

**Writing Instruction in Foreign Language Courses: Multiple  
Perspectives on the Impact of Peer Feedback on Students' Writing  
Proficiency**

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partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in sociocultural theory, peer feedback can help students engage in interaction and negotiation of meaning, which serve as a basis for the construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). It can also contribute to the development of self-regulation, as well as of reflection on one's own learning (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003). Its strategic incorporation into foreign language instruction can help students use the language they are in the process of acquiring to mediate language acquisition (Shrum & Glisan, 2005).

Research shows that peer feedback can help students develop and advance their Zone of Proximal Development through their engagement in collaborative interaction with their peers (De Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Donato, 2004; Lantolf, 2004; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Liu & Hansen, 2005). Peer feedback can also help students improve their writing proficiency, including organization of their texts and awareness of the mechanics of the language necessary for successful communication of the intended message (Kinsler, 1990; Hu, 2005; Williams, 2005).

Framed within a sociocultural perspective on foreign language learning and development, and following a manuscript approach, this dissertation consists of a series of studies that aim to explore: (a) whether participation in a peer feedback experience has a positive impact on students' foreign language writing proficiency; (b) whether guidelines plus training in how to provide meaningful feedback have a different impact on students' foreign language writing proficiency than guidelines alone; (c) around what themes students focus the feedback they provide to their peers; and (d) what students' perceptions of the peer feedback experience are.

The results of the first the study, which consisted of a pre-test post-test quasi-experimental design, showed that students significantly improved their writing proficiency after participating in a peer feedback experience, regardless of training. Further the results of this study indicated that, on average, trained and untrained students provided written peer feedback focused mainly on global aspects rather than local aspects. The results of the second study, which consisted of a mixed methods approach, showed that, on average, students had high perceptions of the peer feedback experience and that they perceived that their partner's feedback had helped them improve the global aspects of their composition more than the local aspects. Students expressed that what they liked the most about the experience was getting a different perspective on their writing, and what they liked the least was that they felt they were not proficient enough in the foreign language to provide meaningful feedback to their peers.

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## Attribution

Peter Doolittle, Ph.D., director of the Center for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching and associate professor of Learning Sciences and Technologies at Virginia Tech, contributed to the writing and research behind Manuscript #2. Specifically, he is named as second author for his role in helping with non-parametric data analysis and in polishing and editing the manuscript.

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# WRITING INSTRUCTION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSES: MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPACT OF PEER FEEDBACK ON STUDENTS' WRITING PROFICIENCY

## Introduction to the Dissertation

As defined by the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (NSFLEP) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (SFLL), the communication goal encompasses three modes of communication: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational (NSFLEP, 2006).

The first mode, interpersonal, “is characterized by active negotiation of meaning among individuals”, often in face-to-face interactions (NSFLEP, 2006, p. 36). The second mode, interpretive, “is focused on the appropriate cultural interpretation of meanings that occur in written and spoken form where there is no recourse to the active negotiation of meaning with the writer or the speaker” (NSFLEP, 2006, p. 36). In turn, the third mode, presentational, “refers to the creation of messages in a manner that facilitates interpretation by members of the other culture where no direct opportunity for the active negotiation of meaning between members of the two cultures exists” (NSFLEP, 2006, p. 38).

Written communication, within the three modes, is one of the most difficult for language learners to acquire and for foreign language (FL) teachers to teach. Although writing had been viewed as a product activity, where emphasis was put on grammatical and syntactic accuracy (Kern & Schultz, 1992), over the past thirty years there has been a shift and the trend has become to focus on writing as process, in first language (L1), as well as in second language (SL) and FL instruction. Process writing encompasses the idea that students as well as teachers will focus on

the different stages in the writing process, as well as on the production of multiple drafts with editing and reviewing instances (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

Given the importance FL writing as a means of communication has acquired in the past few years due to the introduction of the national standards, it becomes clear that there is a need in FL teaching to include instruction based not only on grammar, vocabulary, and culture, but also on writing as a communicative act different from that of speaking. As Lee and Van Patten (2003) explained, the oral and written proficiency FL students have in the target language often varies: “[L]earners with quite good speaking abilities in the [foreign] language may still need to acquire the properties of formal written language” (p. 245). Hence, the need to provide specific instruction on writing arises.

A key element in writing process theory is the production of multiple drafts that the writer must revise and edit in order to produce a good quality final draft. In the editing and revision stage, writers may self-edit their drafts, give and receive feedback from the teacher or from a peer. Writing process theory has been widely adopted in the field of English Composition and to a somehow lesser extent in the field of English as a Second Language. Consequently, the importance of the editing and revision stage has been highlighted in these fields. In contrast, in FL classes, it is generally the teacher who provides any kind of feedback to the students, often in the form of summative rather than formative feedback, and rarely do FL students engage in self or peer feedback, thus seldom editing and revising their drafts during the writing process. The assumption is that FL students are still developing their own linguistic and communicative competence and hence will be incapable of self-correcting their writing or of providing meaningful feedback to their peers.

In addition, another assumption is that, if given the chance to engage in self or peer editing of their writing, students will focus solely on local and not global aspects of the essay. In this sense, students who revise and edit their own work or their peer's work highlight vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation errors at the word, phrase, and sentence level (local aspects), and fail to focus on text coherence and cohesion, development of main and subordinate ideas, exemplification, among others (global aspects).

One way of guiding students in the peer feedback process is to provide them with guidelines but let them interact freely and thus focus on whatever aspects of the essay they deem appropriate. In this sense, students would provide and receive scaffolding from their peers, which would help them construct meaning and knowledge without the constraints of teacher input through formal training in the use of the guidelines.

On the other hand, another approach would be to provide students with guidelines and train them in their use, so that the peer feedback process, albeit constrained, would be focused on the types of foci the expert (teacher) would adopt in the feedback process. In this sense, students may be able to focus their attention during the peer feedback session and thus provide more meaningful feedback to their peers, focusing their comments on both global and local aspects.

In addition, students' perceptions might affect how they view peer feedback. One possible drawback of a peer feedback approach could arise if students feel that they do not have the required language proficiency to provide meaningful feedback and thus feel reticent to give suggestions to their peers. On the other hand, if students have high perceptions of the peer feedback experience they might be more open to participate in such an experience and assign value to their partner's feedback.

## Purpose of the Dissertation

This dissertation proposed to explore multiple perspectives related to a peer feedback experience implemented as part of a writing task in intermediate Spanish as foreign language courses. More specifically, the purpose of these studies was to investigate the impact of peer feedback on students' writing proficiency, written peer feedback types, and perceptions of the peer feedback experience. Through the incorporation of various data collection and analysis methods, the researcher aimed to add to the extant literature in foreign language writing instruction through a better understanding of the phenomena under study and thus address several gaps identified in the literature:

1. There exist few studies focusing on peer feedback in Spanish as a foreign language courses (Amores, 1997; Elola, 2005; Roux-Rodriguez, 2003);
2. No studies comparing two different peer feedback treatments with teacher scaffolding in a foreign language context in an American have been identified;
3. Existing studies on the impact of peer feedback on students' writing proficiency have been conducted with different cultural groups (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Hu, 2005; Liu & Hansen, 2005; Min, 2006); and
4. Existing studies on students' perceptions of peer feedback have been conducted with different cultural groups (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Hu, 2005; Liu & Hansen, 2005; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000).

## Organization

The researcher followed the manuscript approach in designing this dissertation, which includes an introductory section, a comprehensive review of the literature, two manuscripts, and a conclusion.

The first manuscript is a quasi-experimental research design, defined as a research design whose aim is “to test the existence of a causal relationship between two variables” (Bickman & Rog, 2003, p.16), in this case, students’ writing proficiency and peer feedback. Since random selection of participants was not feasible in the present study, a quasi-experimental method was selected that included random assignment of four intact classes of intermediate Spanish to two treatment groups, trained and untrained. In addition, the researcher aimed to address the validity of the study by including pre-intervention and post-intervention measures, first draft and final draft scores, and thus control for initial differences in Spanish writing proficiency among participants.

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate the impact of peer feedback on the writing proficiency of students enrolled in college Spanish as a foreign language courses. A pre-test/ post-test design, as depicted in Figure 1, was used in this study, which included data collected from intermediate Spanish college students at a major North American university. The data included students’ scores on the first draft and final draft of an essay, as well as written comments provided by students to their peers on their first drafts. The first and final draft scores were analyzed statistically to ascertain whether there was a significant difference between the two, which would indicate that students improved their writing proficiency after the intervention, namely, the peer feedback experience. In addition, trained and untrained students’ final draft

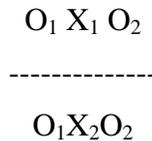
scores were statistically compared to determine whether there was a significant difference between them, after controlling for initial differences. Finally, the written peer feedback data were analyzed to identify on which aspects of the essay students focused their feedback.

Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1) Do students who receive trained and untrained peer feedback show improvement in their final draft as compared to their first draft?

2) Is there a difference in improvement in students' writing proficiency when they receive trained peer feedback and when they receive untrained peer feedback?

3) Is there a difference in type of written feedback provided by students trained and not trained in providing peer feedback?



*Figure 1.* Visual diagram of quasi-experimental study

The second manuscript, coauthored with Dr. Peter Doolittle, is a mixed methods design, defined as a “research design with philosophical assumptions as well as quantitative and qualitative methods”, which includes “collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 5). Specifically, a triangulation approach was selected with the aim to investigate the topic using “different but complementary data” and thus “expand the quantitative results with qualitative data” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 62). Researchers have posited that one of the major advantages of

choosing a mixed methods design is that collecting multiple forms of data and using various methods can help offset the limitations and disadvantages that might be encountered when selecting either quantitative or qualitative methods alone, thus strengthening the study (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003, p. 211).

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to investigate students' perceptions of peer feedback in college foreign language courses. A concurrent triangulation design, as depicted in Figure 2, was used in this study, which included quantitative and qualitative data collected from intermediate Spanish college students at a major North American university in order to ascertain their perceptions of peer feedback.

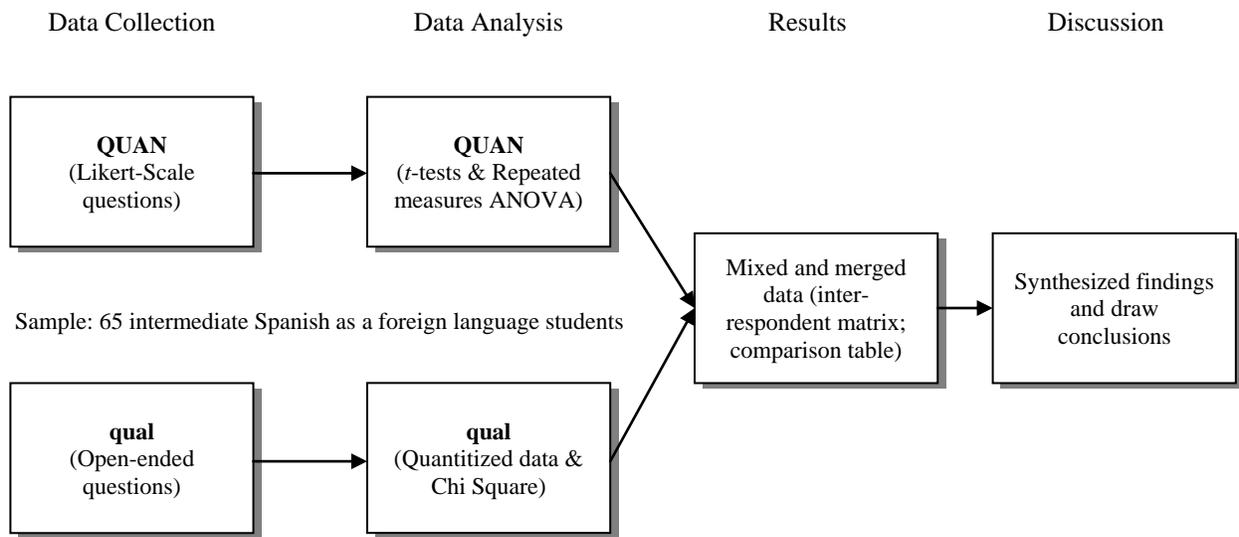


Figure 2. Visual diagram of mixed methods study

The data included students' responses to a survey consisting of Likert-Scale close-ended questions as well as open-ended questions, which were included in the survey with the purposes of validating the quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 65). The mixing occurred

by transforming qualitative data into an inter-respondent matrix (participant x theme matrix) that “indicated which individuals contributed to each emerging theme” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004). The quantitized qualitative data were subsequently merged with the quantitative data in order to compare results from high and low perception students by means of non-parametric statistical analyses using Chi Square. The reason for conducting this mixed methods study was to further add to the knowledge base in foreign language writing instruction (Newman, Ridenour, Newman, & De Marco Jr., 2003, p. 176), particularly understanding in more depth students’ impressions of the value of peer feedback.

Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- a) What are students’ perceptions of the peer feedback experience?
- b) What are some specific aspects of the peer feedback experience that students identified as the most and least valuable?
- c) What specific themes related to perceptions of the peer feedback experience do high and low perception students identify?

