that emerged from the analysis. The figural themes centered around a desire to create a dialogue or conversation with the student by responding to their writing; the experience of emotional reactions to student writing, both positive and negative; a reflection on their own experiences with response, as writers; and the experience of having expectations met or unmet by students.

The analysis of data from the student participant interviews revealed a thematic structure grounded by the theme:

Student Ground Theme: ***You discard the things that don't work and hold on to the things that do work.***

This ground theme illustrated the students' imperative that response to their writing be relevant and useful lest it be dismissed or ignored. This theme also expressed a sense of autonomy over their writing that revealed the students' feelings of ownership and control over their thoughts and ideas and an understanding of their needs as learners. Standing out from this ground were four figural themes that described students' views of opportunities to revise their writing; the construction of instructor identities to explain the instructors' responses; a recollection of students' experiences in the world of work prior to becoming students; and a description of met and unmet expectations for instructors' responses to their writing.

Though the ground themes for instructors and students were different, the last two figural themes for both groups were interrelated. Figural theme 3 for instructors and students were connected as historical reflections on earlier periods in their lived experiences. For instructors, the reflection concerned their experiences as writers who were recipients of response and the student participants recollected their past lives at work as a means of relating to instructor response. Figural theme 4 connected instructor and student themes over met and unmet expectations on the part of instructors for their students, and vice versa.

The following section will discuss the current findings in detail within the context of other studies of instructor response.

### **Discussion of the findings**

The ground theme of the instructor participants, *Providing feedback is a responsibility that I take feedback seriously*, was expressed as an underlying theme across instructors. The responsibility implicit in the act of responding varied across the experience of instructors in terms of how the instructors met that responsibility, including teaching students to be better writers, helping them to learn the hidden rules of academia, preparing students for their careers,

and giving students experience with writing for other professionals. The purposes of response expressed by the instructors in this study is supported by findings from a study by Bharuthram and McKenna (2006) which found through student interviews and an analysis of grades that college students' writing improves when instructor response focuses on assisting students in acquiring the specific norms of the academy rather than focusing on editorial marks or corrections.

The instructors' assumption of responsibility for student learning is also reflected in Hyatt's (2005) corpus analysis of instructor response which suggests seven categories for the instructors' response: those whose purpose is to establish good academic and social relationships with students, developmental comments designed to aid the student with subsequent work, structural comments regarding organization, comments regarding language usage and presentation, comments regarding accuracy and appropriateness for the content, methodological comments to research based writing, and administrative comments relating to procedures for meeting the requirements of the assignment for the course. He found that the most frequent comment types were those regarding content, style, and development (in that order). He also found linguistic factors, for example, the use of imperatives that revealed a significantly authoritative stance on the part of the instructors. These findings echo the sense by instructors in this study that they are responsible for facilitating students' development as writers in academia.

Against the ground of responsibility, the first figural theme that came forward characterized the participants' intention to engage students in dialogue through response to their writing:

Figural Theme 1: *I want to join in a dialogue with the student.*

This finding is supported by Tuck's (2001) results from interviews with college faculty members in the U.K. regarding their perceptions of the purpose of response. She found that a number of the participants expressed a desire for "sharing, reciprocity or dialogue" with the students (p. 8). These instructors also identified assigning grades as an impediment to dialogue with students.

Straub (2000) found that instructors' responses to students on paper and the in-person interactions between instructors and students are "mutually dependent and reinforcing" (p. 23). His analysis of instructor response and student writing found that response practices influence classroom dynamics leading to the conclusion that instructor response must be tailored to the context of the student and the classroom, and that to do so requires that instructors view response as a dialogue between instructor and student.

The second figural theme garnered from the instructor interviews revealed a tendency of the instructors to respond emotionally to student writing.

