

A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL ESL WRITING CONFERENCES:
THEORY, PRACTICE, AND PERCEPTIONS

BY

EVA MISZOGLAD

THESIS

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Master's Committee:

Associate Professor Randall Sadler, Chair
Lecturer Hugh Bishop

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Abstract

This research project investigates one-on-one and group ESL writing conference practices and instructor and student views on how these collaborative writing conferences help improve students' academic writing skills. Research provides strong evidence for the significant positive impact of writing conferences in improving students' writing skills, and they have become a core part of most post-secondary ESL writing program curricula. This study seeks to investigate ESL writing conference practices as part of required college-level academic writing courses at a large US university by analyzing video-recorded conference sessions of several both native and non-native teachers employed at the same ESL writing program and the international students enrolled in their writing classes. To understand both teacher and student participants' perceptions of these conferences, their goals and desired outcomes, ethnographic interviews were conducted. This study provides an account of their self-reported understanding of these individual and group ESL writing conferences. This project compares the data examined according to conversation analysis methodology and ethnographic interview approach with what the current literature suggests as desired practice for conducting successful ESL writing conferences.

Keywords: ESL writing, L2 individual conferences, teacher-student interaction

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how ESL writing conferences are conducted in one-on-one conferences settings, and to investigate both instructor and student definitions, expectations, and attitudes towards the writing conferences and it aims to analyze what these differences could be attributed to. ESL writing conferences are a core part of each writing course offered by the department of linguistics at the university of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana (UIUC). These ESL writing courses are specifically designed for those nonnative UIUC students who are required to take the UIUC-developed English Placement Test (EPT) based on their pre-matriculation test scores. International students whose result falls below the required proficiency score for exemption are mandated to take one or more ESL course they are placed into based on their performance on both the written and the oral parts of the EPT. All nonnative students who are enrolled in one of the offered ESL writing courses, both graduate and undergraduate level, have at least one individual writing conference with their ESL instructor. Which are one-on-one meetings with their respective writing instructors to have a conversation about the student's writing and to, by negotiation of meaning help students become better writers in the American academic writing context.

Benefits of one-on-one writing conferences are a core element of college-level writing classes. Several studies describe the purpose of individual conferences as a way for students to be more involved in their learning and an opportunity for students to discuss their writing process with their instructor, discuss possible misunderstandings or breakdown in communication, and for learners to receive individualized feedback on their work and to ask any questions related to writing to their writing teacher. Research on individual writing conferences

has predominantly sought to find ways to raise learner-awareness by prompting students to become responsible for the content they write, to be able to explain the rationale behind the choices they make, and negotiate for meaning with the instructor during these one-on-one conferences. While a few studies have argued that the main objective of these conferences should be to optimize learner involvement, research that investigates the nature of the interaction between writing instructors and ESL students during these conferences are scarce. Studies that explore the nature of interaction have set to explore and subsequently found that writing tutors, who are native speakers of English, conduct their one-on-one sessions in a significantly different manner when the student is a native speaker as opposed to a non-native tutee. However, no known research has analyzed the possible differences in teacher talk where both native and non-native instructors hold writing conferences only with international students.

This research was motivated by my desire to explore whether there are any differences in the writing conference practices among the ESL Writing Staff at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where I have worked as a TA and Course Leader since 2014. Over regular weekly discussions with over 30 ESL instructors, it has become an area of interest to explore how teachers understand instructor's and students' role, define the objectives of, - and determine the success of their writing conferences. This study was conducted to investigate and analyze the nature of teacher talk during writing conferences of native and non-native instructors, respectively. This paper provides excerpts of both instructor and student interviews. ESL instructors were asked to describe and justify their approach and choice of conference strategies, what they want students to take away from these conferences are, and how they measure their effectiveness. Questions to students aimed to elicit students' understanding of the purpose and the desired outcome of the writing conferences. Understanding cultural differences in

pedagogical practices is important in and of itself. And understanding possible differences in norms is especially important not only for teachers but for administrators as well. This study provides an insight of how international and domestic faculty and graduate students understanding learning goals, teaching norms and practices can differ, which may impact students' attitude and impression of the courses a department offers. At a notable research university such as the University of Illinois that have large, and steadily increasing number of international students, graduate teaching assistants, and faculty, implications of this research can be valuable.

1.1 ESL WRITING STAFF AND COURSES AT UIUC

The university offers a variety of ESL Service courses to both international undergraduate and graduate students to provide an introduction to- and offer assignments to practice writing for academic and professional purposes. The purpose of these courses is to equip students with necessary knowledge on writing for academic purposes and provide the students with ample opportunities to improve their writing skills. ESL Service Courses are courses designed for international students, who are non-native speakers of English. These courses are offered within the Department of Linguistics. The ESL writing courses are mandatory academic writing classes that international students need to take based on the TOEFL/IELTS and EPT scores. All students who are required to take academic writing classes are placed into one of the six writing classes held by the ESL Writing Program. The writing courses are required for international students who score below the university's required level of proficiency.

Individual conferences are held as part of writing courses for international students in the ESL Service Courses at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Writing conferences are individual meetings with the instructors of writing courses, held throughout the

writing course, to discuss how to revise students' papers. Instructors of these writing courses include both American and International TAs and Lecturers. Instructors of these ESL writing courses include both American and International TAs and lecturers. International writing instructor, for the remainder of the paper, will be used to indicate that the instructor is not a native speaker of English. ESL Program's objective for individual conferences in all writing courses:

Individual conferences allow the opportunity for additional communication and support between the instructor and each individual student. Instructors should use this meeting to review where students are in their writing process and where they need to be, and to create action goals for their students. These conferences should focus on students' performance on the final writing assignment for the course, which is students' final demonstration of understanding of the course skills.

Accomplish: During the conference, instructors should elicit any questions that the student has on their draft for the final major assignment, provide feedback and clear goals for the student to improve on and work toward for the final draft, and discuss the student's current grade in the course. ("UIUC ESL Writing Home," Individual Conferences section, 2014)

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research, initially was set out to reveal how writing conferences are conducted among the various writing instructors within one department at a major American university. The following questions guided this study:

1. What are commonly shared ESL writing conference practices among the various writing instructors?
2. How do instructors and students define a successful ESL writing conference?
3. How do the findings of this study align with the current state of research on writing conferences?

1.3 ORGANIZATION

This introductory chapter provides contextual information that is necessary to understand this study and the questions that motivated this research. It also offers a brief introduction to the the ESL Writing Program, the program' and course' objectives, staff and student population and discusses why writing conferences are a core element each writing course in more detail as this research was investigated this program's ESL writing conference practices. Chapter 2 provides more in-depth information about and gives a comprehensive synthesis of the available literature on the topics of individual writing conferences. Subsequently, Chapter 3 describes the mixed-methodology research design through which data was collected. The two methods are Conversation Analysis and Ethnography. The focus of this study was determined by following conversation analysis methodology, while the interview data was collected by ethnographic interviews. Chapter 4 outlines the results of the video-recorded one-on-one ESL writing conferences. These results will be discussed in Chapter 5, where I provide answers to the research questions of this study. The final chapter, Chapter 6 offers a summary the main findings of this study, lists its limitations, and considers its possible implications for L2 writing classes and conference practices.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF WRITING

2.1.1 *The Product Approach*

Four major approaches are discussed when with regard to how writing has been taught in formal educational settings. This section will discuss these approaches; the product, the process, and the genre approaches, as they are all essential for providing the theoretical framework for how the teaching of writing has changed. It will mainly focus on issues specific to students whose native language is other than English. The product approach, although not applied exclusively for ESL and EFL classrooms, is still important to discuss in order to accurately demonstrate the relation between the three and how these approaches are all building blocks of how writing for ESL students is taught.

The product approach to writing emphasizes the need to provide students with the desired language structures and organization patterns they are expected to use in their own writing and focuses on students' ability to imitate structures in effective texts, which also serve as the criteria to assess student development and are a basis for evaluation. Supporters of the product approach argues that by teaching students how language should be used, and participating in error-correction activities, the quality of their writing will improve. Its major focus is on the end product and what students compose as a result of studying sample texts and providing them with sample phrases and organizational structures that students can apply in their own writing, thereby producing the desired texts within a speech community (Nunan, 1999; Tangpermpoon, 2008).