#### Glossary of Terms

Affective Filter Hypothesis: if the language student “is anxious, has low self-esteem, does not consider himself or herself a potential member of the group that speaks the language [...], he or she may understand the input, but it will not reach the language acquisition device. A block, the affective filter, will keep it out” (Krashen, 2003, p. 6).

Authentic Task: a task “set in a scenario that replicates or simulates the ways in which a person’s knowledge and abilities are tested in real-world situations.” (Wiggins, 2005, p. 154).

Communicative competence: linguistic competence that includes pragmatic awareness.

Culturally-relevant tasks: A task is culturally relevant when it resembles scenarios found in the target culture.

First language (L1): mother tongue.

Foreign language (FL): language learned in a situation in which “the language is not spoken in the learner’s immediate environment, although mass media may provide opportunities for practicing receptive skills. The learner has little or no opportunity to use the language in natural communication situations” (Ringbom, 1980, p. 5).

Intermediate-high Writing Proficiency Level: “Writers at the Intermediate-High level are able to meet all practical writing needs such as taking notes on familiar topics, writing uncomplicated letters, simple summaries, and compositions related to work, school experiences, and topics of current and general interest. Intermediate-High writers connect sentences into paragraphs using a limited number of cohesive devices that tend to be repeated, and with some breakdown in one or more features of the Advanced level. They can write simple descriptions and narrations of paragraph length on everyday events and situations in different time frames, although with some inaccuracies and inconsistencies. For example, they may be unsuccessful in their use of paraphrase and elaboration and/or inconsistent in the use of appropriate major time markers, resulting in a loss in clarity. In those languages that use verbal markers to indicate tense and aspect, forms are not consistently accurate. The vocabulary, grammar, and style of Intermediate-High writers essentially correspond to those of the spoken language. The writing of an Intermediate-High writer, even with numerous and perhaps significant errors, is generally

comprehensible to natives not used to the writing of non-natives, but gaps in comprehension may occur” (ACTFL, 2001, pp.4-5).

Interpersonal Communication Mode: This mode “is characterized by active negotiation of meaning among individuals”, often in face-to-face interactions (NSFLEP, 2006, p.36).

Interpretive Communication Mode: This mode “is focused on the appropriate cultural interpretation of meanings that occur in written and spoken form where there is no recourse to the active negotiation of meaning with the writer or the speaker” (NSFLEP, 2006, p.36)..

Linguistic competence: “system of rules that determine both the phonetic shape of the sentence and its intrinsic semantic content” (Chomsky, 2006, p. 102).

Global aspects: discourse (style, coherence and cohesion, audience address, main and supporting ideas, flow and organization).

Local aspects: mechanics of the language at the sentence-level (grammar, syntax, lexicon, punctuation, and spelling).

Monitor: in writing process theory, it refers to a “writing strategist which determines when the writer moves from one process to the next” (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 374).

Monitor Hypothesis: this hypothesis implies that conscious learning has the function of being a monitor or editor. Three conditions must be met, namely: the acquirer must know the grammar rule, be focused on form, and have time (Krashen, 2003, p. 3). According to Krashen (2003), the monitor can best be used while engaging in “the editing phase of writing” (p. 3).

Multiple Opportunities: Teachers in communicative, learner-centered classes act as facilitators, providing students with opportunities that reflect native-like scenarios as closely as possible. These opportunities may include debates, skits, class discussions of a certain contemporary topic, re-enactments of literary pieces, reporting news, functional dialogues (e.g.: ordering food at a restaurant, booking a hotel room, asking and giving directions), formal presentations, and celebrity or job mock interviews, among others.

Performance: “actual observed use of the language” (Chomsky, 2006, p. 102).

Pragmatic competence: “functional use of the language (*illocutionary competence*) and knowledge of its appropriateness to the context in which it is used (*sociolinguistic competence*)” (Omaggio Hadley, 2000, p. 7).

Presentational Communication Mode: This mode “refers to the creation of messages in a manner that facilitates interpretation by members of the other culture where no direct opportunity for the active negotiation of meaning between members of the two cultures exists” (NSFLEP, 2006, p.38).

Quantitative content analysis: “a research technique for the systematic, objective, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952, p. 18).

Second language (SL): language learnt in a situation in which “the language is spoken in the immediate environment of the learner, who has good opportunities to use the language by participating in natural communication situations” (Ringbom, 1980, p. 4).

Sociolinguistic Competence: “underlying knowledge that determines what is appropriate in a given context” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 51).

Survival-type language: Language needed for subsistence in the target culture (for instance, buying groceries, ordering food at a restaurant, asking for and giving basic directions, and requesting and giving basic personal information, among others).

Translating: in writing process theory, it refers to “the process of putting ideas into visible language” (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 373).

## Literature Review

To this date there has not been much research specifically in foreign language (FL) writing that can illustrate the best approaches to be adopted in writing instruction in the foreign language. As Reichelt (2001) stated, “in addition to the lack of clarity concerning the purpose of writing in the FL curriculum, there is a great deal of inconsistency in FL research in the means used to analyze student writing samples” (p. 579). As a consequence of this, there is uncertainty in the definition of the role of writing instruction in the FL classroom, as well as lack of a unified body of research that deals with this particular topic. Therefore, it becomes relevant to turn our attention to the literature on L1 and SL writing with the aim of finding commonalities and theories whose applicability can be transferred into FL writing instruction successfully.

This chapter is divided into distinct sections, which represent the major contributions to writing theory in L1, SL, and FL. The sections are entitled: writing as a mode of communication, writing as product, process writing, genre writing, responding to student writing, peer feedback, students’ perceptions of the value of peer response, trained versus untrained peer response, and conclusions.

### *Writing As a Mode of Communication*

Writing is an act of communication that “involves the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 244). It is precisely through the intricate process of composing that writers seek to find the best possible way to convey the meaning of the message they intend to communicate. In order to achieve this, writers need to set goals and engage in a set of thinking processes while composing (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

In a second (SL) or foreign language (FL), however, writers must not only attend to the varied cognitive processes they go through when writing, but they also have the added task of finding the right linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic paradigms in the SL/FL to successfully communicate the intended message to the intended audience. In order to achieve this, SL/FL writers need to possess not only linguistic competence and performance, which will enable them to select the appropriate grammatical structures and lexicon, but also so-called communicative competence, while attending to the sociocultural significance of their message.

This has strong implications in SL/FL theory, since it might serve as basis for the affirmation that students' linguistic competence, that is, knowledge of discrete grammar and vocabulary items, as part of the language system, does not imply by any means that they will have successful language performance, that is, be able to engage in presentational communication, interpersonal communication, and negotiation of meaning in the SL/FL. In addition, the concept of communicative competence implies that the speaker/writer of the language has knowledge of the grammar, syntax, and lexicon of a language, and is capable of discerning what to say, which word choice to use, and also how to say it, including register selection, given a context-specific communication situation.

In order to acquire communicative competence, language learners need to be immersed in a setting that offers multiple opportunities for them to engage in communicative interactions and negotiation of meaning, thus developing and enhancing their pragmatic knowledge of the language. In this sense, teachers in communicative, learner-centered classes act as facilitators, providing students with opportunities that reflect native-like scenarios as closely as possible.

Those opportunities may include, but are not limited to, authentic communicative situations that students could encounter were they to travel to a country where the language is spoken.

Opportunities for immersion in settings that provide chances to engage in authentic and culturally relevant negotiation of meaning vary among and within language learning situations. Hence, at this point, it becomes relevant to make a distinction between learners of second versus foreign languages, especially with respect to the opportunities these learners have to be immersed in contexts that provide authentic (or otherwise) communication situations. Ringbom (1980) explored the distinction between these two distinct types of learning scenarios. He stated that

In a second-language acquisition situation, the language is spoken in the immediate environment of the learner, who has good opportunities to use the language by participating in natural communication situations. In a foreign-language learning situation, the language is not spoken in the learner's immediate environment, although mass media may provide opportunities for practicing receptive skills. The learner has little or no opportunity to use the language in natural communication situations.

(Ringbom, 1980, pp. 4-5)

One of the strongest implications of this distinction is the different immediate needs students in both learning situations have with relation to language learning and acquisition. While second language (SL) learners are often living in the target culture and thus need to become proficient in the language for survival or academic purposes, foreign language (FL) learners are living in an environment where the target language is barely spoken outside the

classroom. Thus, foreign language teachers need to help create authentic environments to help promote communication in native-like scenarios.

In the educational setting of North American universities, more often than not SL learners are learning English for specific, often professional, purposes, or for academic purposes, often writing in English in their other classes. In these cases, SL learners' language proficiency and linguistic abilities are often high enough so that they can engage in at least basic, survival-type oral communication and negotiation of meaning in English and need to focus specifically on their academic communication abilities, especially their writing abilities.

In contrast, FL learners of languages other than English in North American universities often have much more limited proficiency in those languages when they start their undergraduate education, thus needing to learn the linguistic system, grammatical and lexical paradigms, and the pragmatics of the target language (TL). Along these lines, Lee and Van Patten (2003) posited that foreign "language learners are still in the process of acquiring the linguistic systems that allow people to generate [...] sentences [or utterances]" (p. 245).

Given the demands of foreign language programs for minors and majors at the university level, FL students need to gain knowledge and skills in writing, as they are expected to produce written texts in a variety of classes, and for a wide array of purposes. This, in turn, has specific implications on the needs of such learners to acquire strategies for written presentational communication, which are quite different from those SL learners need.

Reichelt (2001) posited that ESL and FL writing in American universities are quite distinct from each other. In this sense, she stated that "unlike ESL students, FL students are rarely if ever called upon to write in the target language (TL) in classes outside FL departments"

(p. 578), which implies that ESL students have more opportunities to engage in authentic written communication in the TL much more often than FL students. In addition, she highlighted that “English plays a unique role as a world language, including that of the medium of higher education in many cases” (p. 578), which also supports the claim that ESL students are more likely to be in authentic communicative situations in which they can engage in writing in the TL.

SL learners will need to receive writing instruction for specific and/or academic purposes, focusing primarily on the writing process and rhetoric. In contrast, FL learners will first be exposed to writing in the TL as a form of writing down, i.e., “exercises involving copying or reproduction of learned material, concentrating on the conventions of spelling, punctuation, grammatical agreements, and the like” (Omaggio Hadley, 1993, p. 291). With time, however, as their linguistic competence and performance improve, “writing assignments become less structured, less teacher-centered, and more creative in nature” (Omaggio Hadley, 2000, p. 282). In this sense, students will start focusing on semantics rather than on form, thus being able to engage in meaningful presentational communication.

### *Writing as product*

Before the introduction of the revolutionary process writing approach to teaching composition, writing was viewed mainly as a product. In this paradigm, “texts [were] often regarded as a series of appropriate grammatical structures” (Hyland, 2003, p. 4). As this author pointed out, this approach came about as a result of a blend between structural linguistics and behaviorism (Hyland, 2003, p. 3), and reminds us of a Chomskyan view of language as competence (Chomsky, 2006).

In many FL writing classes, writing has often been focused on the final product. The justification for this has been that there is evident lack of command of the language among FL students, which prevents them from being able to focus on the writing process, as they must focus their attention on form. Thus, as Hyland (2003) described it, this model supposes that students receive instruction on a certain grammatical structure or vocabulary word/bank - familiarization; then they manipulate those structures, often from substitution tables, through controlled writing; and later they engage in writing as imitation of given models, e.g.: guided writing (pp. 3-4).

Finally, as Hyland (2003) described, in the very last stage of this model students are able to focus on meaning, applying the structures learned as they use the target grammar and/or vocabulary items to produce an original piece through free writing. Even though this represents the basics of an approach to teaching foreign languages guided by providing meaningful input and multiple opportunities for students to provide meaningful output, it is still very much focused on grammar and lexicon as ends in the process of language acquisition for communication purposes, but it fails to focus on the writing process itself.

Following the product writing model, Gaudiani (1979) proposed an approach to teaching writing that “relies on in-class editing of the compositions the students produce on a weekly basis” (p. 232) with the purpose of focusing on grammar, lexicon, syntax, and style. In this approach, the instructor is to follow several steps. First, students receive a topic and write their first drafts, which they turn in. The instructor then “returns the compositions at the beginning of the next week after having circled errors, and assigned letter grades” (p. 233).

Some of the students' compositions are copied and distributed to the rest of the class, and the authors read them aloud to their classmates, who engage in an editing process. Students focus specifically on comprehension of meaning, asking for clarification of unfamiliar vocabulary or confusion caused by syntax problems; grammar accuracy, where both the author and classmates focus on each error and provide corrections; analysis of style, once they have corrected grammatical errors, and focusing on sentence length, repetition, and other more complex elements of prose style (p. 233).

This seems to be a viable approach in as much as it follows a workshop design in which students take on an active role in the analysis of the writing piece. However, it still focuses on the product, almost disregarding the writing process, except regarding the fact that students actually engage in an incipient editing method at the micro level. Yet, in this case, attention to error is not internal; that is, the writers' monitor is not responsible for detecting such errors but, rather, it is the teacher and the rest of the students who act as monitors, thus restricting the author's agency in his/her own writing process.