*Figural Theme 2: I get caught up in the papers.*

These emotions ranged from feelings of happiness to feelings of disappointment and betrayal. Empirical research regarding the emotional aspects of responding to student writing may be available, but I was unable to locate such studies at this time. However, essays or transcripts of panel discussions regarding response to writing to find descriptions of the emotions experienced by those responding to student writing. Here is a brief excerpt from Harvey (2003) who speaks a little truth through hyperbole:

Even as we jot our pert, fair-minded notations in the margin—'could be clearer here; develop'—we are really thinking, 'What are you talking about? Why are you doing this to me?' When we come across a hint of a suggestion of an idea, we fall over ourselves to

congratulate ‘a fine insight,’ which insight we hungrily fill out and clarify even as we congratulate the student for having it. (p.45)

The emotions experienced by instructors in this study reflect the sense of responsibility to the student that instructors feel. It also speaks to the embodied nature of language and the desire to understand. Carman (2004) explains: “Merleau-Ponty believes that perception and body ground all forms of understanding....Reason and language are not unworldly miracles, transcending and floating free of the concrete environments available to our perceptual and bodily skills” (p. 23).

In addition to eliciting emotional reactions from instructor participants, the experience of responding to writing also triggered recollections of the instructors’ past experiences as students and or writers being critiqued resulting in the third figural theme:

*Interrelated Figural Theme 3: I remember feedback from the past.*

Instructors’ experiences of being writers helped to inform their approach to student writing. Remembering past successes gave confidence or joy or provided a rationale for response. Revisiting past pain enhanced empathy for the student.

For the student participants, recalling experiences of work gave them a point of comparison to their present circumstance as student writers. Doing so provided them with perspective or with a standard for judgment.

These two themes emerged from separate grounds but are interconnected by the phenomenological attribute of time. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), time and the experience of being in the world are intimately connected. Temporality is an inescapable aspect of the human experience. It is no external abstraction that we are born, and we die. It is an escapable aspect of being. However in our perception, temporality is not linear. We experience

time in relation to things. When the instructors describe their past experiences as writers or when students recollect their experiences of working, the past becomes present in the world as they relate their experiences. Both instructor and writer arrange their experiences in terms of before and after.

Like the inextricable connection between being and time, our connection to others is another phenomenological attribute of being. The fourth figural theme of both instructors and students are interconnected based on the participants' sometimes conflicted relationships with the other in the world of response. These themes join together in their representations of met and unmet expectations.

The fourth figural theme of the instructors identified thoughts and feelings associated with expectations that are either met or unmet by student-writers:

Interrelated Figural Theme 4: *I don't think they read what I wrote!*

These expressions of unmet expectations are reflected in the research literature investigating the instructor's experience. In an ethnographic study of British university professors across disciplines, Bailey and Garner (2010) found that even though instructors identified helping students improve their writing as one of the purposes of response, they expressed disappointment about students' willingness to use it. When asked why they thought students did not utilize feedback, the majority of instructor respondents could give no definite answer.

While the instructor participants in the present study expressed a sense that students were not utilizing feedback, student participants described needing more feedback and expectations for more feedback that were unmet. These unmet expectations led students to conclude that instructors were not reading their writing.

While phenomenological research does not seek answers to the “Why?” aspect of a phenomenon, it does seek answers to the question, “What?”. In the case of unmet expectations, this question is answered by what meanings were important to participants regarding this aspect of instructor response. Students identified feelings of disappointment, anger, and isolation from the learning process. One student, Ingrid, expressed her disappointment with the following words:

*It was disheartening not to get more feedback because I was really excited ...about the process and everything that it took me, and the epiphanies, and ‘Wow! That’s red, and red means something.’ It was so gut-wrenching for me, and so hard for me to do... I guess I just wanted, not recognition, in terms of the grade, but recognition in terms of the effort. “I see you did this effort; and wow, you came up with something.” To my teacher it might have been one plus one equals two. It might have been really not earthshattering for her. But for me it was, you know, I just built a rocket to the moon kind of thing. –*

Ingrid

The students in a study by Rubin and Ellena-Wygonik (1994) identified similar sentiments. After an analysis of 400 college student questionnaires regarding their perceptions of their own writing, Rubin and Ellena-Wygonik (1994) found that when students were asked to explain their choices of their best and worst papers, students attended more to what happened during the writing process than the finished product or its effect on others. For these students, and for Ingrid, the experience of writing had more significance than what they had written.

