

Reflection Paper 2

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GIVING FEEDBACK ON WRITING

In the second week of the practice teaching, my mentor teacher encouraged me to grade students' order-listing paragraphs which they had been developing for two weeks. My task was to provide feedback in a way that seemed reasonable to me as a teacher and that would be the most beneficial to the students. The process of giving feedback proved to be challenging because of the feelings which I experienced while being engaged in this activity as well as the lack of conviction about what type of feedback will serve students improve their writing both in the short and long-run.

What I initially realized as I approached the process of writing this reflection paper is that I frequently feel apprehensive when I need to grade somebody's work. Even though such feelings were often present, I did not articulate or verbalize them until this moment. As they become more tangible, I begin to understand what causes their reappearance. Firstly, when I read students' writing, I frequently encounter expressions, words, and sentences which I find very difficult to correct. This difficulty comes from the fact that I do not have the confidence to decide whether something could be perceived as correct by a native speaker, or not. Although I am able to identify areas of student's writing which need to be improved, I do not have the intuition of a native speaker to know exactly how a given sentence should look like. On the other hand, I am aware of the fact that my responsibility is not to provide students with the "correct" or "the best" version of a sentence or an expression, but give feedback that will encourage them to independently figure out how to improve their writing.

Another area of concern regards the type of feedback that will be the most useful for students. The question which reappeared as I was considering this subject was whether explicit and direct feedback is more or less beneficial than implicit and indirect feedback. My intuition was that by providing implicit feedback, a teacher scaffolds student's development as an independent writer. Therefore, instead of fixing problems with students' writing, I provided comments which pushed them to think about it and look for ways to improve it. On the other hand, however, I wondered if the comments which I provided were understood by the students and if they were able to use them to correct their paragraphs. I feel that the subject of giving feedback is highly context-dependent and the type of feedback should be tailored to a specific student's needs, but at the same time I feel that it is not a very realistic goal.

Today I had the chance to talk about this subject with Frances and the conversation with her enriched my understanding of this it and made me feel more confident. Firstly, it helped me realize that my mentor teacher and I face similar challenges and are constantly re-shaping and developing our understanding and approach to giving feedback. For instance, my mentor teacher is exploring various ways of providing feedback and learning on daily basis whether a given approach works or not. Secondly, Frances said that she saw a lot of value in providing less explicit feedback in the form of color coding where students needed to figure out on their own how to fix something in their writing. She explained that when she gave explicit and very direct feedback students were becoming like "robots" who did not take ownership of their writing but only relied on the teacher to tell them what the problem and the solution were.

Another important lesson that I have learned is the value of encouraging students to perceive their mistakes as opportunities for development and not as something that is frustrating. Frances asked the students to choose "five best errors" from their rough draft and write how they

corrected them in the final version of their paragraphs. What struck me was the language used to describe mistakes. She did not ask students to find the most serious or the worst mistakes but the best errors. I believe that such a shift in language can help student look at their mistakes differently.

Aside from the subject of providing feedback, my overall experience of the practicum has been very fruitful. Today I led one of the activities and the students responded to it and to the fact that I was teaching in a positive way. I feel that I am part of this small teaching-learning environment. What I find especially beneficial is the opportunity to talk about teaching with Frances and exchange our perceptions and experiences related to teaching.