In turn, despite conducting his research after Flower and Hayes (1981) developed the concept of writing process, Lalande (1982) focused his research on the writing product, in an attempt to find an approach that would be effective in helping reduce errors in FL students' writing. The subjects of his study were sixty students enrolled in an intermediate level German college class. Students in both the treatment and control groups received instruction following the same method, though there was a difference in the manner in which compositions were graded and subsequent rewriting activities that the students were to complete.

Essays of students in the control group “were corrected in the traditional manner, viz., the teacher entered all corrections onto students’ essays and then required them to incorporate the same into a rewritten version” (Lalande, 1982, p. 142). In turn, the essays of students in the treatment group “were systematically marked by means of the ECCO or Error Correction Code [...]. Upon reception of the marked essays [...] students were charged with interpreting the codes, correcting their mistakes, and then rewriting the entire essay in correct form” (Lalande, 1982, p. 143).

The results of this quasi-experimental design indicated that “the combination of error awareness and problem-solving techniques had a significant beneficial effect on the development of writing skills within the context of the experiment” (Lalande, 1982, p. 145). In addition, the researcher posited that teachers of intermediate level FL classes should include writing skills in their syllabi, as well as consider rewrite activities as an integral part of instruction, paired with error awareness and correction opportunities (Lalande, 1982, p. 147).

The approach proposed by Lalande (1982) is one that many foreign language teachers have adopted as part of their instructional approach to teaching writing in their FL classes. This approach, however, fosters an attitude among students of submitting unedited, unpolished drafts that the teachers then take as final drafts. As Barnett (1989) stated, it encourages students “to offer similar work the next time and to focus most of their attention on surface-level fine tuning rather than on communicating a message coherently” (p. 32). In addition, such an approach favors the writing product over the writing process, as discussed below.

### *Process writing in English composition*

At the beginning of the seventies, there was a transition in L1 composition instruction from viewing writing as a product, and scholars began looking at writing as a process that encompassed different stages, and whose focus was on the cognitive and metacognitive decisions writers make when writing.

*Extensive and intensive writing model.* Emig (1971) began to pave the way for this major change in writing pedagogy. Her study focused on the composing process of eight high school seniors. The results of the study showed that writers focus on one of two major purposes or modes when writing: “reflexive and extensive” (p. 91). The main difference between these two types of writing is the intended audience: in the case of reflexive writing, “the self is the chief audience – or, occasionally, a trusted peer” and it “has a far longer prewriting period” (Emig, 1971, p. 91). In contrast, in extensive writing, “adult others, notably teachers, are the chief audience”, and “discourse is often detached and reportorial” (Emig, 1971, p. 91).

Further, Emig (1971) identified the following characteristics of extensive or school-sponsored writing:

“teachers are interested chiefly in a product [they] can criticize rather than in a process [they] can help initiate” (Emig, 1971, p. 97);

usually there is no time or place for students to engage in prewriting activities (Emig, 1971, pp. 98-99);

“at the end of the process, revision is lost [...] because no time is provided for any major reformulation or reconceptualization” (Emig, 1971, p. 99);

“there is persistent pointing out of specific errors” for which there is little evidence that it will lead to error elimination (Emig, 1971, p. 99); and

“[teachers hold an] overwhelming opportunity for domination [...] through their governance of all formal evaluation” (Emig, 1971, p. 100).

The characteristics of this extensive, school-sponsored model and the resulting writing piece seem to be those of the writing as a product model and resemble the way in which writing is taught, produced, and evaluated in current FL college classes, especially at the beginning and intermediate levels of proficiency. In contrast, it appears that the reflexive writing model includes certain characteristics of process writing, namely, a pre-writing stage, editing and revision stages, and writer’s agency in the writing process.

*Writing workshop model.* A contrasting model is presented by Hass, Childers, Babbitt, and Dylla (1972) who studied the effect of a writing workshop instructional method on the grade achievement of six groups of college students enrolled in freshman English composition courses, four treatment groups and two control groups. The results of the study showed that “all experimental groups did show superior achievement over control groups” (Haas & et al., 1972, p. 36), which indicated that the workshop method of writing instruction had a positive effect on students’ grade achievement.

The workshop method presented by Hass, Childers et al. (1972) had the following characteristics:

it consisted of “daily, intensively supervised writing practice”;

“all themes were written and revised in class”;

students “received instruction and correction on the process of writing”;

“regular use of small group work” was encouraged so that students could get peer help on specific problems;

writing themes were chosen based on subjects students listed in their top ten of themes about which they wished to write (Haas & et al., 1972, p. 36).

This model presents different characteristics than the school-sponsored model described by Emig (1971), while it shares some with the reflexive model. In both Haas, Childers, et al.’s and Emig’s models, writers choose the topic of their writing, which is of great importance in the planning process, as it is during this process that writers establish the purpose for writing and the intended audience. However, the model Haas et al. (1972) proposed did not make specific reference to the importance of planning, drafting, revising, and editing, as Emig’s reflexive writing model suggested.

Although the writing workshop is a viable instructional approach to teaching writing, it is insufficient to focus the discussion only on rhetoric and writing problems, as this still does not take into consideration the difficulties writers encounter and have to grapple with when writing.

*Instructors’ metacognitive development in teaching process writing.* Other scholars have focused on the instructional aspect of basic writing from the point of view of the teacher, as opposed to the students, in an attempt to challenge the belief that “students, not teachers, are the people in education who must do the changing” (Shaughnessy, 1976, p. 234). In this sense, Shaughnessy’s (1976) work aimed to identify the different stages teachers experience when

teaching basic writing at the college level, based on her observations of teachers of English who received traditional preparation. The stages she identified are:

guarding the tower: “during this stage, the teacher is frustrated due to the fact that students are incredibly behind any students he has taught before” (p. 235);

converting the natives: at this stage, the teacher has realized that he can help at least some of these students; however, they “are perceived as empty vessels, ready to be filled with new knowledge”, The teacher completely disregards students’ prior knowledge; in other words, the teaching senses “no need to relate what he is teaching to what his students know [...] and becomes a mechanic of the sentence, the paragraph, the essay” (p. 236);

sounding the depths: “the teacher realizes that, in addition to the dichotomy between written and spoken language conventions, there are many external and internal factors that influence the quality of students’ writing, namely: conditions under which students write, difficulty in organizing ideas, lack of vocabulary to discuss thoughts about thoughts” (pp. 237-238);

diving in: at this last stage, the truth is revealed: the teacher “must now make a decision [...] to remediate himself, to become a student of new disciplines and of his students themselves in order to perceive both their difficulties and their incipient excellence” (p. 238).

Shaughnessy’s (1976) scales model was the stepping stone for the development of further theories on writing instruction, as it guided both educators and scholars into a retrospection of their own practices and approaches to teaching composition. Yet, the model assumes that

teachers go through the stages described sequentially and that they eventually reach the diving in stage. However, this might not hold true in every case, as it is difficult for some teachers to plan and conduct their classes as student-centered environments where students have agency in their learning process.

*The turning point: Structure of the writing model.* The main scholarly theory on process writing was developed by Flower and Hayes (1981). In this sense, their theory on the cognitive process of writing revolutionized the profession. Following the incipient process theories their colleagues started to delineate years earlier, they changed the paradigm of viewing writing as mainly a product-oriented task.

Flower and Hayes (1981) based their proposed approach on a stage model, which they described as follows: “in a stage model the major units of analysis are *stages* of completion which reflect the growth of the written product, and these stages are organized in a *linear* sequence or structure” (p. 367). In addition, Flower and Hayes (1981) pointed out that “the problem with stage descriptions of writing is that they model the growth of the written product, not the inner process of the person producing it” (p. 367).

Their paradigm, however, differed substantially from the product writing model; they proposed a process model, in which “the major units of analysis are elementary mental processes [...] and these processes have a *hierarchical* structure [...] Furthermore, each of these mental acts may occur at *any* [my emphasis] time in the composing process” (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 367). The focus of their analysis was not only on “the development of the written product but [also on] many of the intellectual processes which produced it” (p. 369).

Flower and Hayes (1981) identified the following elements in their model:

task environment: this element “includes all of those things outside the writer’s skin, starting with the rhetorical problem or assignment and eventually including the growing text itself”;

writer’s long term memory: in this element, “the writer has stored knowledge, not only of the topic, but of the audience and of various writing plans”;

writing processes: these can be divided into the basic processes of planning, translating, and reviewing, “which are under control of a Monitor” (p. 369).

These authors highlighted the importance of the rhetorical problem, especially with respect to school assignments, which are mere “simplified version[s] of such a problem” (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 369). Thus, such assignments oblige students to conform to the topic assigned and set aside their own goals, while the rhetorical problem now becomes just “another theme for English class” (p. 369). In addition, they highlighted the constraints of titles and topic sentences provided to students. By the same token, these authors stressed the importance of the rhetorical problem, and pointed out that defining it “is a major, immutable part of the writing process”.

When discussing the writing process itself, Flower and Hayes (1981) identified the following mental processes, as depicted in Fig. 1:

planning: this process involves generating ideas through the retrieval of “relevant information from long-term memory” (p. 372), organizing, which “allows the writer to search for subordinate ideas [...] and to search for superordinate ideas which include or

subsume the current topic” (p. 372), and goal-setting, which includes both substantive and procedural goals;

translating<sup>1</sup>: the authors define this process as “the process of putting ideas into visible language” (p. 373); this process “requires the writer to juggle all the special demands of written English” but “if the writer must devote conscious attention to demands such as spelling and grammar, the task of translating can interfere with the more global process of planning what one wants to say” (p. 373).

reviewing: the authors define this process as a “conscious process in which writers choose to read what they have written either as a springboard to further translating or with an eye to systematically evaluating and/or revising the text” (p. 374).

Throughout these processes, writers constantly check their process and progress by means of activating a monitor. “The monitor functions as a writing strategist which determines when the writer moves from one process to the next” (p. 374). This monitor helps the writer make strategic decisions about his/her writing. For instance, the monitor might help writers determine when to stop planning and start translating, or when to go back and modify their original plan and generate more ideas, which then they will translate, thus making writing a non-sequential process in which the writer constantly revisits and analyzes his/her strategies in writing.

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<sup>1</sup>The term “translating” in this context has a different meaning from the traditional meaning it carries in the foreign language learning and translation theory contexts, where it implies expressing the same ideas in the source and target languages.

### *Process writing in foreign language instruction*

*A task-based process writing approach.* Magnan (1985) discussed the relevance of the writing process in the FL classroom. She highlighted the importance of teaching writing following a process approach and designing writing tasks that are appropriate for each proficiency level. She stated that “in studying the writing process [...] students learn grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, [but] more importantly, they learn ways to organize, process, and present information” (Magnan, 1985, p. 124).

Magnan (1985) proposed a series of tasks at different proficiency levels that FL teachers might incorporate as part of their writing instruction strategies. She further explained that “tasks typically associated with lower levels of proficiency [such as describing items in a room using the present tense] offer excellent pre-writing steps for tasks at the next higher proficiency level [such as describing and narrating in the past]” (Magnan, 1985, pp. 124-126).

### *Incorporating a process writing approach to foreign language writing instruction.*

Barnett (1989) analyzed the pedagogical approaches adopted by FL educators when teaching writing. This researcher claimed that in following a model focused on the written product “many teachers present students with a confusing response to their work. On one hand, [they] treat their writing as though it were in its final form; on the other, [they] make suggestions more appropriate to a rough draft” (p. 34). She further commented on the inefficacy of corrections if students are not offered the chance to reflect on them to improve their grammatical and structural accuracy.

Therefore, Barnett (1989) suggested applying the concepts on process writing developed by Flower and Hayes (1981), though she recognized that “most language teachers have not been

trained to think of classroom composition in this light” (p. 35). As part of the writing process, Barnett (1989) recommended incorporating a self-editing approach, which “requires all students to write a first draft which should be revised into a better, but not perfect, composition before the teacher sees it” (p. 37). She further suggested that teachers “collect students’ notes and first drafts for comments and recommendations before students write second drafts” (p. 37) with the aim of helping students edit their work regarding not only grammatical and lexical accuracy, but also clarifying confusing points in order to make their argument stronger or their message more clearly transmitted.

In this type of approach, focus on error correction should not be detailed; rather, it should point out major and recurrent mistakes that impede or encumber communication so that the author can improve them before turning in the final draft. In addition, Barnett (1989) explained that in following this approach, “the teacher grades according to the quality of the changes made and the new draft in general” (p. 38). This not only encourages students to revise their drafts in order to turn in a high quality final draft, but it also promotes students’ self-awareness of their own capabilities and limitations, which in turn might help them be less focused on their performance as compared to other students, but rather on their performance in their earlier drafts as compared to their final draft.

Barnett (1989) also pointed out some advantages of this type of approach. She stated that “when students realize that teachers read their writing to understand what they are trying to say rather than to judge their grammar and usage, they write more interesting compositions” (p. 39). In addition, “less correction of grammatical errors, together with honest attention to content, can sometimes reduce –and seldom promotes– grammatical mistakes in future compositions” (p. 39).

From the teachers' perspective, there is a clear advantage: "teacher grading can be reduced in length and enhanced in quality" (p. 39).