In addition to these two interrelated figural themes, the structure of student participants’ experience included two more figural themes and one ground theme. These were not interrelated

to the structure of instructors' experiences. They will now be discussed. The first figural theme from the students' experience is exemplified as follows:

Student Figural Theme 1: *It's nice to have another opportunity to do the best that you can.*

The student participants expressed a desire to have opportunities for revision, but they also explained that few instructors gave them that opportunity.

*Well, not all papers that you turn in are going to have a draft process. Probably not even half the time. Most of the time you're just turning it in as is, and you get it back with input, and you get a grade, and you try to remember what you messed up on on the previous one so that you can try not to make the same mistake on the next one. – Kevin*

However, when students were allowed to revise, they described it as an opportunity to learn more about a topic or about expectations for academic papers. This perspective on the part of the students is supported by Merleau-Ponty's description of the nature of language. Rather than seeing language as merely representational, Merleau-Ponty (1962) explains that language does not just communicate thought, it *accomplishes* thought. Our thoughts are incomplete until we are able to find words to complete them.

*...The most familiar thing appears indeterminate as long as we have not recalled its name...the thinking subject himself is in a kind of ignorance of his thoughts so long as he has not formulated them for himself, as is shown by the example of so many writers who begin a book without knowing exactly what they are going to put into it (p.206).*

The figural theme discussed describes students' desire to improve their writing through revision but aspects of the students' experience point to limited opportunities to do so. In Figural Theme 2, students attempt to make sense of instructors' intentions, motivations, and points of view regarding response by constructing identities for instructors.

Student Figural Theme 2: *I know that they have lives as well.*

As an aspect of their lived experience, students attempt to understand the lived experience of their instructors by filling in the gaps of their knowledge of what goes on when instructors respond. The student participants speculate about the reasons for the responses or lack of response to their writing with sometimes complex narratives describing what the instructors experience might be:

*So, maybe he is busy; maybe he has stuff to do, but he found time for this [paper]. If I look at it in context, I don't know... maybe he's going to be retired soon and maybe he is more experienced and maybe he has a procedure for doing things or maybe he's not so busy anymore because he's going to retire in a year or two and maybe he's not so active from a research point of view. Maybe he doesn't receive as many tasks to do. –Meg*

Similarly, in interviews with college students, O'Neill and Fife (1999) found students constantly interpreted instructor comments through their construction of teacher personalities and roles: "'She's more like friend than a teacher'" (p. 41). In a later study (O'Neill and Fife, 2001), they identified three key ways that students interpret response to their writing as an aspect of what they called the "response situation" (p.190): 1). Comments are read in the context of the previous teachers' comments; 2). Comments are read through the student's perception of the teacher's ethos; and 3). Comments are interpreted as just one facet of a broader framework for response that the teacher sets up in the class (p. 194).

The perceptions that students formed as a result of the result of instructor response was complex and multifaceted. The four figural themes that emerged to form the structure of the students' lived experience were set against the ground of the students' decisions to use or not use the instructor response. The students' ground theme is represented by the following quotation:

**Student Ground:** *You discard the things that don't work and hold on to the things that do work.*

The first half of the ground theme expressed the students' resolve to maintain control over their own thoughts and writing process. The embodied nature of language enhances the sense of its intimate connection to the writer making students desire to maintain control understandable. This attribute of the phenomenological experience was illustrated by participants' use of expressions that reference the body to describe writing and response:

*I mean it was blood, sweat, and tears that went into this. I was proud of the grade, and grateful for that. But it would have been nice for her to have recognized somewhere along the line, 'Hey great idea,' or 'I wouldn't have noticed that if you hadn't pointed it out.' ... just to make me think that she actually read my paper. – Ingrid*

and:

*You know, I'm a great writer but I do give credit to some of my English teachers back when I was a child. They, in some cases, literally pounded writing in your head and grammar. So I really credit them with teaching me how to write. – Zach*

