A Social-Constructionist Review of Feedback and Revision Research: How Perceptions of Written Feedback Might Influence Understandings of Revision Processes

This social-constructionist review of research illuminates the ways in which feedback, reflection, and revision are all inherently relational processes. Research suggests that university students’ perceptions of feedback shape their revision processes, though it appears that their preferred types of feedback may not always lead them to make effective revisions.

Many university students find it challenging to develop strategies for improving the quality of their written assignments, even when they are provided with written feedback throughout writing-heavy courses (Price et al. 285). Even when students are afforded the opportunity to revise and resubmit assignments based on feedback, it can be difficult for instructors to ensure that their students understand how to go about improving their work. The research literature has recognized for some time that many students approach the revision process in ways that do not lead to improved
work (Higgins et al. 2001). As such, it is important for writing instructors to get a sense of how students make revision-related decisions. One important issue to consider, though it has not yet been thoroughly investigated, is how students’ perceptions of written feedback might influence their understanding of the revision process. The purpose of this article is to delineate connections between the research on student perceptions of written feedback and the research on student perceptions of the revision process. Articulating the connections between these two areas of research will lay the foundation for researchers to directly study possible connections between these perceptions.

The Central Challenge of Providing Effective Written Feedback

Broadly defined, a representative definition of feedback is a process whereby instructors communicate “information . . . to the learner that is intended to modify the learner’s thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning” (Shute 1). However, in contrast to the metaphor of transmission used in this definition, Higgins et al. argued that the ideal process of feedback might involve more than an instructor passing along information to a student; in fact, it might involve an ongoing dialogue between an instructor and a student (270). Higgins et al. made these assertions in an oft-cited research article critiquing the relative lack of scholarly attention to the relational dynamics of feedback and how they impact students’ perceptions of feedback (273). Since this article was published, many researchers have approached feedback from a relational perspective. For example, in one of the most cited articles on feedback, Hattie and Timperley argued that feedback is an opportunity for instructors and students to collaboratively “reduce discrepancies between current [student] understandings and performance and a goal” (86).

When viewing feedback as a relational process, reception of written feedback can often reflect a break in dialogue between instructors and students (Blair and McGinty). When feedback is provided in a written form, information is downloaded from the instructor to the student, but the opportunity for the student to participate in a dynamic conversation is not present. Many writing instructors conceptualize this situation as a break in dialogue and as a result, strive to provide opportunities for their students to enter into dialogue with them. Some instructors encourage this dia-
logue through in-class activities or discussions, while others do so through posted office hours or scheduled one-to-one consultations. However, even when office hours are made available to students for consultation about written feedback, they often do not take advantage of them (Griffin et al.). Furthermore, the research on teacher-student one-to-one conferences has not clearly established measurable benefits to the practice (Isnawati et al.), even though students have been shown to appreciate the opportunity to discuss feedback one to one (Blair and McGinty; Glazzard and Stones). With respect to the provision of feedback on student writing, many pedagogical strategies have been labeled as best practices in spite of the fact that there is no overwhelming evidence in support of their efficacy.

The central challenge of providing effective written feedback arises from the tension between the dialogic nature of feedback and the complexity involved in fostering an effective dialogue. Some early research has indicated that peer-to-peer dialogue regarding feedback may offer certain advantages that teacher-student conversations may not provide (Schillings et al.). Namely, reading the feedback that other students have received allows for a certain amount of psychic distance from the feedback (Schillings et al.). This distance may allow for students to more easily digest the expectations of the teacher. Furthermore, the opportunity to discuss teacher feedback as well as the general assessment criteria with other students may prove to be quite valuable. This opportunity for discussion seems to increase students’ understanding of what the teacher requires (Schillings et al.). However, Schillings et al. noted that their study was the first that explicitly examined the effect of peer-to-peer dialogue on students’ understanding of feedback. As such, additional research is needed to confirm or contradict their initial findings.