*Training students to become good writers.* In turn, Greenia (1992) focused on writing instruction in the FL classroom. He categorically expressed his view that FL students cannot write "mostly because [teachers] have not trained [them] to" (Greenia, 1992, p. 2). In addition, he explored the differences between L1 and FL writing instruction and stated that there are in fact "class activities and assignments that are clearly emerging in English composition [...] but barely being explored in second-language work" (Greenia, 1992, p. 2). Therefore, he proposed a model that incorporates various types of pre-writing and writing assignments and focuses on correlating them with the course design and content (Greenia, 1992, p. 3).

Greenia (1992) also suggested that teachers reconsider their expectations of the students they teach, pointing out that the lack of expected high quality of students' work, especially that of college language majors, might be due to the fact that teachers "may simply be assigning tasks beyond the learners' ability" (p. 4). He further stated that "merely because students can handle similar exercises in their English classes, [teachers] cannot automatically assume that they have the lexical or syntactic muscle to do comparable work in a foreign tongue" (Greenia, 1992, pp. 4-5).

Although Greenia (1992) made a valid point in noticing the differences between L1 and FL written production capabilities, slightly implying a focus on the product rather than the writing process, he further pointed out that "grammar does not improve clarity or craftsmanship of student writing, nor does focusing on grammar correction in writing samples" (p. 6). Still, he failed to refer to the fact that a higher linguistic competence and proficiency in the FL can in fact

help students focus their attention on meaning rather than on form, which is the case at the beginning stages of language acquisition.

Greenia (1992) further explored the possible designs for a writing course, suggesting a focus on the writing process, genres, practice at many levels of written discourse - including academic discourse -authorial voice, social register, audience, peer-managed projects, as well as publicity of discourse generated in the writing class (pp. 6-12). In addition, he recommended a number of tasks that FL writing students can perform in order to improve the quality of their writing: producing short notes and messages, filling out forms, taking lecture notes, making contributions to a bulletin board, exchanging dialogue journals, and contributing exam questions, as well as oral discussions and topic exploration during the pre-writing stage (Greenia, 1992, pp. 10,13).

In his conclusion, Greenia (1992) urged teachers to detach “from [their] background in grammar and literature to guide [their] students better toward fully creative learning through writing” (p. 13), thus reaffirming the importance of focusing on the writing process. However, as stated above, it is important to consider students’ language proficiency before demanding that they communicate meaning for which they need certain structural knowledge in the FL that they do not have, which can cause frustration and anxiety in the students and divert their attention from meaning to form.

*Connections between L1 and L2 writing proficiency.* Other researchers also investigated the implications of L1 writing theory in SL and FL. In this sense, Valdés, Haro, and Etchevarriarza (1992) made a distinction in the situation of the development of abilities in the acquisition of the language in a different way (p. 333). On the one hand, they stated that “ESL

professionals have been directly affected by the new writing emphasis within the mainstream English teaching profession” (p. 333). Moreover, they pointed out that the expectation of ESL students is that they “write well in English and even [...] compete with their English monolingual peers measured against standards established for writing in English as a native language” (p. 334). This has resulted in an increase in the amount of research on SL writing.

On the other hand, Valdés et al (1992) emphasized that research on FL writing is “in its beginning stages” (p. 334). As these scholars stated, there is an “existing emphasis on spoken language proficiency”, and that is why “the writing revolution has not directly impacted the FL profession to the same degree it has both the mainstream English profession and the ESL profession” (p. 334). Although their assertion dates back to 1992, this has not changed much in the past decades, especially given the sustained trend in FL teaching of focusing instruction on oral communicative proficiency.

This unique study focused on the description of the “implied assumptions made by the ACFTL proficiency *guidelines* about the nature of the growth and change in the writing produced by FL students at different stages [in particular] whether or not the assumptions made by the *Guidelines* reflect the writing ability of FL students who have learned to write in English” (Valdés et al., 1992, pp. 334-335). For these purposes, they analyzed eighteen samples collected from Spanish as FL college students in first year, second year, and advanced composition classes. The researchers collected the samples of writing the students worked on during class. They analyzed the samples as writing products, without focusing on the writing process (p. 340), applying three different criteria: “quality of message, organization and style, and standards of language use” (p. 341).

They found that “theories that are embedded in the existing rating scales reflect a view of writing that is not based on a coherent view of L2 writing development” (Valdés et al., 1992, p. 347), given the prior knowledge and metacognitive awareness that students bring from their L1. In this sense, they concluded that “positive language transfer plays a strong role” in the development of writing skills in the FL (p. 348), and that “the development of target language proficiency interacts with writing skills developed in the first language” (Valdés et al., 1992, p. 346).

Thus, it is important that FL teachers encourage students to make connections between writing in the foreign language and what they have learned in their English courses regarding the writing process. In this sense, teachers can help their students activate their prior knowledge about the writing process in L1 and their metacognitive strategies so that they can effectively transfer the skills they have developed in L1 writing to their writing in L2.

*Explicit L2 writing instruction.* Kern and Shultz (1992) focused on the idea of applying L1 writing process theory to FL writing instruction. They examined traditional FL writing instruction approaches, stating that “in writing tasks focus is usually on surface feature accuracy” (Kern & Schultz, 1992, p. 2), thus highlighting the emphasis on the writing product. They initially questioned “the predominant assumption that writing skills in the foreign language will either be transferred automatically from the native language or that they will develop naturally as a consequence of grammar study” (Kern & Schultz, 1992, p. 2), which contrasts with Valdés et al.’s assertion (Valdés et al., 1992, p. 346).

In addition, Kern and Shultz (1992) pointed out the shift in the FL profession regarding writing instruction and proposed a different approach: incorporating explicit instruction aimed at

fostering the development of writing skills by means of a five-point approach. This approach included different elements, and thus:

targets the mode of essay expected at the upper-division level, that is, the argumentative essay;

provides students with regular, carefully, sequenced lessons on how to write such an essay;

illustrates the lessons with professional models of good writing as well as student models of good and poor writing;

establishes multiple criteria for evaluation of essays: content, organization, style, as well as grammar; and

relies heavily on student response group work (Kern & Schultz, 1992, pp. 2-3).

The subjects in their study were four hundred and fifteen college French as FL students in their third and fourth semester of FL study. The approach chosen for the research design was the analysis of writing samples produced throughout a period of time with the purpose of identifying “significant levels of change in students’ writing performance rather than on the *comparison* of writing performance of those students who received composition instruction and those who did not” (Kern & Schultz, 1992, p. 3).

In contrast to their initial stance, the results of their study suggested that “the writing skill in a foreign language may in fact be more closely tied to one’s ability to write in the native language than to one’s general level of linguistic competence in the foreign language” (Kern & Schultz, 1992, p. 6). In line with previous research, this implies that a focus solely on explicit

grammar instruction does not help students enhance their writing skills in the FL, nor does it result in improved writing skills.

In addition, Kern and Shultz (1992) posited that “systematic discourse-oriented writing instruction [...] will be of general benefit” (p. 7) for FL students. In addition, they stated that “although certain general writing skills may transfer across language boundaries, composition instruction in the foreign language is critical to the automatization of students’ use of foreign language-specific (and mode-specific) rhetorical, grammatical and lexical structures” (p. 7). In this sense, they highlight the importance of incorporating specific writing instruction in FL courses so that students can become better writers in the FL, despite their writing abilities in their first language.

The implications of this study are of paramount importance to the FL profession. On the one hand, it challenges the preconceived notion that an emphasis on explicit grammar instruction and lexical mastery, in other words, a focus on linguistic competence, will result in higher quality FL writing. On the other hand, it presents a model of instruction that is based on a “‘whole-language’ discourse-oriented program [which] can be effective in fostering foreign language writing development” (Kern & Schultz, 1992, p. 9).

### *Genre writing*

Harmer (2001) stated that the study of genres in the FL classroom allows students to identify the kinds of language use patterns present in each genre, which have been defined as “the kinds of texts that are easily recognized and shared by members of a speech community” rather than “a literary genre such as poetry, novel, fiction or non-fiction, short story, drama, or essay” (Shrum & Glisan, in press). He pointed out that “students who have been helped to

perceive these patterns will be in a much better position not only to understand what they read and hear, but also to produce their own written and spoken language” (p. 27). Harmer (2001) described a genre approach as one in which “students study texts in the genre they are going to be writing before they embark in their own writing, [which] forms the pre-writing phase” (pp. 258-259). In addition, he affirmed that an approach to writing that focuses on genre presupposes that students will receive instruction regarding information about the topic or theme; rhetorical, discursive, and stylistic conventions for each particular genre; context; and audience.

In turn, Hyland (2004) identified several advantages of writing instruction based on a genre approach. He described genre instruction, stating that it is:

Explicit: makes clear what is to be learned to facilitate the acquisition of writing skills

Systematic: provides a coherent framework for focusing on both language and contexts

Needs-based: ensures that course objectives and content are derived from student needs

Supportive: gives teachers a central role in scaffolding student learning and creativity

Empowering: provides access to the patterns and possibilities of variation in valued texts

Critical: provides the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses

Consciousness raising: increases teacher awareness of texts to confidently advise students on their writing (pp. 10-11).

It appears that several researchers, both in the US and internationally, have turned their attention to this approach to writing instruction, primarily because it seems to encompass different elements from other models, especially L1, while focusing specifically on the language acquisition process of FL learning and catering for the needs of students at different levels of proficiency. As Magnan (1985) proposed, those types of tasks within certain genres that students master at the beginning levels of proficiency can become pre-writing tasks (pp. 124-125) , especially in the production of more sophisticated tasks within different genres.

*Genre writing in beginning FL classes.* Along these lines, Way, Joiner, and Seaman (2000) conducted a study in which they purported to “examine the writing capabilities of novice FL learners at the secondary [public school] level” (p. 172). The study focused on genre-writing based on tasks, which “involved three different modes of discourse: descriptive, narrative, and expository” (p. 173). In addition, the study included “three types of writing prompts [which] consisted of a bare prompt, a vocabulary prompt, and a prose model prompt” (Way et al., 2000, p. 173). The research design included random assignment of tasks and prompts to different schools, classes, and students.

The results of the study highlighted the different levels of difficulty that the various tasks and prompts presented for the students. In this sense, the researchers found that the expository task was the most difficult, while the descriptive task was the easiest. In addition, they found that the prose prompt resulted in an overall higher quality of the writing samples, while the bare prompt resulted in the lowest overall quality.

Way et al. (2000) concluded that “task difficulty is an important variable in writing, particularly at the beginning levels” (p. 178). In addition, the strongest implication derived

from their study is that its results “cast doubt upon the ACTFL *Guidelines*’ characterization of the novice and intermediate levels”, especially due to their findings that “the novice secondary school learners in this study were able to go beyond novice-level tasks”, as identified in the *Guidelines* (p. 178). Therefore, they concluded that instructors and curriculum specialists should be wary of setting extremely low expectations that do not “challenge the full writing potential of novice FL learners” (p. 178). Apart from that, they emphasized the nature of writing as a communicative skill, exhorting instructors to include in their planning genre-based instruction and authentic tasks that foster interaction and negotiation of meaning.

*Task-based FL writing instruction.* Tena-Tena (2000) reflected on the different approaches to writing instruction of Spanish as a FL. He identified three trends, namely, “a product approach, with focus on structural aspects of writing (i.e., grammar and lexis); a communicative approach, with emphasis on the functions of written language as a tool for social interaction that serves different communicative purposes (for instance, giving orders, describing, narrating, requesting information, greeting, etc.); and a task-based approach, with an emphasis on interactive activities that result in the integration of skills” (pp. 1-2, my translation - original written in Spanish).

Tena-Tena (2000) concluded that the best approach to teaching writing in the Spanish as FL class is one based on play and literature, which instructors can easily adapt to fit the methodological approach of their choice. He proposed including play as an integral part of instruction because it facilitates learning and also helps stimulate students’ creativity. In addition, he pointed out that literature is an excellent resource in the FL class, since it provides

a source of cultural information and helps students develop their reading and grammatical skills (pp. 2-3, my translation - original written in Spanish).

As part of this approach, Tena-Tena (2000) highlighted the importance of the active role students need to have in their own learning, with the instructor acting as a tutor or guide in the learning process. In this sense, he proposed an approach to writing instruction based on workshop-type activities, very similar to the one proposed by Harmer (2001), in which students are presented with a text of a particular genre as input, which they analyze to identify functional language used and grammatical and vocabulary items particular to the type of text.

In addition, students then receive explicit instruction, including any information students need to write a similar kind of text in that particular genre, they produce their first drafts, and turn them in. The instructor makes suggestions regarding coherence, cohesion, style, grammar, presentation of the topic, and vocabulary choice; the students receive their papers back and, either individually or in groups, they analyze the instructor's suggestions, and make any necessary changes. Finally, they turn in their final drafts (Tena-Tena, 2000, p. 3).