The embodied nature of language creates a powerful incentive for students to maintain authority over their words illustrating the students' decision whether or not to “discard the things that don't work.” This finding conflicts with an influential study by Brannon and Knoblauch (1982) that concluded that instructor response frequently usurps students' authority over their writing and thus diminishes students' motivation. Similarly, Sommers (1981) found that instructor comments shifted students' attention away from their own purposes in writing to the instructors' purpose in writing. The students in the present study seemed to have clear ideas of their own authorial intentions:

*The feedback was "You had better understand it the way I do. And if you don't, it isn't necessarily right." And the rebel in me decided I wasn't going to, because I had my own idea of what was going on there. So, evidently he didn't agree, and that's where I got my B – Zach*

In addition to the students' sense of authority over their writing, the second half of the ground theme described the students' need to "hold on to the things that do work." It addresses the ground of the students' experience of wanting instructor response that fits their needs and purposes. The usability of instructor comments was investigated by Walker (2009) by analyzing the written comments on 106 college students' papers and then interviewing 43 of the students whose papers she reviewed. Students in her study described usable comments as those that help "alter the gap" between what they know and what they do not know on previously submitted work and on future work (p. 75). One of the student participants from the present study used similar language to describe her needs:

*I do expect that my teacher knows more about things than I do. And I think that I want to close that gap a little bit, and the way to do that is through learning through class and through the homework, and through doing papers. And the things that the teacher sees that I can do to improve will kind of help boost me up to bridging that gap. And help me learn. – Ingrid*

The figural and ground themes from the student participants' experience helped to illuminate the perspectives that students took as they talked about response to their writing. Likewise, the experience of the instructors offers further insight into the phenomenon of response from their point of view. The activity of response connects instructor and student in an ongoing and

unavoidable process of meaning making and misunderstanding. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) asserts, "We are involved in the world and with others in an inextricable tangle" (p. 528).

## Conclusions

According to Curtis and May (1978), "consciousness of the world involves and somehow depends upon self-consciousness" (p. xix). In other words, if we recognize and honor the co-constituting nature of the person and the world, we also recognize that being conscious of seeing something involves a construction of understanding or a making sense of the object seen. As instructor-readers, we must facilitate that understanding and understand our own co-constitution with the world. "Only what is learned through experience, personally appropriated, is truly known. In this sense life is education. It is 'the curriculum one has to run through in order to catch up with oneself'" (Curtis and May, 1978, p.xxi).

As former students and current instructors, we are all running through the curriculum of life's experiences to learn and grow. We must recognize that the co-constitution of ourselves and the world makes it that much more essential that we understand our students' perceptions and experience as they write. Merleau-Ponty's perspectives on the nature of language contributes to our understanding of response to student writing in significant ways. He warns us that "...in order to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical, we must break with our familiar acceptance of it..."(Merleau-Ponty, 1962; p. xiv).

As instructors, we must disabuse ourselves of the idea that language is purely representational and not subject to our unique perceptions as beings in the world. I use the phrase *as instructors*, because I believe that as scholars many of us readily accept the oblique and situated nature of language. But when we respond to student writing there is a tendency to cling to the comforting belief that that our messages to students transcend the subjective world

and are or *should be* clearly received. It is possibly this illusion that causes some of the frustration and disappointment expressed by both student and instructor participants.

### **Implications for practice**

According to Polkinghorne (1989), phenomenological research produces a deeper understanding of an individual's experience which can lead to several positive consequences including increasing sensitivity toward those involved in particular experiences, expanding upon understanding derived from quantitative methods, and amending social action and public policy to make it more responsive to human needs. These aspects of phenomenology have tremendous potential to be applied toward the study of response to writing and education, in general.

The student participants in this study described their desire to maintain author-ity over their own writing while still desiring response from instructors to support their efforts to learn and grow through writing. To honor the *Lebenswelt* [life world] of the student is to offer the student not only self-consciousness (in the sense of consciousness of the self in the world), but also autonomy. According to Valle, King, and Halling (1989), we are all "condemned to choice" by situations in the world that we may or may not have chosen but within this world we must make choices or not (which is choosing not to). Rather than complete free will on the one hand or behavior completely determined by our own environment on the other, we have situated freedom, freedom (obligation) to make choices within or limited by the world. This desire for autonomy within structure of the world of academia or situated freedom seems to reflect the ground of the students' experience.