This approach came under major scrutiny as longitudinal research provided evidence against its effectiveness asserting that analysis of example texts and their imitation do not improve students' writing skills (Day, 1947; Mills, 1953; Cowley, 1958; Hillocks, 1984;

Hillocks, 1987). These studies report that students, even when demonstrated sufficient mastery of structures during in-class activities and their writing course assignments, are unable to transfer and effectively apply their knowledge to other writing activities where they were not given explicit instruction or provided model texts (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, 1963; Elley, Barham, Lamb, & Wyllie, 1976). Other studies examined differences in writing practices and deduced that skilled writers' focus on content and structure, while for unskilled writers, the mechanical aspects are of primary concern (Hillocks, 1986; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996).

As it became evident that the product-approach alone did not sufficiently improve students' overall writing skills, researchers called for a method that addresses higher level student's needs, and aims to make students creators of their written texts, aiming for students to be able to identify and revise their own writing errors (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996). As a result, a new set of conceptual frameworks, significantly less product-, and more process-oriented methodologies have emerged.

2.1.2 The Process Approach

The process approach, still one of the most widely used methodologies used both in L1 and L2 settings, sets out to equip students with writing skills that focus on how writing is produced, what processes lead to successful texts, arguing that writing consists of several stages, which are more important than the produced texts (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). This view on writing distinguishes a number of stages that writers undergo; planning, pre-writing, writing, receiving feedback, and revising. The flexibility of writing stages (see Figure 1.) allows for writers to repeat the steps multiple times or combine them, due to their recursive nature (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996; Raimes 2002; Grabe, 2001; Kroll, 2001; Reid, 2001; Seow, 2002; Sokolik,

2003; Nation 2009). It “encourages self-discovery and authorial ‘voice’; meaningful writing on topics of importance (or at least of interest) to the writer” (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996, p. 87), in line with Hillocks’ claims that writers need to be equipped with skills and strategies that are applicable to any writing task, moving away from the need to imitate model texts (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996; Hillocks, 1986). Raimes (1983) further argued that the process approach to writing decreases the strain of time restriction, allows for several revisions through the incorporation of both instructor and peer feedback, and gives learners more freedom with regard to choosing the topic they choose to explore.

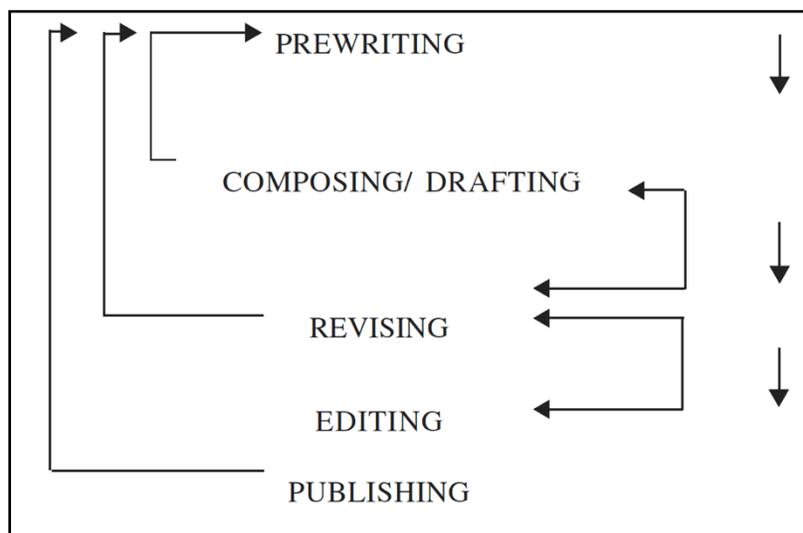


Figure 1. Process Model of Writing (Tribble, 1996)

A major difference between the product and process approach to writing is that while evaluation according to the product approach focuses merely on students’ final product, the process approach supports the incorporation of alternative grading methods, such as journaling or assigning completion grades as part of the overall grade for the assignment. Another major difference is the process approach’ emphasis on audience and purpose as the primary factor in

determining the content of any piece of writing. This more contextualized allows L2 learners to use their own language resources and develop a writing strategy for themselves, moving away from the product-based writing paradigm where students were encouraged to imitate model texts, written by others (Silva, 1990).

Despite the overwhelming support for product-approach based teaching, researchers have discussed its several limitations. A major concern that has been raised regarding the of the process-based approach is that it does not provide writing teachers with adequate guidance on how the classes should be conducted, and what their objectives are, what the teacher's role is during class activities. If it is argued that it is a process of discovery for each individual student, instructors are left with critical questions about lesson objectives and materials, what class activities to include, the criteria by which students' work should be evaluated on and when evaluations should be made, as the process approach asserts that the stages of writing are non-linear and cyclical, it does not define when the writing process should be considered finished (Tuffs, 1993).

Another concern is that this approach falls short in acknowledging the cultural context in which the writing is produced and according to the cultural norms according to which it will be judged (Horowitz, 1983). However, the process approach does not account for the fact that any piece of writing will be judged against according to a writing community's standards. Academic writing has stylistic and organizational pattern requirements that are non-negotiable, and writers are expected to adhere to basic academic writing standards in an academic context, and all written text must conform with established culturally accepted levels of evaluation (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991; Rothery; 1989). As the process approach underestimates the importance of students' ability to produce a final text that conforms to these standards due, a new approach to

writing instruction was proposed to create a balance between the product and the process approaches to writing (Badger and White, 2000; Brown, 2001; Davies, 1988; Horowitz, 1983).

In addition to the process approach's limitations in L1 contexts, the process approach failed to meet ESL learners' needs in several other aspects. So far, only L1 context has been discussed, as prior to the process approach, the teaching of writing in EFL and ESL settings was not rooted in one theory-based approach. Literature on how writing could most effectively address ESL learners' difficulties in writing in a foreign language was not available until the 1980s (Zamel, 1982).

Before the process-approach gained support from researchers studying foreign language acquisition, ESL instruction did not specifically target any learning skill (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) separately: teaching focused on describing prescriptive rules of the target language and practicing these forms during class activities--an approach which manifested itself in the widely popular Grammar Translation Method (GTM). GTM supporters reasoned that as languages are made up of a set of rules, successful communication will occur when linguistic accuracy is achieved (Richards and Rodgers 1982 & 1986). The GTM to L2 learning has been replaced by other methods starting from the 1970s, largely due to its ineffectiveness in achieving communicative competence, over reliance on teaching forms based on prescriptive grammar rules, and its inability to prepare students to use the target language in real-life situations.

The process approach has been widely adopted and used to teach writers of other languages, as it promotes the mastery of a set of skills and requires learners' active involvement and self-reflection, it is not without limitations. One concern with the process approach's application to ESL writing is that it does not account for L2 learners' grammatical errors and linguistic deficiencies. Often, the main reason L2 learners experience a breakdown in

communication and their writing is due to grammatical errors. This approach; however, having been developed to teach native speakers, lacks linguistic instruction and the incorporation of grammatical error correction (Badger and White, 2000).

2.1.3 Genre Approach to Writing

Genre, first defined by Swales (1991) as: "... a more or less standardized communicative event with a goal or a set of goals mutually understood by the participants in that event and occurring within a functional rather than a social or personal setting." (Swales, 1981, p. 10) Since this definition, Swales has developed his earlier position by outlining in more detail the component parts of the definition, adding that as genre is a communicative event, its context, purpose, and relationship between language and culture requires a close examination (Swales, 1990). The genre approach acknowledges that within each writing community, different norms are deemed acceptable and in order for written communication to be effective, writers need to produce texts that are in accordance with to these conventions (Swales, 1991). Another positive aspect of the genre approach to writing is that it is descriptive rather than prescriptive, and it relies on the analysis of existing texts' features. It aims for writing instructors to facilitate students in the identification of genre-specific features, and help them use said features effectively in their own writing (Davies, 1981).

While there are several benefits to the genre-approach to writing, it has its limitations, especially with regard to the classroom applications. While in nature, the genre approach is not prescriptive, it has often resulted in the promotion of a prescriptive teaching approach where students are taught the perceived rules of a specific genre and are evaluated on their ability to reproduce these genres, similarly to the product-based approach (Tuffs, 1993). Additionally,

teaching a genre effectively requires an extended period of time, which writing classes often lack due to the limited hours, and most genres have traits that bear no similarity to one another, making its application limited, leaving significant gaps in students' writing skills (Davies, 1983).