This approach seems to highlight the importance of genre-based instruction in the FL class, in combination with process-writing instruction. However, the author failed to justify the use of play as an integral part of the approach. In addition, while the author incorporated a writing-workshop style to the approach, which clearly emphasizes the importance of a student-centered class, the fact that it is only the instructor who reads the first drafts and makes comments on the initial work of the students may suggest that there is still little involvement of students in the reflective aspect of writing as process, where the students' monitor is supposed

to activate and guide students in the rearrangement and reformulation of ideas (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Shrum & Glisan, 2005).

Another approach to genre writing is one that views writing as meaning-making through social communication. In this sense, Ainciburu, Rodríguez-López, and Salado-Tuero (2005) adopted a Vygotskian view of writing, which they described as being an integral part of language, with the purpose of engaging in social communication with others (p. 3, my translation - original written in Spanish). In this sense, they proposed a task-based approach to writing that highlights its communicative function, while it focuses on the purpose for writing, the ideal audience, and the ideal writer.

Ainciburu, Rodríguez-López, and Salado-Tuero (2005) analyzed current task-based approach examples they found in Spanish as a FL textbooks and found that these do not take into consideration any pre-writing activities besides brainstorming for ideas on the theme. Thus, they suggested a model approach that aims at catering for different students' needs while focusing on writing as a communicative and collaborative activity. In addition, this model introduces students to genre writing based on different literary models.

As with Tena-Tena's work (2000), it becomes apparent that the trend in Spanish as a FL language instruction, at least in Spain, is to incorporate genre-based instruction into a task-based approach to teaching. This type of approach highlights the importance of play as a means of promoting communication through information gap activities (Ainciburu et al., 2005, p. 4, my translation - original written in Spanish). However, once again, the practical aspects of the adoption of a genre-based approach are unclear in the work of these scholars.

### *Responding to student writing – Peer feedback*

In the writing process, it is essential that students receive feedback on their progress before they submit their final drafts for summative assessment. The formative assessment stages in the writing process are therefore of paramount importance, especially given the fact that it is through explicit relevant feedback that student writers will be able to engage in the editing and revision of their writing, thus improving their work.

However, different types of feedback should be given at different stages. Thus, Shrum and Glisan (2005) stated that “initial feedback [...] should help the writer use the processes [...] of synthesizing and structuring the content, and elaborating ideas” (p. 292). At later stages, “focus-on-form feedback can help polish the work, using the process of monitoring” (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 293). In this sense, initial feedback should focus on macro level issues such as discourse, whereas later feedback should focus on micro level issues such as mechanics.

Williams (2005) highlighted the importance of responding to student writing in a variety of ways, including teacher feedback and peer response. In relation to the latter, she stated that “all writers can benefit from having a real audience to write for, especially if the readers can provide helpful feedback. A readily available audience in the classroom is the writer’s classmates, or *peers*” (Williams, 2005, p. 93).

*A sociocultural framework.* Liu and Hansen (2005) explained that a major justification for including peer feedback as part of writing instruction is the Vygotskyan theoretical framework of social constructivism, or sociocultural theory. Thus, they explained that “cognitive development is a result of social interaction in which an individual learns to extend her or his current competence through the guidance of a more experienced individual” (p. 5) thus helping

her or him advance and reach her or his Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined as a “potential level of development (i.e., what can be done with the help of someone else)” (p. 5). In this sense, students who engage in peer collaboration during feedback sessions have the opportunity to negotiate meaning and construct their understanding of the language mechanics, or local aspects, and discursive features, or global aspects.

Social constructivists have as a premise that knowledge construction is subjective and social, and thus “reject the notion that the locus of knowledge is in the individual” (Prawat, 1996, p. 217). Rather, knowledge construction encompasses an experiential process that involves social interaction and active negotiation of meaning with others. Therefore, there is a shift in the source of knowledge from the individual to the social environment.

Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the notion that social interaction and negotiation of meaning are the basis for the construction of knowledge. This approach involves interactions of dyads in which “a more knowledgeable ‘other’ structures the learning experience in a way that allows the novice to overcome whatever limitations in skill might impede his or her attainment of a desired goal” (Prawat, 1996, p. 217). Learning and knowledge construction are mediated through the interaction with others.

Doolittle and Hicks (2003) emphasized the importance of social mediation situated in authentic environments where the individual has the opportunity to interact with others and thus “becom[e] self-regulated, self-mediated, and self-aware [through] feedback received from the environment (e.g. others, artifacts) and self-reflection on [his/her] understanding and experience” (p. 85). In this sense, sociocultural theory constitutes a viable theoretical framework for foreign language writing instruction.

Along these lines, Shrum & Glisan (2005) posited that “collaboration allows students to use language to mediate their language learning because in collaboration students use language to reflect on the language they are learning” (p. 25). Consequently, the adoption of a model of writing instruction that includes peer feedback sessions would foster the use of the three modes of communication in the same task, thus providing students with opportunities to engage in the co-construction of meaning, seek and receive clarification, and, to put it simply, become more proficient in the target language. In this sense, students would write their essays, thus engaging in the presentational mode of communication. In turn, they would receive a peer’s writing to comment on (interpretive mode of communication), and then they would engage in critical discussion of the essay, thus negotiating meaning (interpersonal mode of communication).

A social constructivist approach to the teaching of writing in a foreign language can help students improve their language skills and writing abilities, both at the micro and macro levels. In this sense, writing instruction in the foreign language should be grounded in sociocultural theory and thus include peer interaction in the writing process.

One way to incorporate peer collaboration in FL writing is in the form of peer feedback sessions, which Hu (2005) defined as “a collaborative activity involving students reading, critiquing, and providing feedback on each other’s writing, both to secure immediate textual improvement and to develop, over time, stronger writing competence via mutual scaffolding” (pp. 321-322). This definition highlights the significance of providing opportunities for student interaction that can help students ultimately become self-regulated learners.

Given the importance of student interaction in the development of their language skills, especially in light of sociocultural theory and the belief that knowledge is socially constructed, it

becomes relevant to look into several research studies conducted in the past years pertaining to the role and value of peer response in the writing process.

*Peer feedback in L1 writing.* Cooper (1986) analyzed the importance of peer review in the writing process, especially in combination with daily writing. He explained that, while frequent writing practice will result in an improvement of students' writing skills, it is essential that this be combined with regular reading of student writing. He justified this by ascertaining that "students want their writing read, their progress certified" (Cooper, 1986, p. 346). If their writing is not read regularly, students might become discouraged and fail to improve.

Thus, Cooper (1986) developed a program which incorporates regular writing and reading of students' work. In his work, he explained that, as part of his program, students write, at home, on a hard-bound, sewn notebook, "every day of the semester (seven days a week), on the right-hand pages, leaving the left-hand pages blank" (p. 347). At the beginning of every class, students gather in groups of three, "read each other's writing and indicate in the margins (in pencil or in red) [their corrections. Then] they pass books again to the right and a second reader goes over the same entry. [...] Finally, the notebooks are returned to their authors, who review the corrections" (Cooper, 1986, p. 347).

This program seems to be a viable option for a writing class, since it incorporates active participation of peers in the feedback process. However, it seems to be limited to local feedback, focusing on the mechanics of the language, setting aside other important features of student writing, such as audience, rhetoric, message, cohesion, and coherence, among others.

Kinsler (1990) also looked into the peer review process, incorporating important elements to it. She defined the process of essay revision as "a complex problem-solving process requiring

procedures related to the mechanics of writing (e.g., grammar and punctuation) and reflective activities related to the evaluation of past decisions, comparisons between existing and intended meanings, and the anticipation and correction of audience difficulty” (Kinsler, 1990, pp. 303-304).

In light of this, Kinsler (1990) developed a peer response model that incorporates a “structured peer collaboration component, [which] featured the use of structured alternating roles, consisting of a peer leader and three separate listener roles” (p. 306). In this model, the writer read his or her work aloud, while “each listener actively monitored the peer leader’s oral presentation for metacognitive features consistent with an understanding of the needs of the absent audience”; it was hypothesized that this “would lead to significant general improvement in the quality of WR [writing remediation] students’ essays” (Kinsler, 1990, p. 306).

The aforementioned study was conducted at an urban community college. The researcher collected data on 37 undergraduate freshmen enrolled in a developmental writing course. The study included instruction divided into a five-phase cycle, which encompassed “(a) lecture and discussion on traditional curriculum topics, (b) content generation and clarification experiences, (c) the writing of first drafts, (d) feedback on essay drafts, and (e) essay correction and resubmission to the instructor” (Kinsler, 1990, p. 307). In the fourth phase, students in the control group received teacher feedback, while students in the experimental group received peer feedback through collaboration groups.

Students in the collaboration groups were assigned different roles, namely, writer/reader, and three listeners. The students in the latter roles had to focus on one of the three following areas: unity/main idea, thesis support, and organization/coherence. After the data were analyzed,

it was concluded that “structured peer collaboration significantly improved experimental subjects’ use of thesis support statements and also the general unity and organization of their essays” (Kinsler, 1990, p. 312).

Along the same lines, Kinsler (1990) asserted that this could be possibly explained in light of the fact that “composition teachers focus more on errors of language usage, spelling, and sentence structure than on discourse factors, such as organization, coherence, and other more reflective features of the writing process” (p. 313). Although this assertion was made of L1 writing teachers, it can be extrapolated to L2 writing instruction, where often teachers’ main focus is on the correction of local errors such as mechanics, rather than global errors such as discourse.

In light of this, the results of this study become relevant to L2 writing instruction, and a model like the one described can be feasibly adopted in a L2 composition class where the emphasis is on good writing as evidenced by macro as well as micro level features.

*Peer feedback in L2 writing.* Other researchers analyzed the impact of sociocultural theory on language acquisition and development, especially with regard to student writing. In this sense, De Guerrero and Villamil (1994) applied Vygotsky’s theory of cognitive development in which, as explained by these scholars, “higher psychological operations are first exercised and learned in social interaction through the medium of language” (p. 484). They purported to analyze the types of interactions between pairs of students during the review process, and the types of social relationships resulting from the peers’ cognitive regulation stages.

The study involved 54 intermediate EFL students in the American University of Puerto Rico. The data collected included “audio recordings taken during two peer revision sessions on

two different occasions, approximately one month apart” (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, p. 485). Students’ drafts were randomly paired, and each pair of students was instructed to work on one of the writings, as decided by the two raters who had paired them up. The data were collected in the form of audiotapes of each interaction and a videotape of the group session. Forty recordings were analyzed (p. 485). The results of the study indicated that “students stayed on task for most of the recorded interactions, [...] students not only engaged in interactive peer revision, as was expected, but also interacted with the teacher and self-revised throughout the task” (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, p. 491). With relation to the types of social interactions among students, it was found that “self-regulation [...] was dominant among the students [and that there was] students’ frequent use of the L1 throughout the interactions” (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, p. 491). In addition, it was also found that “asymmetrical relationships [...] prevailed”, which relates to the fact that “the dyadic revision situation created an instructional space where learning was fostered by the more skilled peer assisting the other” (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, p. 491), related to Vygotsky’s ZPD theory.

All in all, the results of this study are of great importance for L2 writing instruction. On the one hand, they reaffirm the need to incorporate peer review sessions as part of the composition course curriculum, given its success in helping students improve their writing skills. On the other hand, although the researchers found that students communicated mainly in their L1, which they explained by stating that “L2 writers use their native tongue to retrieve information from memory, generate content, and improve the study of text” (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, p. 492), it might be worth inculcating in students the need to resort to the L2

when engaging in peer revision, so that they have yet another opportunity to use the language to interact and engage in meaningful communication.

In the fourth study of a series of studies on the implications of sociocultural theory on L2 peer revision, de Guerrero and Villamil (2000) analyzed in more detail “the mechanisms of scaffolded help in peer revision” (p. 55). They analyzed data taken from “one dyad’s interaction to illustrate the microgenesis of socially based individual revision skills.” (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000, p. 55).

The results of the study showed that there was a “vast array of scaffolding mechanisms in the interaction between two L2 learners as they worked jointly in revising written text” (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000, p. 64). Furthermore, they found that the role of the reader as a mediator was a crucial one in “(a) recruiting the writer’s interest [...], (b) marking critical aspects or discrepancies in the writer’s text, (c) explicitly instructing or giving minilessons to the writer on issues of grammar and mechanics, and (d) modeling” (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000, p. 64). In addition, and most importantly, the results of the study showed that there was “movement within the students’ ZPDs” (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000, p. 64).

This study contributes to L2 writing theory in that it affirms the importance of mutual cooperation among students in their learning process, especially in relation to work in learning communities. Though it is difficult for some, if not most, teachers to relinquish their role as main sources of instruction, a model like the one proposed by these scholars advocates for a more active role of students in their own learning process, which enables them to take agency and responsibility for their own learning.

In turn, Hu (2005) highlighted the important role of peer feedback in the writing process, especially given that “traditionally, only the teacher responds to student writing, but peer review [...] is now a prominent feature of process-oriented writing instruction” (p. 321). Hu (2005) purported to present a model of writing instruction that includes active student involvement in the revision and editing of writing produced by their peers. This model was applied in an upper-intermediate English for Academic Purposes writing course for Chinese college students in the National Institute of Education in Singapore.