### **Implications for future research**

The findings from the present study of instructor response point to a need for additional research exploring the phenomenon.

1. An investigation of response with instructors and students across disciplines or in disciplines other than education would contribute to deeper understanding of the lived experience of a wider variety of instructors and students.
2. A phenomenological analysis of the texts of student writing and of instructor responses would provide further insights into the interconnection of response and student text.
3. A study of the ways in which instructors of graduate teaching assistants respond to student writing and a subsequent analysis of the graduate teaching assistants response to their students' writing would provide further information regarding the ways one instructor's response might influence another's.

## **Conclusion**

I have learned from my experience of the present study that response to student writing is a complex and situated act that requires an effort on the part of student and instructor to listen openly to the needs and intentions of the other. From this study, I have a better understanding of those needs and intentions. Perhaps the most eye opening and unexpected aspect of this study for me as an instructor was the experience of skilled student writers and their poignant descriptions of feeling that the writing in which they had invested so much of themselves was going unread. It brings to mind the adage that it is worse to be ignored than to be hated.

Merleau-Ponty's theories and perspectives of language have helped me to better understand the experience of response. In *Prose of the World*, Merleau-Ponty (1973) discusses the lucidity of language. He contends that when language is used well, as in the case of proficient student writers, it "sweeps me on from signs toward meaning" (p. 10). In other words, the more artful the writing, the less prominent the words/signs become in our awareness as meaning comes to the forefront. This situation sheds light on the proficient student writer's

experience that the instructors' response is limited when the paper is "good." For the instructor, the meaning is clear and the questions are few.

The inverse side of this phenomenon is writing that lacks proficiency, that forces the reader to work hard to see beyond the distractions of error or imprecise use to find meaning. This type of writing has evoked in me more of a need to show the way to students, sometimes forgetting that students need to be allowed a way of their own.

My investigation of the instructors' lived experience was one in which I not only felt validated as one who responds to writing, but also as a student. The kindness and generosity of the instructors as they shared their stories, their time, and their support was a model for me of what collegiality should look like, and I will always remember the words of my student participants when I respond to future students' papers.

## List of References

- Anson, C. (2000). Response and the social construction of error. *Assessing Writing*, 7 (1), 5-21.
- Bailey, R. And Garner, M. (2010, April). Is the feedback in higher education assessment worth the paper it is written on? Teachers' reflections on their practices. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15 (7), 187-198.
- Baldwin, R. (1960, May). Grading freshman essays. *College composition and communication*, 11(2), 110-114.
- Bandura, A. (1989, September). Regulation of cognitive processes through perceived self-efficacy. *Developmental Psychology*, 25(5), 729-735.
- Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1, 164-180.
- Barritt, L, Stock, P., and Clark , F . (1986). Researching practice: Evaluating assessment essays *College Composition and Communication*, 3 (7), 315-327.
- Bartholome, D. (1985). Inventing the university. In Rose, M. (Ed.). (1985). *When a Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing Process Problems* (134-165). New York: Guilford.
- Beach, R. (1979). The effects of between-draft teacher evaluation versus student self-evaluation on high school students' revising of rough drafts. In Straub, R. (2006). *Key Works on Teacher Response: An Anthology*(pp.46-56). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- .Beason, L. (2001). Ethos and error: How business people react to errors. *College Composition and Communication*, 53(1) 33-64.
- Bereiter, C., & Scardamalia, M. (1987). *The psychology of written composition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum

- Bentz, V. & Shapiro, J. (1998). *Mindful inquiry in social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bharuthram, S. and McKenna, S. (2006, October ). A writer respondent intervention as a means of developing academic literacy. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11 (4), 495-507.
- Bloom, L. (2003). The great paradigm shift and its legacy for the twenty-first century. In Bloom, L., Daiker, D., and White, E. *Composition Studies in the New Millennium: Rereading the Past, Rewriting the Future*. (31-47). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University.
- Bogdan, R. and Biklen, S. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. Boston: Pearson, Inc.
- Brannon, L. and Knoblauch, C. (1982). On students' rights to their own texts: A model of teacher response. *College Composition and Communication*. 33( 2), 157-166.
- Buxton, E. (1958). *An experiment to test the effects of writing frequency and guided practice upon students' skill as written expression*. In Straub, R. (2006). *Key Works on Teacher Response: An Anthology*.(17-37). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Carifio, J., Jackson, I., and Dagostino, L. (2001). Effects of diagnostic and prescriptive comments on the revising behaviors of community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*. 25, 109–122
- Carman, T. (2008). *Merleau-Ponty*. New York: Taylor and Francis eLibrary.
- Crisp, B. (2007, October). Is it worth the effort? How feedback influences students' subsequent submission of assessable work. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 32 (5), 571-581.

- Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative research and research design: Choosing from among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Curtis, B. & Mays, W. (1978). *Phenomenology and education: self-consciousness and its development*. London: Methuen.
- Davis, B. & Sumara, D. (2005). Challenging images of knowing: complexity science and educational research. . *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 18, 305–321.
- Deane, P. et al (2008). Cognitive Models of Writing: Writing Proficiency as a Complex Integrated Skill. *ETS Research Report*.
- Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (2005). *Handbook of qualitative research*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dohrer, G. (1991). Do teachers' comments on students' papers help? *College teaching*. 39 (2), 48-54
- Dunsford, D. (2006, June). Feedback follow up: The influence of teacher comment on student writing assignments. *NACTA Journal*, 50 (2),12-18.
- Dusel, W. (1955, October). Determining an efficient teaching load in English. *Illinois English Bulletin*, 1-19.
- Elbow, P. (1994). *Writing for learning—not just for demonstrating learning*. Retrieved June 16, 2006, from <http://www.ntlf.com/html/lib/bib/writing.htm>. National Teaching and Learning Forum.
- Emig, J. and Parker, E. (1976) . Responding to student writing: Building a theory of the evaluating process. Report prepared at Rutgers, The State University. Accessed from ERIC ED136257.

- Evans, K. (2003). Accounting for conflicting mental models of communication in student-teacher interaction: An activity theory analysis. In C. Bazerman & D. R. Russell (Eds.), *Writing Selves / Writing Societies: Research from Activity Perspectives* (394-427). Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse, [http://wac.colostate.edu/books/selves\\_societies/](http://wac.colostate.edu/books/selves_societies/).
- Faigley, L. and Witte, S. (1981, December). Analyzing revision. *College Composition and Communication*, 32(4), 400-414.
- Ferris, D. (2008). Response to student writing: Implications for second-language students (2-8). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates.
- Fife, J. and Oneill, P. (2001). Moving beyond the written comment: Narrowing the gap between response practice and research. *College Composition and Communication*, 53 (2), 300-321.
- Flower, L. and Hayes, J. (1981, December). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 32 (4), 365-387.
- Flower, L., Hayes, J., Carey, L., Schriver, K. and Stratman, J.(1986, February). Detection, diagnosis, and strategies of revision. *College Composition and Communication*, 37(1), 16-55.
- Flynn, Bernard, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/merleau-ponty/>.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gambell, T. (1991, Autumn). University students self perceptions of writing. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 16 (4), 420-433.