2.1.4 Process-Genre Approach

Many ESL classroom have adopted a new approach, consisting of elements of both the genre- and process- approach to writing, that incorporates the identification of genre-specific features, focus on the final product in terms of its appropriateness within the context and the speech community in-, and for which it was written (Badger and White, 2000). This approach (see Figure 2.) also maintains that the goal of writing instruction is for students to acquire writing skills, structure and organizational strategies, and to equip students outside with tools they can utilize of the ESL writing classes, and improve their higher-level skills, such as critical thinking skills and ability to express, argue for, support, and clarify their views and thoughts clearly as not only L2 writers, but speakers as well (Rusinovci, 2015).

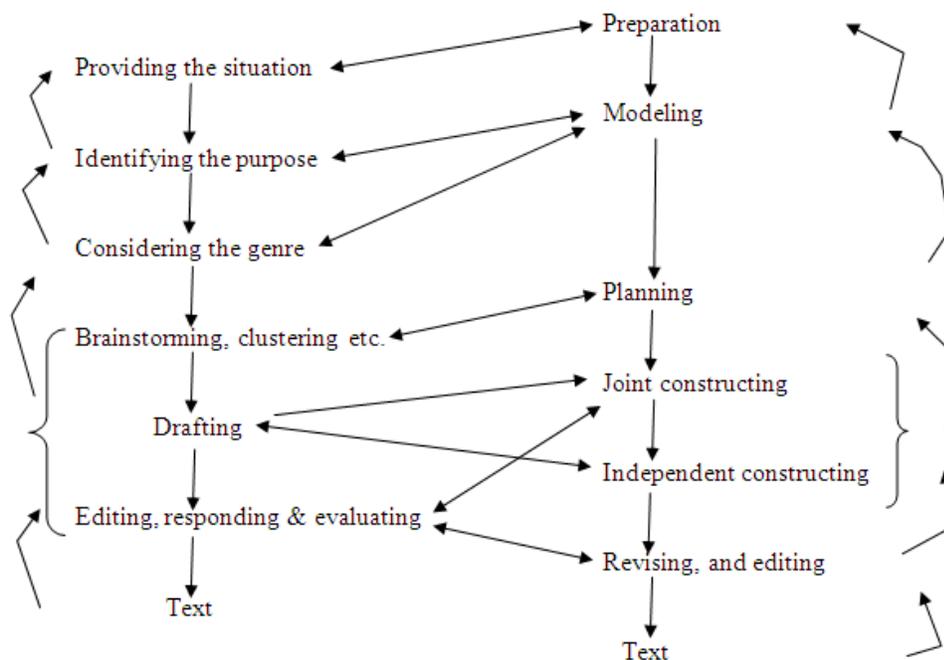


Figure 2 Process-Genre Approach (Badger and White, 2000).

2.2 ESL WRITING CONFERENCES

2.2.1 Feedback, Error Correction, and L2 Writing Conferences

Feedback on students' work has always been a fundamental classroom procedure; however, in most classes feedback is often provided after students submit their papers for evaluation, when they no longer had a chance to revise their work based on the instructor's feedback. This was no different for writing classes, as students were assigned a grade solely based on the final written product. As discussed in the Process-Approach to Writing section above, with emergence of the process approach, the timing, role, and method of instructor feedback changed, as it became only one of the stages of the writing process. Instructor feedback now is usually given on several drafts of a single assignment, strengthening the approach's claims that writing is another form of interaction, in which students need to be aware of the

audience's needs, the negotiate for meaning, and take ownership of their writing, and be able to explain their views.

With the process approach, the way students' errors are corrected has also changed. Although it is generally accepted amongst L2 researchers that students' mistakes should be pointed out and corrected by instructors (Polio, Fleck and Leder, 1998; Ferris, 2002), some researchers, such as Truscott (1996), argued that students do not benefit from error correction practices, students will not understand why some of their writing was corrected, and will often not read the feedback, as they do know that their grade on the assignment will be unaffected.

However, as writing instruction's focus has shifted and the writing process is emphasized in ESL classrooms, some of Truscott's (1996) critique is no longer valid, as students not only can, but the process-approach encourages continuous revision of their work based on the feedback they receive, and with the incorporation of writing conferences, they are given the chance to ask questions and clarify the feedback they receive. By participating in writing conferences, learners can gain an understanding of their weaknesses that impede understanding of their intended message, and self-correct themselves thereby developing strategies that help them avoid these issues in the future, in, and more importantly, outside of the ESL classroom (Eckstein, 2012; Ferris, 2003; Hillocks, 1986; Zamel, 1985). As the role feedback prompted revision and required active involvement from both learners and instructors, one-on-one ESL writing conferences became a common practice. These conferences are regarded to be conducive to achieving higher levels of reader-awareness, thereby providing students with advanced writing skills proficient writers possess.

Conferencing is two-way communication, which allow the students to express their own ideas and discuss them with their writing instructor or their peers (Chi, 1999). In this work, both

student-instructors and students-instructor writing conferences were studied. Studies that discuss the limitations of holding writing conferences point out issues related to the logistics of conducting them; the fact that they require a significant amount of time and effort from instructors (Leki, 1992; Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). Even though conducting writing conferences is time-consuming, they are claimed to be make the most conducive approach to significantly improve students' writing skills (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996; Ferris and Hedgecock, 2005; Raimes, 1983). A negotiated teaching event held outside of the classroom, the face-to-face conferences offer the students a chance to address their own difficulties and needs through a dialogue with the teacher (Reid, 1993, p. 220).

Regarding the dynamics of teacher-student writing conferences, Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) point out that writing conferences are most effective to those learners who are actively engaged in the conference interaction and negotiation of meaning, as their post-conference drafts, reflect students' ideas and thoughts significantly more accurately than those students that took a more passive role, where the writing conferences consisted of significantly more teacher-talk.

2.2.2 Teacher Talk in ESL Writing Conferences

Research on teacher talk in second language writing conferences is few. While the benefits of these one-on-one conferences are generally accepted by TESOL professionals, studies that specifically analyze the discourse of L2 conferences are scarce. Several research projects have focused on the peer perception process and the language used in interactions between peers and students' response to this practice and how effective these peer comments are in improving written work's quality. Some studies have examined instructor-student writing conferences in

tutoring centers to determine whether these conferences help improve learners' writing skills. Few research has focused on one-on-one writing conferences to reveal the nature of interaction between students and instructors.

Studies that have examined tutor-student writing conferences proposes that some practices during writing conferences seem to be more effective in developing writing skills (Cumming & So, 1996; Harris & Silva, 1993; Thonus, 1998, 1999, 2004). A collaborative environment where learners are active participants rather than passive listeners and a non-authoritative attitude are believed to increase learner-awareness and improvement in non-assignment specific writing skills (DeGuerrero & Villamil, 2000; Weigle & Nelson, 2004; Williams, 2004). Most of these studies; however, are concerned with the impact of conferences on students' work and the changes learners make to their drafts following the one-one-one meeting with their instructor. Some studies that have investigated writing tutor or teacher talk (Aljaafreh and Lantolf, 1994; Cumming and So, 1996; Anton, 1999; DeGuerrero and Villamil, Patthey-Chavez and Ferris, 1997; Haneda, 2000, 2004) noted on the amount of teacher to student talk ratio and reported that regardless of learners' proficiency level and the fact that more proficient learners tend to participate more in the one-on-one conferences, instructors still dominate the conference interaction.

Although examination is scarce on ESL writing conference discourse, significant research has been carried out to reveal the nature of teacher talk. Koshik (2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2005, 2010) examined individual writing conferences in second-language academic writing contexts following CA methodology. In her research, Koshik (2010) argues that during these conferences, writing teachers were more likely to prompt students to self-correct rather than explicitly give them corrected forms. She identifies four different types of questioning practices

applied by writing instructors: Designedly Incomplete Utterances (DIUs), Reversed Polarity questions, Alternative questions, and questions that animate the voice of an abstract audience. Each of these known-answer questions have a different function and can be distinguished by a different use of grammar or intonation. While researchers agree that ESL writing conferences should be a part of the writing curriculum, studies on how conferences should be conducted to maximize its benefits, what their objectives are, and how these objectives can not only be met but be communicated effectively of instructor-to-student talk are scarce. In this study, writing conference will involve both one-on-one teacher-student and peer interactions.