The adoption of this model was supported by an extensive literature review conducted by the scholar, who summarizes the potential benefits and advantages of peer review as follows: it contributes “to learners’ developing understandings of themselves and others both as writers and as classroom learners of writing”, while offering opportunities for teachers to “develop their own understanding of writing and the teaching and learning of writing”, thus providing “openings for mutual development and improvement on the quality of life in the classroom” (Hu, 2005, p. 325). This scholar described the pedagogical framework adopted in the course as one which was “process-oriented, genre-centered, theme-structured, and task-based” (Hu, 2005, p. 328). The model included

reading on specific themes, mini-lectures on target text types, textual analysis (with respect to audience, purpose, rhetorical structure and support) pre-writing tasks (e.g., brainstorming, note-taking and discussion), multiple-drafting, peer review, teacher-student conferencing and revision. These activities emphasize writing as a social act [...]; they are aimed at helping students go through the various stages of composition and acquire strategies for producing effective academic discourse. (Hu, 2005, p. 328)

As part of the course, students were required to turn in six 500-word compositions with redrafts, based on different genres, and a final research paper of 1,500-2,000 words. During the peer feedback sessions, students responded to their peers' first drafts orally and then in writing. In addition, in order to promote interaction among students, they were required to work in different dyads for each assignment. The peer feedback process itself involved three stages or steps.

In the first step, students “read peer writing carefully to understand intended meaning”; then they “respond to macro issues (content, audience, purpose, organization, and development of ideas)”; finally, students “deal with language problems” (Hu, 2005, p. 330). In all cases, students were provided with a list of questions to use as guidelines in their responses, while receiving extensive training and modeling on how to conduct the peer revision. For these purposes, whole-class review and revision sessions were held, together with modeling sessions by the instructor, which also included procedural explanations and explanations of the benefits of peer response for “real writers” (Hu, 2005, pp. 331-335). In addition, the instructor conducted follow-up activities of students' work, which included praise of good suggestions by peer editors, as well as an examination of actual revisions conducted by the writers based on their peers' suggestions (Hu, 2005, pp. 336-337).

The final stage of this model included a feedback questionnaire administered to the students after the process. In their responses, “students clearly recognized the value of peer review in improving their academic writing competence”; they stated that “they learned much about writing by reading each other's writing and by giving each other advice” (Hu, 2005, p. 339).

All in all, the model Hu (2005) presented seems to be successful at encouraging students to take an active role in the improvement of their writing skills. It seems that, by engaging in the revision of their peers' work, students gain metacognitive awareness of their own writing, thus being able to advance in their own process towards mastering writing in the L2.

*Students' perceptions of the value of peer feedback in L2 writing.* An important aspect of peer response is its impact on students' motivation to engage in the editing of their peers' work. In light of this, several researchers have studied students' perceptions of and reactions to peer response.

Carson and Nelson (1996) investigated the interaction styles and perceptions of Chinese students who engaged in the editing of their ESL peers' writing. They purported to investigate the different styles in which Chinese students interacted during peer response sessions, as well as Chinese students' perceptions of how they negotiated their relationships with their peers while engaged in peer response.

The study consisted of a microethnographic analysis of the interactions of eleven students enrolled in an Advanced ESL Composition class at a large urban university. The students were placed into three different groups, according to their nationality and gender. Prior to engaging in the peer response sessions, the students participated as observers of "a series role-plays in which three ESL instructors (actors) visited the class and played the roles of student writers and responders" (Carson & Nelson, 1996, p. 4). The data collection included videotapes of the peer feedback sessions, audio taped interviews with the students, and transcriptions of said interviews. Based on the data collected focused on Chinese students' perceptions, Carson and Nelson (1996)

identified several themes: reluctance to criticize drafts, reluctance to disagree with peers, reluctance to claim authority, feelings of vulnerability, and conditions for speaking.

Carson and Nelson (1996) concluded that “the kinds of behaviors that Chinese students would normally exhibit in groups are different from the behaviors that are frequently desired in writing groups” (p. 18). Moreover, they stated that Chinese ESL students seemed more preoccupied with maintaining group cohesion than with giving their peers valuable feedback on their writing, probably because they recognized “that making negative comments on a peer’s draft leads to [group] division” (Carson & Nelson, 1996, p. 18).

Although making generalizations across cultures is somewhat dangerous, this study has implications for FL writing. On the one hand, it is important that teachers make sure that there is a true sense of community in the classroom before any attempts are made to implement peer editing as a strategy to help students improve their writing. In this sense, there needs to be a general environment of mutual respect among students and teacher so that students feel comfortable giving and receiving peer feedback. On the other hand, students’ affective filter needs to be low; otherwise, some students may not be open to their peers’ input, thus blocking any valuable feedback they might receive from their peers and not incorporating it into their final drafts.

In a follow-up study, Nelson and Carson (1998) investigated the interaction styles and perceptions of ESL students who engaged in the editing of their peers’ writing. Once again, they conducted a microethnographic study in which eleven ESL students enrolled in an Advanced ESL writing class participated. The researchers videotaped six sessions of each of the peer editing groups. In addition, “within five days after each session, an interviewer and a student met

to view the videotape of the session and to discuss the group's interactions" (Nelson & Carson, 1998, p. 118). The questions asked during the interviews fell under one of the following three categories: a) "inquiring about the subjects' affective states"; b) "inquiring about the subjects' cognitive states"; and c) "inquiring about the subjects' pragmatic intent" (Nelson & Carson, 1998, p. 118).

Based on the data collected, Nelson and Carson (1998) identified several themes: preference for negative comments, preference for teacher's comments, ineffective comments, and cultural differences in perceived effectiveness. Students' rationale for preferring teacher's comments was based on the fact that they perceived the teacher, rather than their peers, as the expert. In addition, students sometimes perceived their peers' comments to be ineffective or unhelpful, especially since they "felt that too much time was spent talking about unimportant issues [including] grammar and sentence-level details" (Nelson & Carson, 1998, pp. 125-126).

Regarding cultural differences identified, Nelson and Carson (1998) found that Chinese students needed consensus for the attainment of "a positive group climate and maintenance of group harmony" (p. 126), whereas Spanish-speaking students "tended to focus on discussing the improvement of the essays of group members and viewed the social dimension of the group as subordinate to the task dimension" (p. 127).

Although the students in this study belonged to different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, which contributed to the differences in their perceptions of the effectiveness of peer response, its results can contribute to FL writing pedagogy. On the one hand, it is important that teachers present themselves as facilitators in the classroom and that students take an active role in their own learning. In this sense, for peer response to be a successful tool in the development of FL

students' writing, the FL classroom needs to be student-centered. Otherwise, students will show reluctance in accepting their peers' suggestions and will rely solely on their teachers' comments.

On the other hand, it is important that teachers focus their attention on pointing out and discussing local aspects of students' writing, such as grammar and sentence-level issues, as well as global aspects, such as organization and idea development. As indicated in Nelson's and Carson's (1998) study, students may perceive a sole focus on local aspects as unhelpful, which might cause them to become discouraged from giving and receiving peer feedback. In this sense, it is important that students recognize the significance of a combination of focus on both local and global aspects in order to be able to provide meaningful feedback and improve their writing.

Tsui and Ng (2000) investigated the frequency with which L2 writers incorporate peer comments. The subjects in the study were twenty-seven Chinese students enrolled in grades 12 and 13 in a secondary school in Hong Kong in which English is used as the medium of instruction. The method of writing instruction in the classes in which the subjects were enrolled was based on writing cycles.

Each cycle included the "production of a first draft after a whole-class brainstorming session [followed by] the teacher giving whole-class feedback on common problems found in the first draft" (Tsui & Ng, 2000, p. 151). Then, students exchanged their first drafts with their peers and commented on their peers' essays in writing. Afterwards, students engaged in face-to-face interactions in which they discussed the written comments. Students then produced a second draft, on which the teacher provided comments. Finally, students received the teacher's feedback and produced a final draft.

Students were then provided with a questionnaire survey, which focused on the following:

Part one: students' attitude towards writing based on a product-oriented approach; students' attitude towards writing based on a process-oriented approach; reasons why students are afraid of writing; reasons why they liked writing better when using a product-oriented versus a process-oriented approach to writing (Tsui & Ng, 2000, p. 153);

Part two: "usefulness of reading peers' writings"; "usefulness of peers' oral comments given in the peer response sessions"; "usefulness of reading peers' comments"; "usefulness of teacher's comments" (Tsui & Ng, 2000, p. 153); and

Part three: "extent to which [students] incorporated teacher and peer comments in their revisions"; "which aspects of their writing improved after the revisions" (Tsui & Ng, 2000, p. 153).

In addition to the questionnaire, data collection included the analysis of the drafts to account for "the number of peer comments on the first drafts of the two compositions each student wrote [as] compared with the amount of revision on the second drafts and the number of teacher comments on the second drafts [as] compared with the amount of revision on the final drafts" (Tsui & Ng, 2000, pp. 156-157). This analysis was followed by the identification of six writing samples in which students had incorporated more teacher than peer comments, more peer than teacher comments, and about the same number of teacher and peer comments with the purpose of examining "the extent to which peer and teacher comments facilitated revision" (Tsui

& Ng, 2000, p. 157). Finally, the authors of the selected six writing samples were interviewed in semi-structured interviews in order to elicit more information related to their editing choices.

The results of the data analysis indicated that students favored teacher comments over peer comments, and that teacher comments lead to more revisions than peer comments (Tsui & Ng, 2000, p. 165). In this sense, they found that students

who incorporated a low percentage of peer comments saw the teacher as the sole source of authority [and] did not have confidence in their peers [whereas] those students who incorporated a high percentage of peer comments saw the value of getting feedback from peers despite their reservations about the ability of their peers as competent L2 writers. (Tsui & Ng, 2000, p. 166)

In addition, Tsui and Ng (2000) identified several roles that peer feedback played: a) it enhanced students' sense of audience, who therefore viewed their peers as the real audience for their writing; b) it raised students' awareness through their giving and receiving feedback, and thus contributed to helping students transfer the ability to spot others' mistakes and develop metacognitive abilities to spot their own; c) it encouraged collaborative learning and negotiation of meaning among students; and d) it fostered a sense of text ownership among student writers, especially since they viewed their peers' comments as lacking authoritativeness, which let them decide whether to incorporate their peers' comments into their final drafts without feeling compelled to do so.

As did the previous studies described in this section, this study contributes to the FL writing field, especially regarding the implications of its results. On the one hand, the results of the study imply that peer response is a viable option that can be incorporated into learner-

centered writing instruction. In this sense, not only does peer response help students develop their writing ability in terms of macro level features, for instance, audience-awareness and sense of text ownership, but it can also help students develop metacognitive skills, such as awareness of their own mistakes when writing, as well as group interaction and negotiation of meaning.

*Trained versus untrained peer feedback.* Some scholars specifically focused their research on the impact on students' writing of trained and untrained peer response, as well as of peer feedback with and without guidelines.

On the one hand, Benesch (1984) highlighted the importance of taking into account students' prior experience in writing as well as in giving and receiving feedback. In this sense, she proposed an approach that lets the students engage in the process of peer feedback without following any guidelines or receiving any training in peer response. In such an approach, the teacher takes on the role of modeling effective peer feedback techniques and monitoring students' interactions, providing assistance when needed.

Benesch's (1984) model presupposes that the teacher have clear learning objectives related to the rationale for using peer response as a means of providing students with feedback for their writing. In this sense, teachers interested in adopting such a model should take into consideration that "membership in a peer response group entails three interrelated spheres of learning: [...] learning to write, [...] learning to respond to writing and [...] learning to collaborate" (Benesch, 1984, p. 2). In addition, teachers should assess students' prior knowledge on these three areas and set clear and attainable goals for students to reach in each of the areas.

In addition, Benesch (1984) stated the need to provide students with modeling of what effective feedback should be like. One of the ways in which teachers can implement this

approach is by showing the class a draft written by the teachers and conducting a whole-class discussion of what helpful feedback the writer could get for that specific draft. In turn, teachers can also model effective feedback by providing students with comments on their drafts (Benesch, 1984, p. 3). In this approach, only after receiving guidance from the teachers will students be able to provide descriptive feedback and “become careful readers and articulate responders, particularly when they are operating from a former model of vague, prescriptive feedback” (Benesch, 1984, p. 8).

The model Benesch (1984) proposed, in which teachers allow students to engage in peer response using “their own language and conversational habits and then monitoring their feedback while modeling the type that is most conducive to promoting true exchange” (p. 8), might seem at first sight one in which there need not be much training on peer response. However, the type of modeling she described appears to be in itself formal training on how to provide effective feedback.

In turn, Min (2005) studied the effect of training on the amount of specific feedback provided by students to their peers through peer feedback. She stated that “the problem that lies with [FL] peer reviewers is [...] an aggregate of over- and mis-interpretation as well as a lack of skills in providing specific feedback” (Min, 2005, p. 295), which results in ineffective feedback and lack of incorporation of peer comments in subsequent draft revisions. Thus, she designed a detailed procedure for providing written feedback, since in FL peer feedback “there is usually little time for the reviewer and writer to discuss the written comments in class due to time constraints” (Min, 2005, p. 296).