Given the tension involved in providing written feedback, it would seem that there are a few key important areas of research that need to be addressed. First of all, it is important to investigate the extent to which a personal connection to one’s own writing makes it difficult to receive and implement feedback. As speculated by Schillings et al., it may be that students are better able to digest the commentary on one’s own work after reviewing the commentary on other students’ work. Second, it is necessary to identify which characteristics of dialogic feedback consistently produce improvements to student writing. Finally, it is critical to consider the potential relationship between student perceptions of written feedback and
student perceptions of the revision process. As the act of revising one’s writing necessarily involves considerations of one’s audience and one’s purpose, it logically follows that perceptions of instructor feedback may influence perceptions of the purpose of revision.

To further explore the bases for these three potential lines of research, this article will provide a critical analysis of the research on students’ perceptions of feedback and revision through a social-constructionist lens. To achieve this purpose, the article is organized in the following sections: (a) an exploration of a social-constructionist framework for the feedback process; (b) a review of the research on students’ perceptions of the purpose of feedback; (c) a review of the research on students’ perceptions of the purpose of revision; and finally, (d) several suggestions for ways forward in the research.

A Social-Constructionist Framework for the Feedback Process

From a social-constructionist perspective, meaning is not defined and static, but is constructed collaboratively within cultural communities (Vygotsky). Vygotsky argued that language codifies cultural ideas about the world and that it is impossible to separate language from culture. As applied to the contemporary university context, academic disciplines can be considered as distinct cultures. Each academic discipline has its own discursive practice, that is, “a historically and culturally specific set of rules for organizing and producing different forms of knowledge” (Foucault as paraphrased by O’Farrell). This social embeddedness is not surprising given that “[w]riting is a social technology designed to communicate among people” (Bazerman).

In other words, writing is a practice that allows people to achieve particular social aims within specific sociocultural contexts using contextually appropriate rhetorical modes (Bazerman).

University students, particularly those in their first and second year of studies, have not yet been acculturated to their disciplines (Itua et al.). They are, therefore, approaching assignment criteria from different cultural standpoints to their instructors, who are entrenched within their disciplines (Hamilton; Itua et al.). Itua et al.’s interviews with seventy second-year undergraduate students demonstrated that learning citation practices and acquiring academic jargon are both challenges when engaging in academic writing. As a result, it is important for instructors to engage their students
in dialogues about academic discourse to make them aware of the cultural context in which their assignments are embedded. It is also the case, as the academic literacies perspective would suggest, that an overarching academic culture exists and associated epistemological assumptions come to bear on the meaning of assignment criteria (Lea and Street).

On a practical level, acculturation to academic disciplines and to the requirements of academic writing takes place through the practice of scaffolding, which refers to providing instructional mentorship supports for students as they make the bridge between what they are currently able to do and what they will need to do to meet the learning task at hand (Vygotsky). For example, if while working towards revisions, a student can articulate an argument to the instructor but not the underlying reasons that support their argument, the instructor could ask the student some questions to prompt deeper thinking on the topic. This scenario is an example of scaffolding because the student is not able to come to a clear articulation of ideas on their own, but they are able to do it with the instructor’s assistance. In this example, the instructor and the student are working within the zone of proximal development, or the zone in which students can reach a new level of understanding with the assistance of a knowledgeable other, in this case, the instructor (Vygotsky).

From a social-constructionist perspective, the feedback process encompasses dialogue between instructors and students about the meaning of assignment criteria, the purpose of written feedback, and how to apply feedback to future work. When students are left to interpret written feedback in absence of these dialogues, there is a high probability of misinterpreting the feedback and encountering difficulties with making subsequent successful revisions. In short, feedback cannot be understood in a vacuum; feedback is necessarily embedded in cultural contexts.
Students’ Perceptions of Feedback

Because misinterpretation is likely when attempting to understand feedback, it is important for university students to gain a sense of how that feedback fits within various contexts. While some students may believe that successful writing is best understood as the result of the thoughtful application of universal rules, nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, successful writing results from a nuanced understanding of discipline-specific norms, the pedagogical aim(s) of a given assignment, the audience whom one is writing for, and the reasons why a given audience may have specific expectations. Since students might not be aware of these important contextual factors, they often have a narrow understanding of the purpose of written feedback. Novice students, in particular, tend to expect professors to tell them all of the specific things that they need to do to be successful in their classes (Hamilton). As a result, students can become frustrated because they are missing context(s) that are outside of their awareness.