As previously mentioned, most ESL students are not familiar with writing conferences, writing instruction focuses on improving students' ability to write in order to achieve high scores on standardized language tests. Teaching writing for academic purposes and research-based writing is a rare element EFL classes, unless the student specializes in English or American Studies at a university. Hence, understanding students' perception of writing conferences is crucial for conducting effective writing conferences. However, existing literature on student expectations on these conferences are scarce. ESL students in writing classes often do not feel confident with their writing, and might be intimidated by facing the teacher directly with their writing. A study by Goldstein and Conrad (1990) compared ESL students' writing drafts prior to writing conferences with draft students produced after receiving instructor feedback and reported that students who were active participants of the conference by negotiating for meaning were successful in increasing the quality of their essays. However, those students' second draft who were passive and focused on the instructors' explicit error correction showed no improvement from the draft produced prior to the conference.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The proposal of this project was submitted to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board in Spring, 2017 and was approved on May 27th, 2016. Recruitment procedures and consent forms were approved by the University of Illinois Office for the Protection of Research Subjects. Video recording of the conferences started in October 2016. Initial interview questions were written as part of the application form, with the explanation of the required flexibility for conducting ethnographic interviews. Both instructor and student interviews began in November 2016, lasting until the end of January of 2017. This thesis follows the Conversation Analysis (CA) type of research methodology, the research process did not begin with a hypothesis, only a broad social action, ESL writing conferences, was chosen to be studied.

3.1.1 *Conversation Analysis*

Conversation analysis (CA) investigates how utterances, by virtue of the sequences in which they appear, perform recognizable social actions. Doing CA involves recordings and detailed transcripts and would seem to be a more intense kind of observation, potentially adding to ethnographic strategies. Ethnography may add to Conversation Analysis' close inspection of talk. CA methodology requires recordings to be authentic; that is, interaction occurring in a natural-setting, not under experimental controls, and are spontaneous (Stivers & Sidnell, 2013).

3.1.2 *Ethnography*

Ethnography is the study of social interactions, behaviors, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organizations, and communities. The central aim of ethnography is to provide rich, holistic insights into people's views (Hammersley, 1989). Ethnography sets out to explore the nature of a particular social phenomenon hoping to learn from informants something they do not already know. Ethnographic interviews resemble a learning process, and not an experiment controlled and determined by the researcher. The ethnographer must be flexible and creative. Ethnographic interviews are significantly different from the traditional, pre-written interviewing method. Interviewers need to stay in the moment and reflect on interviewees' responses real time in order to be able to structure their interview and devise follow-up questions based the information the subject reveals.

Effective ethnographic interviews predominantly ask descriptive questions. Questions that prompt interviewees to provide their own thoughts, perceptions, and interpretation of situation, which allows a deeper understanding of interviewees personal views of an experience. Ethnographic interviews are often called guided conversations, as a set of interview questions are written prior to talking with respondents. While this is not necessarily, as questions are dependent on interviewees' answers, I did prepare questions for two reasons: 1) it is required by the IRB to provide all data collection methods in order to receive permission, and 2) I have never done ethnographic interviews before, and wanted to guarantee that the discussion still targets the questions I set out to research. The order of the questions was flexible, and I did not ask all of the questions to all respondents, and when I felt appropriate, added other questions for elicitation purposes and to keep the conversation's flow.

You need to find a way in which the informant is happy to give you as long a speech sample as you need, while not knowing exactly what you are looking for in it. This is usually not difficult, but it is important to be attentive to keeping the speech spontaneous. It is also important that the interviewee understand that you are interested in speech and are trying to collect a completely natural sample.

(Jordan, D. (2007) Quick tips for Ethnographic Interviewing. Retrieved from pages.ucsd.edu)

The interviewer is advised to pay close attention to the respondent, to identify patterns in their speech that can be used to further the discussion. Using words and phrases respondents have previously used helps build rapport and decrease the chance of interviewers choosing words that give hints to respondents as to what the researcher would like to hear, and they can be effectively used for clarification by not paraphrasing the interviewee to again, avoid any possible bias the paraphrase could contain, thereby compromising the authenticity of the interview. I audio-recorded each interview so that data is not a mere report of the researcher's interpretations of the provided answers. I did not take any notes were during the interviews to prevent any possibility of distraction it could provide.

Conducting ethnographic interviewing can offer the researcher a more realistic and meaningful objectives and goals for the particular act being studied. This process enables the researcher to develop a better understanding of students' needs and awareness of their interpretations, which can be used to redesign how to explain the purpose of writing conferences and to help students better understand its objective and usefulness.

3.1.3 *Mixed Research Methodology*

Researchers in the fields of communications discourse analysis, linguistically-anthropology, and pragmatics use recordings along with ethnographic methods to allow a close examination of the social practice, adding ethnographic interviews to allow participants to express their own perceptions and feelings of these events to uncover a broader understanding of the speech event (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995). Researchers note that there is often a large discrepancy between the way subjects describe their own practices and beliefs and the way the act is carried out and interpreted, asserting that the relationship between CA and ethnography are “of mutual affinity” (Grimshaw, 1989; Sacks, 1984).

Two qualitative research methodologies were selected to investigate the nature of ESL writing conferences: conversation analysis (CA) research approach and ethnographic interview methodology. Both were chosen in order to collect the most authentic, naturally-occurring data so that the collected data is not compromised or biased by the potential hypotheses prior to analyzing the findings, as I have been conducting individual conferences for 3 years at the same university and had been present for several of them as many of the conferences are held at the offices of instructors that are shared by 3 or 4 Teaching Assistants. Initially, only a CA approach was proposed, I decided to add an additional qualitative research method to discover and learn about instructors’ and students’ perception of their writing conferences, and what their expected outcome is and how they define an effective ESL writing conference. The questions asked to the participants were designed exclusively for this project and reflect the ESL Writing Department’s objectives on student-teacher writing conferences (described in the ESL Writing Program section of Chapter 1).

Neither CA nor ethnographic research is designed in order to test a hypothesis; they are both interested in studying a particular phenomenon as it occurs in a natural setting. The data is only to be analyzed after the data collection is finished. Through the ethnographic interviews, I set out to explore how ESL academic writing instructors and students define the goals of writing conferences and what their expectations are. All interviewees met with the researcher one-on-one, in person. Although the questions were pre-written, my choice of research method was ethnographic interviews, where the questions should be open-ended in order to establish a natural and conversation-like atmosphere between the researcher and the interviewee.

Ethnographic interviews are conducted with instructors and students to discover instructors' own perception of their practices as well as students' opinion on these conferences. Ethnographic research consists of asking questions to the participants that test the validity of the researcher's perceptions against the participants' intuitions and beliefs. Investigators must be receptive when approaching research subjects and to have an open mind when attempting to capture subjects' understanding of their own perceptions and experiences (Saville-Troike, 1996). In like manner to CA methodology, ethnographic data is collected in natural settings. As ethnographic approach to research seeks to compare and contrast these findings with others research findings, answers to these questions will be compared to the analysis of video-taped one-on-one conferences. These two different types of methodologies enable us to see not only how students and teachers feel and what they think about one-on-one writing conferences, but how these practices are done in naturally-occurring interactions.

The decision to add an additional qualitative research method was to discover and learn about instructors' and students' perception of individual conferences, and what their expected outcome is and how they define an effective ESL writing conference. Interviewing allows

researchers to verify how accurate their observations were (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006). The purpose of ethnographic research, similarly to Conversation Analysis methodology, is not to test out a particular hypothesis, the data is only to be analyzed after the data collection is finished. Through ethnographic interviews I set out to explore how ESL academic writing instructors and students define the goals of writing conferences and what their expectations are.

All interviewees met with me one-on-one, in person. Although the questions were pre-written, my choice of research method was ethnographic interviews, where the questions should be open-ended in order to establish a natural and conversation-like atmosphere between the researcher and the interviewee.