The participants in Min's study were eighteen students in their sophomore year enrolled in a composition class at a Taiwanese large university. The students were studying English as their major, and their proficiency level in English was intermediate. The students engaged in initial review of their peers' composition following guidelines provided by the researcher. However, "most peer comments were perfunctory, made only to answer the teacher's questions on the guidance sheet" (Min, 2005, p. 297). This initial finding led the researcher to provide students with training sessions.

Each session encompassed an in-class modeling phase that lasted four hours. During this training, the teacher modeled to students how to provide feedback following four steps: clarifying the writer's intention; identifying the problem; explaining the nature of the problem; and making specific suggestions. After receiving this training, the students were asked to provide feedback on their peers' writing. The second phase of the training included "two 30-minute teacher-student conferences outside of class" (Min, 2005, p. 297). During these conferences, the teacher provided guidance on how students could modify the feedback they had provided so that it would adjust to the prescribed four-step model presented in the first phase of the training. After the two phases of the training were completed, students were asked to write an essay at home and bring their first drafts to class for peer review. The students were then given an hour of class time to provide their peers with feedback on the first drafts of their essays. The teacher then collected the comments and compared them with the comments students had provided for their first essay, prior to the training sessions.

The data collected were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis consisted of paired samples *t*-tests that analyzed the total number of comments, the

number of comments on local and global aspects, “and the number of steps each comment contained before and after training” (Min, 2005, p. 298). In addition, the researcher conducted a qualitative analysis of students’ journal entries on their opinions about the class in general and about peer feedback in particular.

Min (2005) found that there was a significant difference in the number of comments students provided after the training when compared with the number of comments provided before the training. In addition, the researcher found that the means of the number of comments that included two and three steps after training were significantly higher than before training. However, she found no significant difference in the number of comments that included one step, before and after training (Min, 2005, p. 299). In addition, Min (2005) did not find significant differences between the means for comments on micro level issues before and after training, though there were significant differences in the means of macro level comments before and after training.

Regarding the qualitative analysis, Min (2005) found that the training had positive effects on the students. In this sense, as reviewers, “students learned to provide more feedback to global issues”, saw an “increase [in] their vocabulary repertoire”, identified an impact on their self-monitoring, and “gain[ed] confidence in viewing themselves as competent readers” (Min, 2005, p. 301). In addition, as writers students “learned from their peers how to focus their ideas and view things from different perspectives” (Min, 2005, p. 302).

Moreover, Min (2005) identified changes in the quality of students’ comments before and after training: “the language used prior to training was short and impersonal, rendering the tone like teachers’ corrections over students’ assignments”. In contrast, after receiving training,

students provided comments that “sounded more like readers communicating ideas with writers and thus the language longer, the tone much friendlier” (Min, 2005, p. 302).

Thus, Min’s (2005) findings suggest that the feedback provided by students who have received training is more detailed – including two and three steps – and more focused on global aspects. However, these results do not indicate whether students in fact incorporate the feedback received into their final drafts, nor do they indicate whether students produce final drafts of better quality after receiving trained versus untrained peer feedback.

Min (2006) conducted a subsequent study in which she analyzed data collected in a larger study (Min, 2005). She investigated the impact of trained versus untrained peer feedback on students’ subsequent revisions and the impact of trained versus untrained peer feedback on revision quality.

The quantitative analysis of the data showed “a significant difference between the total revisions writers made before and after peer review training” (Min, 2006, p. 129). Specifically, she found that revisions produced prior to and after training differed in quality: “the revisions produced prior to peer review training [...] were mainly at the word level” whereas “most of the revisions post peer review training were improved in terms of idea development, unity, and organization” (Min, 2006, p. 130).

Regarding revision types, Min (2006) found that students often overlooked grammatical errors – micro level – as long as these did not impede or obscure communication of meaning. She hypothesized that this could be the case since students were instructed to focus on meaning rather than on form when giving feedback (p. 131). In addition, Min (2006) indicated that there were certain types of revisions that led to higher-quality final drafts: substitution of information,

permutation or rephrasing of information, re-ordering or moving information at the text-based level, consolidation or putting separate information together, and distribution or rewriting same information in larger chunks (pp. 133, 139).

All in all, Min (2006) highlighted the benefit of using written comments, since it allowed her to “trace the impact of the trained peer feedback” (p. 133). She also stated that the results from the data analysis indicated that “77% of the trained peer review feedback was incorporated into students’ revisions, which constituted 90% of the total revisions” (Min, 2006, p. 133).

Some of the contributions of Min’s (2006) study to FL writing pedagogy as indentified in her research study are:

After-class teacher-reviewer conferences, which provided additional guidance to peer reviewers, who were able to “transform their declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge” (p. 134) with regards to providing peer feedback;

Assigning a grade for peer comments, which motivated students to follow the four-step guidelines and to provide their peers with meaningful feedback;

Implementing peer review strategies in classes with more experienced writers, since they are more likely to have “the ability to detect the dissonance between their intended meaning and readers’ understood meanings” and also “the linguistic resources for revision strategies” (p. 135).

However, Min (2006) failed to address the issue of language proficiency as an important factor in students’ ability to give and receive peer feedback. Although she pointed out the need for students to have “linguistic resources for revision strategies” (p. 135), she indicated that this

was related to students' ability to write. However, linguistic resources are also related to other manifestations of language proficiency. In this sense, students need to be at a high enough level of language proficiency in order to be able to interpret their peers' writing in such a way that they can subsequently provide their peers with feedback on how to address macro and micro level issues they might detect in their writing.

### *Conclusion*

As Way et al. (2000) affirmed, "few researchers have directly studied writing instruction in FL classes. Consequently, practitioners have had to depend on research from writing in English as first language [...] or English as a Second Language [...] when developing instructional procedures for teaching second language (L2) writing" (p. 171). This assertion is of great importance for the foreign language profession, particularly because it informs about a line of research that scholars have not extensively explored thus far.

In addition, the work of other researchers stresses that, while there are instances when positive transfer from L1 to FL occurs (Valdés et al., 1992) or when ability to write in one's L1 may enhance one's ability to write in the FL (Kern & Schultz, 1992), there are still other factors to be considered with regard to writing in the FL. For instance, there is an obvious difference in linguistic ability between someone writing in the L1, or even in a second language, and someone writing in the FL (Reichelt, 2001), which often leads FL student writers to focus on form and fail to focus on meaning, and which instructors should consider.

Thus, teachers should bear in mind that it seems to be best to avoid designing writing instruction that is solely based on emphasis on the linguistic accuracy of the product, since this may cause students' affective filter to rise. Nor should they demand that students produce

linguistically rich writing that is culturally relevant and whose meaning is communicated effectively unless learners have acquired the linguistic and syntactic structures of the language necessary to successfully perform the task without being impeded to do so by linguistic deficiencies.

In line with this, some researchers are focusing their attention on writing instruction that is guided by a focus on form as a pre-writing task, so that students are exposed to specific structures used in the FL to communicate a particular meaning. For instance, Lucha-Cuadros (2006) found that instruction focused intensively on certain Spanish as a FL structures resulted in a more frequent use of said structures in students' writing samples (p. 19, my translation - original written in Spanish). Thus, it might be a feasible idea to adopt a genre-based writing instructional approach that incorporates focus-on-form strategies during the pre-writing stage.

The advantages of this type of approach are many. On the one hand, "the degree of accurate production of L2 forms seems to be 'shaped' by attention to form for those features of the L2 grammar that can help the learner convey a particular message" (Salaberry & Lopez-Ortega, 1998, p. 528). In this sense, students that receive instruction on a particular genre, combined with instruction on certain forms suitable to express meaning within that genre, may internalize the forms and therefore be able to focus on the message they want to convey without consciously focusing on form. In turn, this may result in their production of more accurate samples.

On the other hand, this type of approach, if implemented as a workshop-type instruction model, may foster collaboration among peers and autonomy in learners who can thus engage in self-correction during the planning, translating, and reviewing stages, following the process-

oriented model proposed by Flower and Hayes (1981). Hence, such an approach might help students develop metacognitive awareness and focus on conveying the message particular to the type of genre on which they are working.

An integral part of such an approach should be the incorporation of peer feedback sessions, especially with the purpose of helping students gain metacognitive awareness of their own capabilities and of how they can improve their writing skills. By engaging in peer feedback, students not only have the opportunity to see reflected in others' work their own writing, but they get the chance to contribute to their peers' improvement through mutual scaffolding. In addition, this type of approach will help teachers share some of their responsibilities for monitoring students' progress by actively involving them in self-monitoring.

Hence, a writing instruction approach informed by sociocultural theory would provide students with multiple opportunities to become more proficient in the foreign language through the active negotiation of meaning required in peer feedback sessions. In this sense, students would be able to deepen their knowledge of the language mechanics and its pragmatic uses through dyadic interactions, as well as gain metacognitive awareness on how to monitor their own progress regarding language fluency and accuracy. In addition, students would advance their ZPDs and then become self-regulated writers, ultimately becoming more proficient independent writers.

Future research studies on FL writing are needed that focus specifically on FL writing instruction as an autonomous discipline, informed by research on L1 and SL writing research, but with its own unique endogenous characteristics.

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## Appendix A

### L1 and L2 writing instruction research

Topic	Researcher	Description
Extensive and intensive writing	Emig (1971)	Extensive writing: the intended audience is the teacher. Reflexive writing: the audience is the self or a trusted peer, which makes this type of writing more authentic and focused on the writing process.
Writing workshop	Hass, Childers, Babbitt, and Dylla (1972)	Intensive daily in-class writing, explicit process writing instruction, peer feedback, and student-generated topics.
Instructors' metacognitive development in teaching process writing	Shaughnessy (1976)	Description of stages teachers experience when teaching basic writing at the college level.
Structure of the writing model	Flower and Hayes (1981)	The writing process includes various stages, namely, planning, translating and reviewing, which are constantly checked by the writer's monitor and influenced by the task environment and the writer's background knowledge
A task-based process writing approach	Magnan (1985)	Writing tasks should be designed for different proficiency levels, but those designed for lower levels of proficiency can become pre-writing tasks at higher proficiency levels.
Incorporating a process writing approach to foreign language writing instruction	Barnett (1989)	This approach should include students' self-editing of their writing as well as teacher feedback, which should focus on recurrent mistakes that impede communication
Training students to become good writers	Greenia (1992)	Curricular design for foreign language writing should include pre-writing and writing assignments. Teachers should have high expectations of their students but not assume that they will automatically transfer their L1 writing knowledge to L2 writing.
Connections between L1 and L2 writing proficiency	Valdés, Haro, and Etchevarriarza (1992)	Differences in L1 and L2 writing proficiency as well as positive language transfer opportunities should be acknowledged when considering L2 writing development.
Explicit L2 writing instruction	Kern and Shultz (1992)	L2 writing proficiency is more highly correlated to L1 writing knowledge than to L2 linguistic competence.
Genre writing in beginning FL classes	Way, Joiner, and Seaman (2000)	Genre and task prompt differences have an impact on students' L2 writing.
Task-based FL writing instruction	Tena-Tena (2000)	Intensive genre-focused instruction coupled with specific instructor feedback can contribute to developing students' writing proficiency in an L2.
	Ainciburu, Rodríguez-López, and Salado-Tuero (2005)	

## Appendix B

### Research on peer feedback

Topic	Researcher	Description
Peer feedback in L1 writing	Cooper (1986)	Having an audience for one's writing is essential to one's writing proficiency improvement. Peer feedback provides a viable audience for students' writing.
	Kinsler (1990)	Structured peer response in the form of oral and written feedback can help students develop their writing proficiency.
Peer feedback in L2 writing	De Guerrero and Villamil (1994, 2000)	Peer revision can contribute to the writing proficiency development of ESL students through mutual scaffolding provided by students to each other during face-to-face peer review sessions.
	Hu (2005)	A peer feedback model in ESL writing classes includes intensive training on how to provide feedback and can be divided into three steps: reading one's partner's essay, providing feedback on global aspects, and providing feedback on local aspects.
Students' perceptions of the value of peer feedback in L2 writing	Carson and Nelson (1996)	Chinese ESL students have low perceptions of peer feedback and perceive it as a potential threat to group cohesion.
	Nelson and Carson (1998)	ESL students express a preference for teacher comments and negative comments. Students of different cultural backgrounds (Hispanic vs. Chinese) have contrasting perceptions of the effectiveness of peer feedback.
	Tsu and Ng (2000)	ESL students favor teacher over student comments. Teacher comments lead to more revisions than student comments. Peer feedback enhances a sense of audience for one's writing, enhances students' metacognitive awareness, encourages peer collaboration, and fosters a sense of text ownership.
Trained versus untrained peer feedback	Benesch (1984)	Targeted teacher scaffolding can enhance the quality of peer feedback students provide.
	Min (2005, 2006)	Intensive and extensive training in how to provide meaningful feedback helps enhance peer feedback quality as well as the percentage of revisions incorporated by writers after receiving peer feedback.