- Gee, T. (1972). Student responses to teacher comments. In Straub, R. (2006). *Key Works on Teacher Response: An Anthology* pp. 38-45.
- Graham, S. (2006). Writing. In Alexander, P. and Winne, P. (Eds.), *Handbook of Educational Psychology* (2nd ed.)( Pp. 457-478). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates
- Graue, B. (2006). Writing in education research. In C. Conrad & R. Serlin (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook for Research in Education* (pp. 515-589). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Greenhalgh, A. (1992). Voices in response: A postmodern reading of teacher response. *College Composition and Communication*, 43(3), 401-410.
- Hahn, J. (1981). Students' reactions to teacher's written comments. *The National Writing Project Quarterly*. 4, (10) 2- 8.
- Hairston, M. (1981). Not all errors are created equal: Nonacademic readers in the professions respond to lapses in usage. *College English*, 43 (8), 794-806.
- Hammond, M., Howarth, J. and Keat, R. (1991). *Understanding Phenomenology*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1983). *Ethnography: Principles and Practices*. London: Tavistock.
- Harvard Study Writing Study. (2002). *Drafts: Students and Teachers Talk about Feedback*, <http://stream.fas.harvard.edu/ramgen/permanent/exposwrite/acrossthedrafts.rm>
- Harvey, Gordon. (2003). Repetitive strain: The injuries of responding to student writing. *ADE Bulletin*, Nos. 134/135, 43-48.
- Haswell, R. (2006, November 9). The complexities of responding to student writing; or, looking for shortcuts via the road of excess. *Across the Disciplines*, 3. Retrieved October 16, 2007, from <http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/articles/haswell2006.cfm>.

- Hatch, A. (2002). *Doing Qualitative Research in Educational Settings*. Albany, NY: State of New York Press.
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77, 81–112.
- Hayes, J. and Flower, L. (1980). Identifying the organization of writing processes. In L. Gregg and E. Steinberg (Eds.). *Cognitive processes in writing* (pp. 3-30). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hillocks, G. (1986). Research on Written Composition: New Directions for Teaching. Urbana, IL: Eric Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills p. 390.
- Hyatt, D. (2005). ‘Yes, a very good point!’: A critical genre analysis of a corpus of feedback commentaries on Master of Education assignments. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 10, (3), 339-353.
- Ivanic, R., Clark, R. and Rimmershaw, R. (2000) ‘What am I supposed to make of this?’ The messages conveyed to students by tutors written comments. in Lea, M. and Stierer, B. (Eds.) *Student Writing in Higher Education*, (pp. 47–66). Buckingham, UK: The Society for Research in Higher Education and Open University Press.
- Jeffrey, F. and Selting, B. (1999). Reading the invisible ink: Assessing the responses of non-composition faculty. *Assessing Writing*, 6, (2), 179-197.
- Kantz, M., & Yates, R. (1994, August). Whose judgments? A survey of faculty response to common and highly irritating errors. *A partial proceedings of the 5th Annual Conference of the Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar*, Normal, IL.

- Kellogg, R. (1996). A model of working memory in writing. In *The Science of Writing: Theories, Methods, Individual Differences, and Applications*, (pp. 27-72). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates.
- Kellogg and Whiteford (2009) Kellogg, R.T. (2008). Training writing skills: A cognitive developmental perspective. *Journal of writing research*, 1(1), 1-26
- Kent, T. (1999). *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing Process Paradigm*. Urbana, IL: Southern Illinois University.
- Knoblauch, C. and Brannon, L. (2006). The emperor (still) has no clothes—revisiting the myth of improvement. In Straub, R. ed. (2006). *Key Works on Teacher Response: An Anthology*, (pp. 1-15). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Lea, M. and Street, B. (1998, June). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education*, 23(2), 157-173.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. London: Routledge.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). *Signs*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1973). *The Prose of the World*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2004). *The World of Perception*. New York: Taylor and Francis e-Library.
- Moffett, J. (1982). Writing, inner speech, and meditation. *College English*, 44 (3). 231-246.
- Murray, P. (1989). Teachers as readers, readers as teachers. In Lawson, B., Ryan, S., and Winterowd, W. (eds). *Encountering Student Texts: Interpretive Issues in Student Writing*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 59-72.