3.1.4 Data collection

Participants were informed prior to signing the consent forms, in the consent form as well as orally prior to starting their writing conference that their participation is voluntary and are under no obligation to sign the consent forms and are free to discontinue participating in the project at any time without any consequences. The procedures of the different parts of this research study were explained to instructors through email and by in person. Consented students were informed through their respective instructors while they were given the instructions to ensure that they understand that by signing all parts of the consent form, they would be invited to an interview with the researcher, which would require time spent solely on taking part in this elective study. As part of the recruitment process, both instructors and students were informed that this study is not intended to test any hypothesis and is merely interested in ESL writing conferences.

All research was conducted at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and all instructor participants are either lecturers or Graduate Teaching Assistants in the ESL Writing Program teaching one of the ESL Academic Writing courses offered by the department. All student participants are either undergraduate or graduate students fulfilling the university's required academic writing requirements for international students.

3.1.5 Recruitment

In order to gather ample data for analysis, approaching ESL writing instructors from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and with varying levels of teaching experience is crucial. After receiving several instructors' consent to having their one-on-one writing conferences videotaped, students enrolled in the consented instructor's classes need to be recruited who give permission to the videotaping of their individual conferences.

As I am also a TA in the writing courses and know the other instructors, I recruited instructors orally through personal face-to-face contact. The instructors teaching these courses are my colleagues that I meet with every week. Most ESL classes take place in the Foreign Languages Building (or other buildings on campus), where I teach and hold an office; consequently, access to the instructors as well as the students are feasible. Students were also contacted through personal contact via email. In the consent form to be given to the participants, it was made clear that their participation is voluntary and that they are free to discontinue the participation at any time.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

3.2.1 *Instructors*

All instructors consented to be interviewed, although one of them asked to not be recorded. There is a wide range of diversity between the participants, in several aspects: both native and non-native English speakers were interviewed, international instructors from a variety of cultural and language backgrounds and domestic students, and teachers with varying levels of teaching experience, ranging from one semester to 12 years. Interviews were conducted with 11 consented instructors whose conferences were videotaped. The instructors who were informed about this study were both domestic and international ESL instructors working in the ESL Writing Service courses at the University of Illinois. Recruitment of instructors was done by the researcher through face-to-face interactions. The procedures of the different parts of this research study were explained to instructors in person and subsequently by sending a copy of the consent forms via email.

The instructors teaching these courses are colleagues that I meet regularly throughout the semester. Most ESL classes take place in the Foreign Languages Building, where I teach and work making it possible for me to personally talk to all the instructors. There is a wide range of diversity among the participants, in several aspects: both native and non-native English speakers were interviewed, international instructors from a variety of cultural and language backgrounds and domestic students, and teachers with varying levels of teaching experience, ranging from one semester to 12 years. No age requirement was set for the instructors. Instructor interviews varied in length ranging from 17 minutes to one hour. Locations for the were selected based on their

convenience to each individual instructor, bearing in mind its conduciveness to having an open discussion.

In order to gain an insight of each instructor perspective on writing conferences, I asked similar questions to each instructor, with the first question being the same in each one: “How would you describe a successful writing conference?” Below are the additional questions I planned prior to interviewing the participants:

- 1) What is the typical format of your individual writing conference?
- 2) What is your expectations of students when they come to the conference?
- 3) What do you hope to happen as a result of these individual writing conferences?
- 4) Do you think your students improve with the help of one-on-one conferencing?

3.2.1.1 Students

The majority of the students were willing to be interviewed, but only 30 were selected out of the 107 volunteers. Respondents were not selected fully randomly, but the selection process was not based on a personal preference some students to other, but merely to have a diverse group of interviewees both undergraduate and graduate levels, a variety of linguistic and cultural background, and age. Student respondents’ age varied from 18 to late thirties, from six different countries: China, Korea, Brazil, Spain, Japan, and Turkey. Consented students were informed through their respective instructors while they were given the instructions to ensure that they understand that by signing all parts of the consent form, they would be invited to an interview with the researcher, which would require time spent solely on taking part in this elective study. Only those students were approached about possible interviewing, who had already volunteered to have their conferences videotaped.

I contacted the students who volunteered to be interviewed individually via email upon receiving their consent forms to schedule the interviews. Students when signing the consent forms were asked whether they would be willing to participate in a short one-on-one interview with the researcher in order to follow-up on their individual conferences and to elicit what they perceive as the goal of individual conferences and how beneficial they feel the conferences are to the growth of their English academic writing skills.

Many of the interviews were conducted right after students' individual conferences or shortly afterwards. The interviews took place in the office dedicated to the ESL Writing Course Leaders, the Linguistics Library, or the TESOL Library, all located in the Foreign Languages Building. The length of the interviews ranged from 7 to 30 minutes, depending on how the natural flow of the conversation. In some cases, the interviews were question-answer style, with a limited amount of production from the students. In these situations, I did not force to further to conversation and ended the interview, as the setting was not conducive and did not replicate the kind of naturally-occurring conversation ethnographic interviews set to achieve. All interview sessions were audio-recorded.

The first question that I asked from the students was "Could you describe your individual conference?" in order to prompt the student to produce as much language as possible, which would consequently help me to devise the follow-up questions:

- 1) What are your opinions and feelings about writing conferences?
- 2) What are your expectations of these individual writing conferences?
- 3) What difficulties, if any, do you have when interacting with your instructor?
- 4) Do you feel these conferences help you to become a better writer?

3.3 PROCEDURES

The total number of participants who were videotaped in this study is 148, 11 Instructors and 30 students. The number of videotaped sessions are 63, and the number of audiotaped interviews are 41. Four types of data were collected: 1) Videotaped recordings of writing conferences; 2) Audiotaped interviews with instructors; 3) Audiotaped interviews with students. Instructors were contacted upon receiving their signed consent forms to schedule two short meetings. During the first meeting, I emphasized to instructors again that I was not looking to confirm any hypothesis and that I was merely interested in the conference sessions. I provided instructors with copies of the student consent forms to ask their students whether they would be willing to participate in my research.

The second meeting was scheduled after instructors talked about my research to their students and they contacted me with the number of students that decided to take part in my study. During the second approximately 5-minute meeting with the instructors I provided a camera to the instructors, and explained to them where to place it so that both the student(s) and instructor were visible, as well as the paper they were discussing. I provided instructions on how to turn on/off the camera, how to charge it, and how to start the recordings. I noted down their last scheduled conference so that I could collect the recording equipment after the conference recordings were done. This was also the time I received the signed consent forms of the students, and schedule the instructor interview.

The conferences were videotaped in the location where they normally conduct individual conferences, in the instructor's office, the regular classroom of the ESL class, or one of the university's libraries. After video data was collected, I began to transcribe the data, a process that is yet to be completed. In order to keep the anonymity of the participants, all transcriptions are

and will be done by using pseudonyms. Excerpts of transcripts are provided in a qualitative analysis of data in chapter 5 and 6, using conversation analysis methodology. Instructor interviews took place over a longer span of time, as some courses conferences are scheduled for the last week of the semester and some instructors were leaving for the winter break. These instructors were interviewed in January, 2017.

3.3.1 Conferences

The length of writing conferences is between 15-20 minutes. Instructors cancel one class (one 80-minute session) or two classes (two 50-minute sessions) to hold one-on-one conferences instead of the regular classes. The conferences in the ESL classes are scheduled at the end of a unit, often the first and/or the last assignment the students turn in at the beginning and/or end of the course. About half of the offered course have one individual conference at the end of the semester, the other half has one at the end of the first unit, and one at the end of the final unit, unit 4.