Pedagogical Literacy

According to Maclellan, the degree to which instructors are pedagogically literate is the degree to which they are proficient in applying abstract pedagogical theories to everyday educational situations. Though Maclellan focused on pedagogical literacy in terms of instructors, Price et al. argued that students also require pedagogical literacy (though they term it “pedagogic” literacy) to make sense of instructors’ feedback on writing assignments. Most students lack an understanding of their instructors’ pedagogical aims behind providing feedback and “[c]onsequently, we have a situation where students evaluate feedback … without the pedagogic literacy to fully understand its role in learning processes” (Price et al. 286). Students need to know what their instructors are trying to teach them through feedback on written assignments. Then, they can begin to understand how to use it for revising the assignment or transferring writing principles to future compositions.

Differences Between Instructors’ and Students’ Perceptions of the Purpose of Feedback

It is well established in the literature that students and instructors often hold differing perspectives on the purpose of written feedback (Carless; Bailey and Garner; Price et al.). Therefore, students are often left with lasting impressions of feedback that do not resonate with their instructors’
original intentions. Student perceptions of the purpose of feedback are often somewhat narrow because they rest on assumptions that arise from trying to make sense of varied experiences with feedback without the context through which to interpret them. Similarly, instructors’ perceptions of what students believe feedback is for are also based on trying to draw conclusions from isolated encounters with students. This breakdown in communication makes it necessary to research the differences between students’ and instructors’ perceptions of the purpose of feedback to understand why students are often critical of the feedback they receive.

When comparing students’ and instructors’ perceptions of the purpose of feedback, two main themes arise: *justifying the grade* and *feeding-forward*. The term “feeding-forward” comes from Higgins et al. and refers to the idea that feedback is meant to improve student learning by being generalizable to future work (Higgins et al. 274; Duncan). Both students and instructors recognize each of these purposes for feedback, but they may understand them from different points of view. A comparison of their perspectives helps to shed light on the misunderstandings between the two parties with respect to the purposes of feedback.

### Justifying the Grade

While neither students nor instructors generally identify the primary purpose of feedback to be justifying grades, they both acknowledge that assessment is a necessary role of feedback. However, qualitative interviews reveal that students tend to believe that feedback is “exclusively for the student,” and they do not always recognize the administrative purposes behind the recording of feedback (Bailey and Garner 192). In contrast, instructors have indicated in various studies that they are concerned with ensuring that the feedback provided makes sense to other people in their department, in case of a grade appeal or administrative check-up (Bevan et al.; Bailey and Garner; Price et al.). Therefore, while students may recognize that assessment is a necessary part of higher education, they may not recognize the administrative pressures that their instructors feel.

It is also worth noting that some students are suspicious of the motivation behind providing feedback and perceive that their instructors are mainly concerned with providing grades as opposed to helping students develop (Carless; Price et al.). Price et al. interviewed several students who expressed that, over time, their experiences with unhelpful feedback led
them to believe that instructors are not interested in helping students to develop through feedback but are only concerned with grade output (282). This is an unfortunate perception that may arise from student misunderstanding of the meaning of instructors’ feedback. To set up a context for the misunderstandings that occur between students and instructors, it is important to consider the mutually understood main purpose for feedback: feeding forward.