- Nystrand, M (2006). The social and historical context for writing research. In Macarthur, C.; Graham, S., and Fitzgerald, J. *Handbook of Writing Research* (pp. 11-27). New York: The Guilford Press.
- O'Neill, Peggy, & Fife, Jane M. (1999). Listening to students: Contextualizing response to student writing. *Composition Studies*, 27(2), 39-51.
- Panjares, F. and Johnson, M. (1994, October). Confidence and competence in writing: The role of self-efficacy, outcome expectancy and apprehension. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 28(3), 313-331.
- Panjares, F. (1996, Winter). Self-efficacy beliefs in academic settings. *Review of Educational Research*, 66 (4), 543-578.
- Perpignan, H. (2003). Exploring the written feedback dialogue: a research, learning and teaching practice. *Language Teaching Research* 7,2 (2003); pp. 259–278.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In Valle, R. & Halling, S. eds. (1989). *Existential Phenomenological Perspectives in Psychology*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Prior, P. (2006). A sociocultural theory of writing. In In Macarthur, C.;Graham, S., and Fitzgerald, J. *Handbook of Writing Research* (pp. 54-66). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Probst, R. (1989). Transactional theory and response to student writing. In Anson, C. ed. *Writing and Response: Theory, Practice, and Research*. (68-79). Urbana, IL: NCTE Press.
- Puma, V. (1986). Relationships between writer-audience proximity, register, and quality in essays of first year college students. *ERIC Research Report*, number 282217
- Rigsby, L. C. (1987, March). Changes in students' writing and their significance. Paper presented at the meeting of the *Conference on College Composition and Communication*,

*Atlanta.*

- Roche, M. (1973). *Phenomenology, language, and the social sciences*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Rubin, R. and Ellena-Wygonik, M. (1994). 'I still think it was a good paper': A study of students' evaluations of their own writing. *Journal of Teaching Writing*, 12 (2),199-216
- Santa, T. (2008). *Dead letters: Error in composition, 1873-2004*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Shute, V. (2008). Focus on formative feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(1), 153-189.
- Sommers, N. (1981) Responding to student writing. *Composition and Communication*, 33(2), 148-156.
- Stiff, R. (1967). The effect upon student composition of particular correction techniques. In Straub, R. (2006). *Key Works on Teacher Response: An Anthology*,(17-37). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Straub, R. (2000). The student, the text, and the classroom context: A case study of teacher response. *Assessing Writing*, 7 (1), 23-55.
- Thomas, S. & Pollio, H. (2002). *Listening to patients*. New York: Springer Publishing.
- Tuck, J. (2011). Feedback-giving as social practice: teachers' perspectives on feedback as institutional requirement work and dialogue. *Teaching in Higher Education*. pp. 1- 13.
- Valle, R., King, M. & Halling, S. (1989). An introduction to existential phenomenological thought in psychology in Valle, R. & Halling, S. eds. (1989) *Existential phenomenological perspectives in psychology*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Villanon, J., Kearney, P., Calvo, R. and Reimann, P. (2008). Glosser: Enhanced feedback for student writing tasks. Paper presented at the *Eighth IEEE International Conference on Advanced Learning Technologies*, 454- 458.

- Walker, M. (2009, February). An investigation into written comments on assignments: do students find them usable? *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 34 (1), 67–78.
- Warnock, T. (1989). An analysis of response: Dream, prayer, and chart. In Lawson, B., Ryan, S., and Winterowd, W. (eds). *Encountering Student Texts: Interpretive Issues in Student Writing*, (pp. 59-72). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Wiltse, E. (2002). Correlates of college students' use of instructors' comments. *Journalism & mass communication educator*. 57 (2). 126 -138
- Winterowd, W., & Blum, J. (1994). *A teacher's introduction to composition in the rhetorical tradition*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Young, P. (2000) “‘I might as well give up’: Self-esteem and mature students’ feelings about feedback on assignments’ . *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 24(3): 409–18.
- Zerger, S. (1997, March). This is chemistry, not literature: Faculty perceptions of student writing. Paper presented at the 48<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the *Conference of College Composition and Communication*, Phoenix, AZ.
- Ziv, N. (1984). The effect of teacher comments on the writing of college freshmen. In Straub, R. (2006). *Key Works on Teacher Response: An Anthology*,(pp. 94-111). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

## **Vita**

Michele Williams earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Southern Mississippi in December of 1983 with a double major in English and psychology and a minor in German. In 1994, she completed her Master of Arts degree in English at Virginia Commonwealth University. In the fall of 2004, Michele began the doctoral program in educational psychology at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. She completed her Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Psychology and Research in the summer of 2012.