It is up to each instructor how they schedule and where they hold their conferences, but it is encouraged that they are held during the canceled class period(s) and before or after it for easier scheduling and are held in the classroom or instructor's office, or the library. Instructors are encouraged to give students a preparation sheet so that students come to the conference with specific questions about their draft. Teachers are explicitly instructed to involve the students and take the role of a facilitator, and engage in a discussion about students' writing process and negotiate their intended meaning. They are also told not to correct students' grammar or focus on the mechanical aspects of students' texts.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS THROUGH CLASSROOM ETHNOGRAPHY

After a thorough analysis of both conferences and interviews, the predominant direction I took was a sociolinguistic analysis with the study's implications being pedagogical. As mentioned in the Chapter 3, ethnographic interviews allow researchers to gain the participants own perceptions of the observed event. Agar (1986) composed a manual for ethnographic data analysis in order to allow researchers to find differences and common themes present in the collected data. Lufland and Lofland (1984) suggest that categorizing information according to observable patterns. By analyzing contextualized data, we can understand how participants' own perceptions of a particular social action affect how that action is carried out (Hamilton, 1999). I analyzed and grouped the results of this study based on the patterns I identified in instructor conference practices, teacher-student talk, and perception of both instructors and learners.

To allow for thorough analysis of student-teacher talk, each conference was video-recorded. I took notes while watching and listening to the data, chose my focus of analysis, and transcribed the relevant data I address in this study. The interview data was analyzed in a similar manner to the video-recorded conferences; with the exception of the interviews being audio-taped as opposed to video-taped. I took notes on the participants' responses and noted any similarities. In the results section, I first provide the shared perspectives of instructors followed by the common themes mentioned by student participants, in addition to those that were deviated from most other respondents' report.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 CONFERENCES

Table 1. Conference Recording Data

Total Number of Recorded Conferences	Total Number of Recorded Instructors	Total Number of Recorded Conference/Instructor	
63	11	6	9
		5	1
		4	1

Table 2. Teacher-to-Student Talk

Average Conference Length*	Average Length* of Student Talk/Conference	Average Length* of Teacher Talk/Conference
15:34	3:32	12:02

**length in minutes*

Table 3. Question Initiation

Total number of Questions	Teacher-Initiated Questions	Student Initiated Questions
991	816	175

Table 4. Question Types (categories based on Mackiewitz & Thompson, 2014)

Question Type	Definition
Common ground	<p>These questions are asked to determine what common understanding the two parties have. These questions during writing conferences could be directed to measure what a student knows and to identify gaps in learner's knowledge so that time can be spent on filling in the gaps rather than discussing what learners already know.</p>
Conversation control	<p>These questions aim to maintain a specific conversation's flow. In writing conferences, this is often to regulate them by keeping them on topic, on time, and to ensure that progress is made. Instructors often use these to move from one section of the paper to another and to not let the conference session go over the dedicated time.</p>
Leading	<p>Yes/No questions, where the question-initiator has a pre-determined right answer to the question. These are non-negotiable and in the writing conference frame, these can only be initiated by instructors.</p>

Table 5. Teacher-Initiated Questions

Question Type	Question Examples	Average Number /Conference
Conversation control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did you bring your checklist? - How is life? - How is it going? - Did you have any other questions? - Anything else? 	2
Leading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did you have any questions? - Does that make sense? - Is what I am saying clear? - Do you know what you need to change? - So, do you see how you can change your thesis statement to make it more specific? 	6
Common ground (confirmation check)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did you make changes based on the peer review? - What citation style are you using? - Are you using IEEE or APA? 	5

Table 6. Student-Initiated Questions

Question Type	Question Examples	Average Number /Conference
Confirmation requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you understand this part? I don't know if it's OK". - Is my thesis statement good? - Is the citation OK? - Can you look at the reference page? 	2
Clarification requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Here? - Move this at the end? - So I put this sentence [at] the beginning? 	1

Table 7. Instructor Feedback Types and Examples

Error Correction Type	Example Comments	Average number/Conference
Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subject-verb agreement problem. - Adverb-adjective confusion. - Verb tense issues. Don't switch tenses within one sentence. - Countable vs Uncountable noun 	98
Vocabulary/Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'It is kind of hard to think' 'kind of' is too informal. Replace. 	31

Table 7 cont.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use 'also' to add a new idea. - Informal Expressions - Pronoun referent clarification - Parallel structure 	
Formatting & Citation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formatting issue - Citation error: In-text citation - Citation error: Reference Page - Paraphrase instead of direct quote 	4
Paragraph/Paper Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This section is redundant. Delete it. - Write a concluding sentence at the end of each paragraph - Move these sentences to the end of the paragraph - Summarize your paper first then add the implications. - This paragraph doesn't have a topic sentence. 	2

4.2 INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEWS:

I only provide excerpts of some of the answers respondents provided here: 1) those that were representative of the interview questions; 2) those answers that help answer the research questions I set out to find answers to. Due to the nature of ethnographic interviews, only the first

question I asked received an explicit answer from all respondents, as some of the responses included answers to the additional questions I initially proposed. To respect the anonymity of participants, no instructor or student names are used. In order to avoid the possibility of identifying participants by representative phrases they use, in all cases when referring to answers provided by teachers, they are referred to as “Instructor”. Learner’s answers are indicated by “Student”.

Question 1: How would you describe a successful writing conference?

Instructor: Students are supposed to come with their conference sheets. They have to ask questions, but they don’t. I guess they are successful if students have a good final draft. They want the grade anyway.

Instructor: If they end on time? Students always ask weird questions. Or like unrelated ones. They ask me to check their entire paper, but they like it. I kind of go with what students want me to look at. They always just want grammar, because they know they have issues, so I help with those. If they correct them in the final one, it is good, but I get so mad if they do not. I do not know if they care.

Instructor: I see them as successful when students understand something I have been trying to teach them. I am happy to see if they have a lightbulb moment. If they have one of those than it is good. You cannot expect more in 15 minutes.

Instructor: I do not know, when they come, they just want me to talk. So, I just give my feedback and I guess that is it. If they have questions when the time is up, they can come back for another meeting. I think they are successful when students leave happy.

Instructor: Sometimes I really do not know what they want to say because they make so many mistakes. Their sentences are all over the place, like several tenses, you know, or yeah, third person, and stuff like that, also pronouns. I try to tell them to not use those and what they should do instead. But I do not see them ever again after the conference, so I do not know. They like to ask for more English help, so maybe they can use it later, I think.

Instructor: I love the conferences at the beginning of the semester because when I used to have them at the end, I was sad because the students were so different just with me than in class. There was this one that I did not hear anything from the whole semester and he was so nice, but at that point it didn't matter. When we do them at the beginning [of the semester], the class is more fun.

Instructor: I want them to ask questions but they do not, so it gets boring. I feel like I give them the feedback I would normally write down, on the other assignments. Some of them seem happy to come, but

some just do not even say anything. I answer all of their questions, but they can only write down 3, so that's ok. Some of them want me to comment everything, which is impossible! We only have 15 minutes, which is too short to discuss a 10-page research paper.

Instructor: My main goal is to address the errors I found. At this point, if they are still making the mistakes they are, they clearly need help. Because it is like, unless they correct those, there is no way for them to write well. If I can get them to understand those, I think they go well. I have asked some of them to sign up for another time slot, because they really need to work on the paper a lot more.

Instructor: I like the ones where we just talk. Usually, the good students will not have many questions and I know they are good, so I just ask them what they'll do over the break.

Instructor: I wish we had more time for these! It's hard to really talk about their paper when I know other students are waiting outside So many times it's the first time I see the paper so I can just check formatting and take a quick look.

Instructor: Good question. I guess when I don't have to do much.

Question 2: What is the typical format of your writing conferences?

Instructor: I start by checking if students brought everything they were supposed to bring to the conference. I look at their prep sheet where they write the questions and start with those. That usually takes up the whole time we have.

Instructor: I ask students if they have questions and go from there. If they do, cool, we just go over those and then look at the whole paper. I point out things they should fix and see if they get it, I mean if those are clear and at this point, time is usually up. There is of course, variation, like the students that have questions that basically ask me to look at the whole paper. That's why I have to schedule them back to back, otherwise, they would go [on] forever.

Question 3: What is your expectations of students when they come to the conference?

Instructor: Most undergraduate students are not truly concerned with improving their writing skills at all. Their concern is getting an "A".

Instructor: I don't even know. Just come at least. So many do not show up or delete themselves off of GoogleDocs last minute.

Question 4: What do you hope to happen as a result of these individual writing conferences?

Instructor: It is my hope that my students will meet with me after preparing some thoughts and concerns of their own. I love to address those concerns in as much depth as possible. After that, we can move on to things I have picked up on (i.e. grammar, repetition and misuse of phraseology) that they never seem to notice on their own.