Feeding Forward

Students and instructors both generally acknowledge that the purpose of feedback should be to enhance student learning for the long-term, that is, it should be “feeding-forward” (Higgins et al. 274). This acknowledgment has been established in various qualitative studies (Bevan et al.; Price et al.; Bailey and Garner). Students generally expect that written feedback will provide them with the opportunity to learn how to improve future work. Instructors also acknowledge that feedback should be useful for students in terms of generalizing to future work. Research studies suggest that instructors hold varying perspectives of how to feed-forward on writing assignments, with strategies ranging from correcting errors in students’ papers to making very explicit connections to future assignments (Zellermayer; Price et al.; Bailey and Garner; Bevan et al.; Lee). However, students have somewhat different perspectives of what makes for effective feeding-forward than do their instructors. Generally, students desire feedback that lays out steps for improvement (Glover and Brown; Bevan et al.; Price et al.). Given that students do not often understand the language of assignment criteria, it makes sense that they would have trouble interpreting feedback that uses those same terms. Many studies have investigated students’ difficulties with interpreting feedback and figuring out how to apply it to revision or future work.

Applying Feedback

As previously established, it is well-known in the literature that students can find it difficult to interpret written feedback and to apply it to revisions or future work (Carroll; Carless; Glover and Brown; Bevan et al.; Poulos and Mahoney; Price et al.). Sommers noted in 1980 that research studies on the revision process were few and far between. Her definition of the revision
process was, “a sequence of changes in a composition—changes which are initiated by cues and occur continually throughout the writing of a work” (Revision Strategies 380). Based on this definition, research studies on revision are still few and far between. Whether cues to revise come from an instructor or from a student’s own recognition that revision is needed, revision should be a response to a need to for it, not something that is simply done for its own sake. Therefore, while studies on how students actually revise based on feedback are relatively limited, as evidenced by Jonsson’s literature review in 2013, it is useful to consider the results of studies that examine students’ perceptions of the usefulness of various characteristics of feedback. As Jonsson noted, the majority of studies identify students’ perceptions of feedback through questionnaires and interviews, which are often semi-structured in nature. Several main characteristics of written feedback that students perceive to impact understandability and utility are: amount of feedback, specificity of feedback, feeling of comments, and timing of feedback.

Amount of Feedback
It is not uncommon for students to report that they wish instructors would provide more or longer feedback (Bevan et al.; Jonsson). While more feedback may not be indicative of feedback quality, it appears that students might conflate the two. Presumably, students believe that more feedback would provide them with a greater understanding of where the strengths and weaknesses of their writing lie. This is likely a result of their unawareness that, as previously established, academic literacy is required to interpret many of the academic requirements. Therefore, since explicit instruction of assignment criteria does not seem to encourage students’ understanding of criteria (O’Donovan et al.), more written feedback that revolves around the jargon of assignment criteria may not actually help them to interpret the meaning of academic terms. In fact, students generally recognize that feedback is often too jargon-filled to be useful. This recognition is identified through the student perception that the feedback they receive has not been tailored to their individual papers.

Specificity of Feedback
Students desire specific feedback, or in other words, feedback that applies particularly to their own papers (Carless; Glazzard and Stones; Glover and
Brown; Poulos and Mahoney; Price et al.; Jonsson). As Sommers explained, based on her systematic review of hundreds of student papers, instructors’ feedback tends to be generic and applicable to any given piece of writing. In other words, feedback is often “not text-specific” (Responding to Student Writing 152). In one study, students perceived that generic feedback is the result of instructors not caring about their development and only being interested in justifying their grades (Price et al. 286). Students often wish that feedback would give them directions about how to improve (Glover and Brown; Price et al.; Jonsson). Research reveals that students are often interested in learning from feedback, but they just do not know how to do so (Carless; Glover and Brown; Poulos and Mahoney; Bevan et al.; Price et al.).

On the other hand, sometimes students find their feedback to be too specific. This perception usually arises in the circumstance that feedback is returned with no opportunity to revise or to apply to a similar assignment in the future (Lea and Street). Therefore, more specific feedback may not always be desirable, and instructors may need to select the degree of specificity in conjunction with the particular contexts within which their students are writing. For example, if students are permitted to rewrite their papers, more text-specific feedback appears to be useful, but students do not necessarily perceive text-specific feedback to be generalizable to future work.

**Focus of Comments**

Instructor feedback can either praise or criticize student work. According to Hillocks’ meta-analysis, negative comments, or those comments that pointed out deficits in student work, produce poorer quality writing from students than do positive comments (160). Similarly, studies of student perceptions of feedback suggest that students react poorly to negative comments, particularly if they have low self-esteem (Weaver; Poulos and Mahoney). On the other hand, some studies indicate that positive comments too early on may lead students to believe that the quality of their writing is higher than it is, which Hyland and Hyland found to be the case for students with English as an additional language. Some research suggests that students receiving positive comments do not necessarily know how to identify why their work was successful (Glover and Brown). This means that while students may prefer positive comments, they may not be able to apply it to revision any more than they can do with negative feedback.
Timing of Feedback

Many students perceive that feedback is not useful when they are not given the opportunity to apply it immediately (Glover and Brown; Carless; Bevan et al.; Price et al.). Furthermore, many students perceive feedback received after a course ends to be inapplicable to future coursework (Lea and Street; Glover and Brown; Bevan et al.; Price et al.). While timeliness has been long recognized as a hallmark of useful feedback (Gibbs and Simpson), feedback is most often provided in conjunction with a final grade, which has influenced some students to feel that feedback is only meant to justify the grade (Price et al. 286). Regardless of the timing of feedback, students generally desire more dialogue with instructors about feedback and feel that it would help them to utilize it more effectively (Price et al.; Jonsson).

Summary of Research on Written Feedback

Writing is not the sort of activity that can be taught didactically. Rather, it must be improved by practice. In this way, it is like driving a car. While a driver-in-training might study the criteria for successful driving (i.e., the rules of the road), this knowledge does not directly translate to success on the road (especially not immediate success). Often, students wish to be told everything they need to know to be successful. This wish sometimes corresponds with their perception of assignment criteria. While drivers-in-training generally understand that there may be a disconnect between their knowledge and their practice, writers-in-training do not necessarily share this perception. In other words, writers-in-training do not necessarily share this perception. In other words, writers-in-training generally understand that the purpose of feedback during driving lessons is formative and will help them to make specific changes to their practice. Writers-in-training, in contrast, often see the purpose of feedback as mainly evaluative. Helping students to understand the purpose of written feedback seems to involve the foundational step of helping them to understand the purpose of setting criteria: to provide them with targets that they will reach more closely with ongoing practice and feedback. However, despite the prevalent perception of feedback as primarily evaluative, university students do take notice when feedback appears to be given for the purpose of learning. They seem to appreciate opportunities to learn and to apply feedback to multiple writing situations. In fact, the research appears to demonstrate that a balance of specific suggestions and generalizable critiques is preferable to students.
However, despite the prevalent perception of feedback as primarily evaluative, university students do take notice when feedback appears to be given for the purpose of learning. They seem to appreciate opportunities to learn and to apply feedback to multiple writing situations. In fact, the research appears to demonstrate that a balance of specific suggestions and generalizable critiques is preferable to students. They prefer to have the opportunity to apply feedback immediately, when possible, but they also want to carry forward information they can use to improve their writing across courses.

**Students’ Perceptions of Revision**

As previously stated, investigations of the ways in which revision processes might be influenced by students’ perceptions of written feedback are minimal (Can and Walker). In one notable study, Can and Walker used structural equation modeling to develop an explanatory model of the relationships between variables related to perceptions of written feedback and revision-related behaviors. This model was developed based on data that was provided by 276 doctoral students from two universities. Can and Walker found that doctoral students are more prone to revise their work when they believe that the purpose of feedback is for improving as professional scholars (i.e., a role beyond the immediate writing task). They also seek out feedback on their work more often when they receive a balance of positive feedback and thoughtful criticism. While doctoral students are more experienced as writers than are undergraduate students, it seems that these groups share many perceptions of feedback and, therefore, it is at least plausible that undergraduate students might share some perceptions of revision. To confirm this supposition, structural equation modeling would need to be conducted with data from the undergraduate population. In order that a theoretical foundation may be set for such studies in the future, this section of the article will provide a critical overview of the research on students’ perceptions of revision.