Instructor: I hope my students use their brains like sponges to soak up the valuable feedback, criticism and tips they are being given. They are lucky to be getting this help but too often they act like ingrates and take these conferences for granted. It almost seems like an inconvenience for them. I hope I'm wrong about this, but the persisting questions regarding grades rather than knowledge and improvement speak volumes.

Question 5: Do you think your students improve with the help of one-on-one conferencing?

Instructor: I think a few do, but I'm not really sure if they're improving or if they're just following explicit instructions. They have the wherewithal to ask the questions in enough detail to "earn" the grade they want, yet they do only what we discussed and never try to apply these principles elsewhere or further the implications of what has been explained to them.

Instructor: My students seem to respond very well to the conferences. They almost always come prepared to get to work and have good questions ready to

ask. Their curiosity and thirst for knowledge and the want to improve is what drives me to get up every morning.

Instructor: My students never seem to care or bother to prepare anything but the bare minimum of what's required, asking very generic questions, and inevitably ending each conference with a question about how to get a high grade on the paper. It's clear that they don't care because in their cultures grades are more important than the retention of knowledge. It seems like a pretty big waste of time on everybody's part.

4.3 STUDENT INTERVIEWS

Question 1: Can you describe what happened during your writing conference?

Student: My instructor called me into [their] office and we talked for [a] long time. My instructor gave me many feedbacks on my paper. They ask me questions about my formatting and if I know how to change it. Also, they wanted to know if I had some more ideas for how to make [my] paper more PIE. I don't know what it is.

Student: My instructor just want[ed] to make sure I was understanding these processes we are working on in [the] classroom. When I show[ed] them my progress they seemed happy and we talked about how I can improve for [a] better grade.

Question 2: What are your opinions and feelings about the conferences?

Student: Um, I don't like them. My teacher always talks about things that I don't understand. They assume that everybody understands everything after they explain [it] one time. I never know what to ask because I don't even know where to begin. My instructor seems very irritated when I don't understand so I stop[ped] asking questions about these things.

Student: They are not needed. If I want help, I would just go to the office hours. I don't need to [have a] conference.

Question 3: What are your expectations of these individual writing conferences?

Student: I expect nothing.

Student: I really want to know how to get [an] "A". It's very important for me because I want to transfer.

Student: I am nervous, because I don't know what we do.

Question 4: What difficulties did you have interacting with your instructor?

Student: My instructor doesn't listen very well. They always know what I should do, but if I don't understand, they don't really explain why. They just tell me grammar I should change. Sometimes she speak[s] very fast and my English [is] not so well.

Student: When I express concern to my teacher about [my] grade, they just seem to push it aside and move on to [their] next point.

Student: I ask [the] teacher questions about why we need to learn some aspects of this class and there is never a sufficient answer.

Student: I don't know why we I have to take this class. I am in finance and I don't need to write research paper[s]. Teacher is nice but my program is short and it takes such long time to do homework. I think it should be not mandatory.

Question 5: Do you feel the conference helped you become a better writer?

Student: No. These conferences were just a formality and a waste of time. My instructor seemed flustered and uninterested when we met. They went over their predetermined remarks for me, told me they didn't have time for any of my questions and that I should come to office hours.

Student: I liked them because it felt like I learned a lot that I didn't understand during the class. I like its individual.

Student: Yeah. I know how to format APA. It's hard because in China we don't have that and the rules are really complicate[d].

Student: I didn't appreciate these meetings because I was already doing very well in the class and was told to make only minor revisions. Only students who are struggling should have to go.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: WHAT ARE COMMONLY SHARED ESL WRITING CONFERENCE PRACTICES AMONG THE VARIOUS WRITING INSTRUCTORS?

9 out of 11 teachers started the conferences by asking students whether they had any questions. As instructor speech dominated the conferences, students took a passive role and expected instructors to lead. Conference' length ranged between 14-23 minutes. Out of the 63 recorded conferences, the discussion was dominated by instructors. Length of student speech ranged from 01:27 minutes to 4:51 minutes. On average, students talked for 3:32 minutes. Teacher talk averaged at 12:02 minutes, the shortest recorded time of instructor talk was 11:28 minutes, while the longest was 17:09. Writing conferences were dominated by the instructors, as in all of the 63 video-recorded conference, teacher talked the majority of the time, as approximately 70% or more of each writing conference was teacher talk.

Questions initiation reflected similar teacher dominance. For every teacher-initiated question, one student question was asked on average. Students initiated 3 questions in a typical writing conference, while instructors asked 13 during one conference. The total number of questions was 991. Teachers asked 816 of these questions, and students asked 175. The two most common type of questions were leading and scaffolding questions and common ground questions, in the form of confirmation checks. Students asked yes/no questions, in the form of confirmation checks.

There were two major types of questions instructors asked to their students. The question categories I used are loosely based on question types were identified by Thonus (2004), and further exemplified by Mackiewicz and Thompson (2014). Thonus (2004) identified 5 different question types: 1) Knowledge deficit 2) common ground; 3) social coordination; 4) conversation

control; and 5) leading and scaffolding questions. While the first 4 types can be both student and instructor initiated, leading and scaffolding questions are reserved to teachers. I concentrated on the 3 main types of questions that make up 797 of the total 991 of questions asked during the conferences: 1) common ground (comprehension check); and 2) leading questions. The 56

The most common type of instructor-initiated question, 424 out of 816, was leading question. Comparable to questions that check for comprehension, this questioning strategy is common among teachers and is also called 'closed', 'reproductive' or 'known-information' questions; all implying that these questions have a right answer and do not invite interaction and the acceptable response is non-negotiable. They prompt students to come to a conclusion that has already been determined (Mackiewicz and Thompson, 2014).

Comprehension checks were the other major type of question instructors used to elicit from their students. 317 of the 816 teacher-initiated questions were comprehension checks. These questions are often asked by educators to ensure that students understand what they had been talking about. Most of the questions (273) were formulaic, such as "Is what I am saying clear?" or "Does that make sense" or "Do you know what you need to change?", as opposed to the non-formulaic questions (144) that were specific to the particular conference, such as "So do you see how you can change your thesis statement to make it more specific?". Students that were more confident about their speaking skills and had a better rapport with their instructor were asked more non-formulaic questions. Conversely, students rarely asked comprehension questions of the instructor. My data contains 7, in one instance, a student asked whether the teacher thought the implications section in her paper was clear: "Do you understand this part? (pointing at the section of the paper) I don't know if it's OK".

While students always acknowledged teachers' questions either or both verbally and nonverbally, learner-initiated questions were atypical with the exception of request for the instructor to confirm that they understood what the instructor wanted them revise in their paper, for example, "Here?" as they pointed at a specific section of their paper. I named the type of questions students asked as yes/no confirmation check questions as they prompted instructors to confirm that a specific section or aspect of the student's paper was satisfactory or correct if it was not. Even when students had filled out a preparation sheet prior to the conference, asked their instructor about a broad aspect of their texts regarding sentence structure, verb tenses, entire body paragraphs, the formatting of the paper, references page, or in-text citations. They formulated their questions as a closed question, such as: "Is my citation correct?" or "Is the thesis statement good?" The most common response students gave was "Yes" and any follow-up questions targeted teachers to point to the specific error they wanted to students to correct.

Analyzing the feedback learners received, the majority of the comments teachers gave were related to technical aspects of writing, such as sentence structure, verb tenses, citations and formatting, while comments that target higher level writing skills and strategies, such as structure, organization were scarce.

5.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: HOW DO INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS DEFINE A SUCCESSFUL ESL WRITING CONFERENCE?

Students unanimously were in favor of conferencing with their instructors and expressed their desire to have more one-on-one conferences as they see them beneficial to their learning goals. These goals; however, are not in line with what writing conferences' objectives are. Students were satisfied with the outcome of the conference for reasons other than negotiating

meaning or describe their writing process. Students who had their writing conferences at the beginning of the semester saw them as a chance to receive individual feedback on their English skills and expected teachers to specify the learners' grammatical errors, as well as to establish a better rapport with their course instructor. Many students stated that they wanted the instructor to explain specific grammar rules and to correct the ones they had made in their writing. Some of them mentioned that they thought it was a good chance to practice their English and wanted to get to know their instructor on a more personal level.