**Revision as an Outgrowth of Understanding**

While this may seem to be an obvious statement, understanding is a mediating variable between feedback and revision. Nelson and Schunn conducted a study in which undergraduate students provided feedback on each other’s essays. They analyzed 1,073 feedback segments, coding them in terms of
the following themes: summarization, specificity, explanations, scope, and affective language. The feedback types were then analyzed for their impact on revision on students’ second drafts of their essays, including students’ perceptions of the feedback. Nelson and Schunn found that understanding was the only significant mediator between feedback and revision (which removed agreement with the evaluator’s feedback from the equation). Three aspects of feedback were significantly correlated with understanding: summarization, localizing problems, and providing solutions (the latter two are aspects of specificity). As such, it seems that students are more likely to implement feedback they understand, regardless of whether they agree with the feedback. Understanding feedback allows them to make revisions that will satisfy their audience.

Peer Suggestions Versus Instructor Suggestions
One of the most common questions in the literature is whether peer suggestions encourage more effective feedback implementation than do suggestions made by instructors. Part of the interest in this question derives from concerns about the time-consuming nature of providing effective feedback (Calver and Tweedley). Because instructors need to balance the responsibility of providing written feedback with other teaching, administrative, research, and service responsibilities, it is not often possible for them to devote as much time to providing feedback as they would like to do. The first benefit of peer feedback is that it can be included as part of course requirements, so that students are rewarded with credit for providing it, which offloads some of the burden of providing feedback in a way that fairly rewards students for their efforts. The second reason for the interest in peer feedback has to do with speculation that peer feedback may allow for greater psychic distance from the suggestions and, therefore, greater uptake on implementation (Schillings et al.). It may be that this psychic distance facilitates greater understanding and then, by extension, facilitates revision.

While some studies have demonstrated that students are likely to implement feedback provided by peer reviewers (Falchikov; Medonça and Johnson), others have shown the opposite (Connor and Asenavage; Paulus; Ruegg; Tsui and Ng). However, as Ruegg has pointed out, the studies that find greater uptake of instructor feedback than peer feedback are those in which students receive feedback from both sources (i.e., instructors and peers). Ruegg has argued that, when faced with feedback from both sources,
students may feel that the instructor feedback is inherently more valuable because the instructor is the one who will ultimately assign their grades. Ruegg’s suggestion that peer feedback is taken seriously when it is the only feedback that students receive appears to ring true, since studies that only involve peer feedback have demonstrated that students will make revisions based on it (Medonça and Johnson). Even in Ruegg’s study, in which students received both instructor and peer feedback, students appeared to understand their peers’ feedback more easily.

Furthermore, Rahimi conducted a study in which students who received training in how to give feedback learned to focus their commentary on global issues rather than more localized issues such as grammatical mistakes (which the untrained students in the study tended to focus on). The trained students made greater improvements to the quality of their own writing over the course of the term when compared with students who were not trained. Rahimi’s findings are in line with those of other studies (Bloxham and West; Cho and MacArthur; Nicol et al.; Smith et al.). It would seem that while receiving peer feedback certainly has its benefits, providing peer feedback may actually have an even greater impact on students’ development as writers (MacArthur). In contrast, Huisman et al. did not find any difference in benefits between the reception of feedback and the giving of feedback. Since Huisman et al.’s study was the first to employ a quasi-experimental design, it appears that their findings are worth noting, and additional investigation is needed to determine whether the reception of feedback or the provision of it is more impactful.

**The Role of Reflection in the Revision Process**

While the best source of feedback is contested (i.e., instructor or peer feedback), it remains clear that students must be able to reflect on the feedback they receive to effectively revise their writing (Chen et al.; Harris). Desmet et al. highlighted the fact that not all composition researchers have been comfortable with the idea of revision as a necessary part of the writing process, particularly prior to the early 2000s. However, the results of Desmet et al.’s 2008 pretest-posttest study demonstrated that reflective revision can indeed improve students’ writing. Furthermore, in 2018, Lindenman et al. conducted a study to determine if and how the quality of students’ written reflections on the revision process might be related to the revisions they made. A secondary aim of the study was to categorize
students’ revisions into the following categories: substantive, moderate, and editorial. With respect to this aim, it was determined that 28% of students made substantive revisions, 44% made moderate revisions, and 28% made only editorial revisions. Similarly, the quality of students’ reflections on the revision process were 19% excellent, 55% adequate, and 26% inadequate. In spite of the similarity between statistics regarding the quality of revisions and the quality of reflections on revision, Lindenman et al. noted a general mismatch between the revisions described in the reflections and the actual revisions made to the papers. In other words, Lindenman et al. observed a disconnect between what students said they did and what was actually observed in the revised papers. While the papers generally improved in response to reflections, they may not have improved to the expected extent or in the expected ways.

The researchers supposed that this curious phenomenon might arise from the students’ tendency to focus on what they planned to change, as opposed to why they needed to make changes. They speculated that students may have been simply recording what they were told they needed to do, while lacking the procedural skills to effectively make the changes. As a result, they recommend “direct[ing] students’ metacognitive attention to the why of revision over the what” (Lindenman et al. 602; italics in original). While reflection may be a key part of the revision process, students appear to need explicit instruction in how to usefully reflect. It seems that, even if students understand what the feedback they receive is asking them to do, they do not always understand why they are being asked to do those things. Furthermore, it appears that students may believe that they have accomplished particular revisions despite evidence to the contrary. This phenomenon may speak to the complexity involved in recognizing the effectiveness of one’s own writing decisions.

To further illustrate this point, Yang found that undergraduate students felt that their ability to make global revisions was directly related to their ability to view their writing from multiple perspectives. In Yang’s study, which examined ninety-five students’ reflections on self-correction and peer review, students discussed the difficulties they had with noticing problems in communicating their ideas until the other students commented on their work. Some students even mentioned that sentence-level editing became easier, as they would often notice sentence-level problems during their own editing time, but they did not necessarily know how to fix the
problems on their own. The fact that it becomes easier to notice problems with communication when provided with feedback might seem obvious. However, "neither the process of how students reflect on their actions, nor how students verify and modify strategies in writing [was] presented" in research prior to Yang’s study (Yang 1203). In other words, while reflection on writing has been a focus on research over the past twenty years or so, researchers have only begun just examining on the procedural particulars of how feedback, reflection, and revision processes might work together.

**Summary of Research on Revision Processes**

Preliminary structural equation modeling with graduate student populations has demonstrated that students make more effective revisions when they believe that the purpose of revision reaches beyond the immediate task at hand (i.e., when they perceive a connection to improving their broader scholarly work) (Can and Walker). They also make more effective revisions when they receive a balance of positive feedback and thoughtful criticism (Can and Walker). While it is not yet clear if these relationships between variables would also apply for undergraduate populations, it does at least seem plausible. Research on perceptions of written feedback has demonstrated that undergraduate students have a preference for feedback that ‘feeds-forward’ as well as for feedback that is positive in its orientation (Higgins et al.; Hillocks). However, as Glover and Brown have demonstrated, the preference for positive feedback does not always translate into successful revisions, and so it may be that a balance of feedback types would foster more effective revisions, just as it does in graduate populations.

While there is much we do not yet know about how feedback types affect revision processes, it does seem that, however obvious, understanding feedback is the most important factor (Nelson and Schunn). Nelson and Schunn found that even when students did not agree with the feedback, they were better able to implement it when they understood it. While there is much we do not yet know about how feedback types affect revision processes, it does seem that, however obvious, understanding feedback is the most important factor (Nelson and Schunn). Nelson and Schunn found that even when students did not agree with the feedback, they were better able to implement it when they understood it.
offered a detailed accounting of the features of feedback that tend to foster understanding: summarization, localizing problems, and providing solutions. Based on these results, it would seem to be sound advice for instructors to include these features in their feedback to students. However, further investigation is necessary to confirm these findings.