Those students, whose writing conferences were at the end of the semester, shared some of these views, but their perception and definition of the primary goal of the conferences were different. They described the successful outcome of conference sessions that yield the most corrective feedback from learners and that helps them get a good grade on their final papers. Most students corrected all the errors their instructor pointed out; however, they did not make any additional changes to their texts besides the ones that were discussed during the conference. Undergraduate students reported that some of their instructors would offer to students to send their paper for a final review before they submit it for grading. All students that mentioned this option during the interview, reportedly took advantage of this opportunity, as it made them feel more confident about the work they then turned in.

Instructors viewed writing conferences positively as well. They said that they enjoyed spending time with each student alone, as they were able to build rapport with students and when conferences were at the beginning of the semester, found that the class dynamic was more positive and students became more participatory as a result. They reported that for a writing conference to be successful, students should be prepared and should have a draft that is close to the one they will submit for evaluation. Those instructors that had multiple writing conferences

had higher expectations of students' work and wanted the students to discuss their difficulties in general about writing. However, students often have different ideas about what they need help with than what instructors feel and research suggests they need to master in order to become effective writers.

They also said that students who do well do not really need help with their writing and those who tend to not put as much effort forth will have too many issues and 15 minutes is not sufficient to discuss them at length. Many of them reported that students often only cared about the grade they receive at the end of the semester and are not necessarily interested in mastering the content.

5.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 3: HOW DO THE FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY ALIGN WITH THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH ON ESL CONFERENCES?

The reviewed literature and current research findings suggest that error correction of this type does not help improve student's writing skills (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones and Schoer, 1963; Elley, Barham, Lamb, & Wyllie, 1976). The product-approach believed that technical aspects of written text, such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling was what distinguished skilled writers from less skilled ones. For the very reason that this approach proved not to effectively advance learner's writing skills did the focus of writing instruction shift emphasizing that writing is a process, and attention should be primarily paid to content and structure (Hillocks, 1986; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996).

During each individual conference, teachers asked the majority of questions (816/991). This finding is line with other research that studied instructor-student talk during individual conferences (Graesser & Person, 1992; Mackiewicz and Thompson, 2014). While some of the

other questions types, such as scaffolding questions that are more open-ended and aim to involve students and encourage them to self-correct and make revisions on their own, the overwhelming majority of questions were teacher-initiated closed questions that rarely resulted in negotiation. This seems to confirm Nassaji and Wells' (2000) claims that these types of questions increase instructor-authority thereby decreasing the likelihood of conferences to be a two-way interaction between teacher and learner. Although several studies show a strong preference among writing tutors or instructors to have a preference for student-initiated self-correction (Koshik, 2002, 2003; Waring, 2005), data collected for this study does not provide evidence of such trend.

The students I observed and interviewed expressed a preference for teacher feedback on their perceived language errors which is in line with other studies that investigated student's feedback preferences and expectations (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, 1996; Radecki & Swales, 1988). As Radecki & Swales (1988) write, learners "expect the instructor to correct all their surface errors" in the written feedback (p. 362). Therefore, student respondents' expectation and preferred type of feedback is not unexpected.

The majority of student participants are from Asian countries, where the expectations of teachers and students are different than in, for example, American educational context (Koshik, 2002). While in the United States, learners are socialized to display their knowledge through performance, while in many Asian countries, students are socialized to learn by observation (Koshik, 2005; Scollon and Scollon, 1995) This might also contribute to the majority of international students' preference for teacher-initiation as well as the conferences tendency to be teacher-talk dominated. As mentioned earlier, while students did not attempt to negotiate their text with the instructors, they always acknowledged teachers' comments by taking notes, and/or nodding. Furthermore, in case they were unsure of what their instructor had commented on, they

did ask clarification questions and initiated confirmation checks to ensure that they had understood what they were asked to revise in their papers.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 SUMMARY

The purpose of this research was to reveal various instructors' ESL writing conference practices who teach in the same ESL writing program, according to the same principles outlined by the director of the program. It also investigated the reasons behind instructors' conference practices and perception of the role of writing conferences as well as students' views of the goals and opinion of ESL writing conferences through ethnographic interviews. While both instructors and students had a positive view of-, and were in favor of including one-on-one writing conferences in academic writing classes, the objectives of these conferences do not align with the current state of research. Individual writing conferences are meant to be a two-way communication between student and instructor and are an essential stage in the writing process. For these conferences to achieve their goal, learners should take on an active role and negotiate with their instructor to further their ability to explain their thoughts in their L2. However, based the writing conferences I analyzed and the interviews I conducted, neither instructors, not students view the conferences as a discussion, but rather as an oral feedback session and a chance for learners to get their desired score on the given assignment. This chapter discusses the results and offers instructional implications to bridge the gap between suggested conference practices, objectives, and participant roles that make ESL writing conferences effective and the way these conferences are conducted in practice.

6.2 LIMITATIONS

One of the major limitations of this research is the limited number of conferences that were recorded, in addition to the small number of writing instructors that participated in the

study. Several of the courses hold multiple conferences throughout the semester, and recording those would have allowed to see the similarities and differences in the manner of which instructors hold their writing conferences. Additionally, after each of the conferences, the participants could have been interviewed to explore whether their impressions and views on the purpose of writing conferences has changed. Another major shortcoming of this study is the lack of experienced lecturer participation, which would have provided with an additional aspect to explore as to whether the writing conferences are different depending on the number of semesters an individual has spent in the university's writing program. Additionally, interviewing of the directors and supervisors of the program would have added a more comprehensive insight into the program's aim of how writing conferences are to be conducted and what is expected from instructors.

Furthermore, conducting instructor interviews who are colleagues of mine or fellow TAs, and close acquaintances might have affected the kind of responses I received to my questions. The instructor interviews might have yielding different results had they been conducted by someone they did not know on a personal level.

6.3 IMPLICATIONS

The Writing Program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has an abundance of materials that are readily available to instructors, including the goals and objectives of one-on-one ESL writing conferences. However, based on the collected data for this study, both instructors and students are unclear on what it is exactly that these conferences are supposed to achieve and why they are so conducive to developing effective writing skills.

Although there are also sample preparation sheets that instructors can modify and give their students in order to ensure that instructors have already read students' drafts and students do not come expecting their teacher to tell them exactly what and how to revise their work in order to receive a high grade. All writing courses offered by the department have a class period (50-minute session) dedicated to train students on giving effective feedback to their peers. This is a required element of the courses as peer perception activities are not a common element in EFL classes. In like manner to a training session on peer review, a training session on one-on-one conferences could be beneficial to increase writing conferences' primary purpose to learn about students' difficulties in the writing process, to prompt learners to negotiate meaning, to express their views, and to make them a two-way interaction.

This training could be done in different ways. My idea would be to include a lesson plan that addresses the goals of conferences so that instructors could discuss the procedures during their meetings with other instructors so that they can 1) translate these objectives to their learners during the class session on conference preparation; 2) effectively meet the objectives set out by the department in practice. The international student participants of this study were not familiar with the concept of individual writing conferences, as in most foreign language learning settings, writing instruction is still not an explicitly taught skill. Even when writing is taught, it is often in the realm of teaching to the test. The objective of said writing classes is to prepare students to achieve high scores on standardized language tests. Teaching writing for academic purposes and research-based writing is a rare element EFL classes, unless the student specializes in English or American Studies at a university level, which would only be applicable to the graduate student participants of this study. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of students do not know what is expected of them or what they should expect when their writing instructor asks them to sign up

for an individual conference. The lesson could clarify the expectations so that students can prepare and have successful conferences, reaping all the benefits these conferences have to offer.

In addition to the possible conference training lesson-plan, a sample video-recorded conference could serve as a guide to exemplify how a successful ESL writing conference is structured. This additional method of clarifying what is to be achieved by these conferences, both instructors and learners could have a clearer idea of what they can expect and what is expected of them. It is not uncommon that such a video is provided, as it is not an easy task to imagine a writing conference one has not heard of, let alone know how to conduct or prepare for them. As I previously discussed, many instructors in this program are international students and are not familiar with such conference practice, and might be uncomfortable attempting to hold them if they do not exactly know how they should be done to maximize their effectiveness.

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