In addition to types of feedback, another area of research interest has been the source of feedback. One of the common questions has been whether peer feedback engenders more effective revisions than does instructor feedback. Peer feedback is generally perceived as a viable solution to the problem of increasing instructor workload, especially when students are compensated for their time providing feedback (in the form of course credit). Furthermore, it has been supposed that providing peer feedback might provide a certain amount of psychic distance to students when they are digesting instructor expectations. Finally, it has been shown that being trained to give peer feedback can itself lead to improvements in one's own writing (Rahimi). Given these potential benefits, it is not surprising that so many research studies have focused on peer feedback. Ultimately, though, it is not yet clear whether students are prone to implementing peer feedback effectively. Some studies have shown that they do, while others have shown the opposite. As Ruegg astutely observed, the variability in results may be because, when students are given the choice between receiving peer feedback and instructor feedback, or presented with both, they might be more trusting of instructor feedback due to the instructor's expertise in the subject area. Additional research is needed to determine whether this is the case.

Finally, regardless of the types of feedback received or the source of said feedback, the role of reflection on feedback is paramount. While researchers have only recently begun examining the particulars of how feedback might lead to reflection and then to revision, initial findings seem to show that reflection can lead to improvements, though perhaps not always to the expected extent. In particular, Lindenman et al.'s finding that students' self-reflection records on their revisions differed significantly from actual observed revisions is troubling. Troubling though it may be, it is possible that students find it difficult to determine the success of their own revision decisions without these two things: (1) a sense of why they are making certain revisions, apart from instructor direction; and, (2) ongoing feedback that responds to changes they make. Lindenman et al.'s research lends further credence to the idea that courses ought to engage students
in multi-revision processes so that they can gain a more concrete sense of how best to enact revision strategies so that their intended meaning is communicated effectively with the audience.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

In general, the purpose of this paper was to review the state of knowledge on written feedback, as well as revision processes. The reason for doing so was to establish a foundation for future, systematic investigations of the relationships between variables related to feedback and revision. In short, there is a lot we do not yet know about how feedback might influence students’ reflections on their work, and, in turn, their revision practices. Looking at the extant literature through a social-constructionist lens has illuminated the ways in which feedback, reflection, and revision are all inherently relational processes that are deeply embedded in social contexts. Therefore, future research should focus on uncovering how these relational processes might manifest and how they might be made more effective and/or efficient. In addition, it will be important for future research to consider qualitative experiences with these relational processes. It is not enough to streamline these processes without considering the ways in which the well-being of students and instructors is implicated in them.

Continuing to further our scientific understanding of the relational processes involved in writing will require a two-pronged approach. First, it is important to measure the effectiveness of feedback, reflection, and revision processes as well as the ways in which relationships between them can be optimized. Research questions related to this aim must necessarily involve quantitative research approaches such as experimental or quasi-experimental studies and structural equation modeling techniques. While these approaches have not been particularly popular in composition research, they can provide valuable evidence of measurable outcomes. However, measuring effectiveness is not the only important vein of research. It is also critical to examine the well-being of students and instructors as they participate in these relational writing processes. Both groups are comprised of human beings with unique strengths, weaknesses, hopes, and fears.

To treat the processes involved in writing as variables that we can manipulate, without considering the ways in which human actors might feel, does a great disservice to the further development of writing instruction. As composition researchers have long done, they must continue to consider
the qualitative experiences of the people who are involved in making writing happen in college and university classrooms. Only then can we consider the evidence regarding the effectiveness of various strategies while monitoring the best ways to foster their use so that students and instructors can find the greatest satisfaction possible in their endeavors.

As stated previously, there are three key potential lines of future research that appear to arise from the present review. To begin, it will be necessary to investigate the extent to which feeling personally connected to one’s writing makes it difficult to receive and implement feedback. Following that, it will be productive to consider whether there are feedback modes available that might solve this problem, such as implementing peer feedback in place of instructor feedback (if peer feedback does indeed provide students with greater psychic distance). Next, research is needed that will identify, in measurable ways, which characteristics of feedback may lead to the greatest improvements in student writing. Finally, we need research that will explore potential relationships between students’ perceptions of feedback and their perceptions of revision. While the extant literature has briefly touched on each of these areas, we need to build a body of research that can confirm, complicate, and/or contradict the current findings.

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