The impact of peer feedback on students' written comment types and writing proficiency

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## Introduction

Various approaches to foreign language teaching have been in vogue throughout the years, including those whose framework was grammar and translation based, audio-lingual, cognitive, behaviorist, humanistic, communicative and proficiency-oriented (Harmer, 2003; Omaggio Hadley, 2000; Shrum & Glisan, 2005). One of the current approaches in foreign language teaching, proficiency-oriented instruction, focuses on various sets of competencies that learners need to be able to demonstrate, as evidenced by their attainment of pre-determined performance levels set forth in the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines - Speaking (1999) and Writing (2001). In addition to these proficiency guidelines, the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (NSFLEP) has defined a set of content standards and goal areas that specifically address what learners should know and be able to do (NSFLEP, 2006).

One of the five goal areas identified in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (NSFLEP, 2006) is the Communications goal, which includes three different standards: interpersonal communication, interpretive communication and presentational communication. Standard 1.3, presentational, establishes the need for learners to “present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics” (NSFLEP, 2006, p. 45). One way in which foreign language teachers can foster the attainment of this content standard is through focused writing instruction.

## Theoretical Framework

Although the importance of explicit instruction in foreign language writing has been recognized, research on the best approaches to be adopted in foreign language writing instruction

is scarce. Researchers investigating this topic have posited that there is a stated need to explain the purpose of writing instruction as an essential topic in foreign language writing research (Reichelt, 2001), which calls for systematic inquiry so that researchers and practitioners can identify best practices that will elucidate ways of understanding and improving foreign language writing instruction (Hamp-Lyons, 1995; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; Hyland, 2003, 2004; Matsuda & Silva, 2005; Williams, 2005).

A traditional approach to writing instruction includes the production of drafts by learners and the summative assessment provided by teachers. This type of approach focuses on writing as a product (Gaudiani, 1979; Lalande, 1982). In contrast, a process-oriented approach to writing instruction includes the production of multiple drafts on which learners receive explicit feedback, whether from a peer, the teacher, or even themselves (Barnett, 1989; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Kern & Shultz, 1992; Magnan, 1985; Tena Tena, 2000). A major advantage of incorporating peer feedback as part of the writing process is that it specifically allows learners to engage in different modes of communication within one major task. In this sense, an approach to teaching foreign language writing that includes peer feedback can provide opportunities for learners to write in the presentational mode, read their peers' drafts in the interpretive mode and provide feedback in the interpersonal mode (NSFLEP, 2006).

Second language acquisition researchers have identified the role of feedback in foreign language learning as “a collaborative process where the dynamics of the interaction itself shape the nature of feedback and inform its usefulness to the learner [or learners]” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 276). Specifically, peer feedback has been said to provide learners with scaffolding opportunities (De Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Liu & Hansen, 2005), defined as “a

dialogically produced interpsychological process through which learners internalize knowledge they co-construct with more capable peers” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 282). In this sense, when interacting with their peers, learners can engage in negotiation of meaning that will help them advance their zone of proximal development (ZPD) and consequently become more proficient in the foreign language. Other benefits of the incorporation of peer feedback into foreign language instruction include providing learners with opportunities to reflect on their role as writers and readers, on the negotiation of meaning needed to successfully communicate the intended message, and on the linguistic and rhetorical resources that writers need to employ in order to communicate meaning (Hu, 2005; Kinsler, 1990; Shrum & Glisan, 2005; Williams, 2005).

Previous researchers adopting a sociocultural perspective to foreign language teaching have focused on the role of corrective feedback as a scaffolding process in second language acquisition. Specifically, research has been carried out that investigated the role of instructor feedback in providing opportunities for negotiation of meaning and advancement in learners’ ZPD (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Nassaji & Swain, 2000). In turn, other researchers have focused on the role of peer feedback as a means to enhance foreign language development (Donato, 2004) and writing proficiency (Berg, 1999; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; Kinsler, 1990; Min, 2006).

Researchers investigating peer feedback as a scaffolding mechanism in foreign language writing have carried out their studies with learners studying English as a foreign language (Berg, 1999; de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Hu, 2005; Min, 2005; Min, 2006; Tsui & Ng, 2000), French as a foreign language (Donato, 2004; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992), and Spanish as a foreign language (Amores, 1997; Elola, 2005; Roux-Rodriguez, 2003). Prior research has also

focused on students' perceptions of peer feedback (Amores, 1997; Hu, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000), students' interaction during peer feedback sessions (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Elola, 2005; Roux-Rodriguez, 2003), students' comments and revisions types (Min, 2005; Min, 2006; Roux-Rodriguez, 2003; Stanley, 1992), the impact of peer feedback on French and English as a Foreign Language students' writing proficiency (Berg, 1999; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; Min, 2006), and the effect of training ESL students on how to provide peer feedback (Leki, 1990; Stanley, 1992). However, research focusing specifically on the impact of peer feedback on students' writing proficiency in Spanish as a foreign language is scarce.

The purpose of this study was threefold. First, it aimed to investigate the impact of peer feedback on the writing proficiency of American students enrolled in college Spanish as foreign language courses. A second aim was to investigate whether students trained in how to provide meaningful feedback improved their writing proficiency significantly more than students not trained in how to provide specific feedback before they participated in a peer feedback experience. Finally, in an attempt to incorporate a supplemental strategy that would “aid in the interpretation of data in the core project, providing explanations for unexpected findings [and] supporting the results” (Morse, 2003, p.192), the study aimed to examine whether there were differences in the type of written feedback provided between students trained and not trained on how to provide meaningful feedback before they participated in a peer feedback experience.

## Method

### *Participants*

The study participants were 70 undergraduate students of Spanish as a foreign language at a major university in the southeastern United States. Students were enrolled in four intact

Intermediate Spanish college classes, which were randomly selected and assigned to Group A: Trained and Group B: Untrained. This quasi-experimental assignment resulted in 35 students participating in each group. It should be noted that all 4 courses were taught by the same language instructor. The students' average age was 19.4 years old, with 42 female and 23 male students; 5 students did not report their gender. The ethnicity distribution of the study participants included 51 Caucasian students, 3 African-American students, 2 Hispanic students, and 4 Asian/Pacific Islander students; 10 students did not report their ethnicity. Regarding students' year of enrollment, 11 students were freshmen, 29 sophomores, 16 juniors, and 4 seniors; 10 students did not report their year in college. Students' average number of years of Spanish instruction received before enrolling in this class was 4.25 years.

In order to ensure that students had the expected language proficiency level before enrollment in Intermediate Spanish classes, the Foreign Languages and Literatures Department administered a diagnostic test that evaluated students' knowledge of diverse grammar topics, as well as their speaking and writing abilities. Based on their score on this placement test, students were advised to take the appropriate language course. Therefore, all students enrolled in the four Intermediate Spanish classes who participated in the study had an equivalent language proficiency at the beginning of the course.

#### *Peer Feedback Guidelines and Training*

Students in Group A: Trained and Group B: Untrained received a set of guidelines that they were to use when providing feedback on their partners' essays. The guidelines were adapted from Loderhose's (2008) peer feedback guidelines. The instructions encouraged students to provide their partners with meaningful feedback that would help improve the quality of their

partner's writing. Specifically, the instructions advised students to concentrate on global aspects, such as organization, transition of ideas, and exemplification, as well as local aspects, such as punctuation or grammar mistakes. Further, the instructions prompted students to read their partner's essay, choose the questions that they considered the most relevant from the set of 14 questions, and write a critique answering the questions selected as thoroughly as possible. The critique needed to include the following formatting criteria: 12 point font, 1 inch margins, double spacing and two pages in length. In addition, the instructions allowed students to provide marginal comments on their partner's essay, but those comments could not substitute for the critique.

While students in Group B: Untrained only received the guidelines and no training in their use, students in Group A: Trained participated in a 30-minute training session on how to provide peer feedback using the guidelines. Based on the training session model designed by Min (2005), the researcher designed and conducted the training session, in which she modeled how to provide feedback. After distributing a sample essay and the guidelines among the students, the researcher used think-aloud techniques to model critiquing the sample essay using the guidelines, and giving a rationale for the type of feedback provided.

Additionally, the researcher distributed sample written comments on other aspects of the sample essay not included in the preceding think-aloud examples in order to model the type and quality of critique that students would be expected to provide on their partners' essays. The researcher also distributed additional sample essays and instructed the students to read the sample, decide which of the questions in the guidelines would be worth answering in order to constructively critique the sample, and discuss within their groups the type of feedback they

would provide to the author. Finally, students in each group gave examples of the feedback they had provided on their sample as well as a rationale for said feedback. After this, the researcher prompted students to discuss how they would re-phrase some of the feedback so that it would become more constructive. The training session ended with a final discussion and clarification of students' final questions and concerns regarding the feedback process.

### *Procedure*

The peer feedback experience consisted of five sub-tasks, which included writing the first draft of an essay, providing written comments, participating in a face-to-face peer feedback session, producing the final draft of an essay, and completing a survey.

The essay assignment consisted of an essay prompt, assigned by the course instructor. The prompt included an expository section - the advantages and disadvantages of marriage or divorce - and a persuasive section - providing advice to a friend who was considering marriage or divorce. As part of the writing assignment, students were asked to write two drafts of a 500-word essay, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins.

The first sub-task, writing the first draft of the essay, was completed at home on Day 1. On Day 2, the researcher distributed the printed guidelines among all students in each of the four sections involved in the research, regardless of training. The researcher also trained students in Group A on how to constructively critique an essay using the guidelines. Students in Group B did not participate in the training. In class, after receiving the guidelines (Groups A and B) and training (Group A only) students exchanged drafts with their partners. Partnerships were determined through self selection.

The second sub-task was completed over the weekend, on Days 3 and 4. Students read their partners' essays and wrote the two-page critique following the guidelines provided. Students completed the third sub-task in class on Day 5. Students took part in a 50-minute face-to-face peer feedback session, during which they exchanged drafts and comments with their partners. Students were encouraged to discuss the written feedback received, negotiating for meaning and seeking clarification on the feedback received so that it would later help them revise their essay.

The fourth sub-task was completed at home on Days 5 and 6. Using the feedback they received from their partners, students revised their first draft and produced a final draft. On Day 7, students turned in their final drafts and completed a survey on their perceptions of the peer feedback experience.

### *Essay Scoring*

Two independent raters were selected for the scoring procedures. The raters presented the following characteristics: native speakers of Spanish, trained language teachers, experienced scoring students' foreign language writing samples. A scoring rubric, adapted from the 2008 Advanced Placement® (AP) Spanish Language Presentational Writing Scoring Guidelines, was used to provide raters with criteria for evaluating the essays and to increase the reliability of the subsequent scores and the validity of the ultimate conclusions (see Appendix). A calibration session was conducted with the raters by the researcher to establish unified scoring criteria. The researcher and the raters discussed the scoring rubric descriptors and the researcher clarified the raters' questions. The researcher selected three writing samples representing a high score, a mid score, and a low score. The raters assessed each of these samples and then they discussed the

score assignment with the researcher, in order to reach consensus as to what characteristics a high, mid, and low rating essay should have. The raters then assessed six randomly selected writing samples (first draft or final draft). A reliability analysis, Pearson product-moment correlation, was subsequently conducted after the raters had completed their ratings, resulting in a high level of inter-rater reliability ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

### *Essay Scoring Rubric*

A rubric adapted from the 2008 AP<sup>®</sup> Spanish Language Presentational Writing Scoring Guidelines (Appendix) was used in this study to score the students' essays. The rubric was selected because it assessed writing proficiency at a level comparable to the level expected from the students who participated in the study. The rubric focused on three different aspects: a) task completion, in other words, how thoroughly the writing sample addressed and completed the task; b) topic development, i.e., relevance and thoroughness of topic address, organization, cohesiveness, and accuracy of social and cultural references; and c) language use, that is to say, evidence of control and variety of structures and idiomatic expressions, richness and precision in vocabulary use, command of conventions of the written language, and register appropriateness.

### *Written Peer Feedback Analysis*

Researchers have adopted different approaches in the analysis of written peer feedback, including a priori designed protocols focusing on types of actions required from the author (Elola, 2005; Faigley & Witte, 1981) and language functions used by students providing peer feedback (Roux-Rodriguez, 2003; Stanley, 1992). The approach selected to code students' written peer feedback in the present study differed from those prior approaches and included the use of a quantitative content analysis protocol generated on the 14 questions in the guidelines,

which students had been provided and instructed to use in order to provide written peer feedback. Further, the data were grouped into two broad categories, global and local aspects, for data analysis purposes.

The data analysis method selected was quantitative content analysis, defined as “a research technique for the systematic, objective, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). The content of students’ written peer feedback was analyzed and segmented into units, which were assigned to a category and then tallied (Rourke & Anderson, 2004). The tally involved the quantization of the data, a process by which “collected qualitative data types are converted into numerical codes that can be statistically analyzed” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 9). Specifically, the data were transformed and recorded as binary variables in order to determine to which themes students’ written peer feedback referred. The data were coded following these criteria: a value of 1 was assigned if the theme was addressed and specific feedback was provided to the author, while a value of 0 was assigned when the theme was not addressed in the written peer feedback or when the theme was mentioned but there was no specific feedback provided to the author. The rationale for this approach was that some students, in attempting to answer all the questions in the guidelines, merely mentioned each theme but did not really provide recommendations for improvement.

Two independent coders analyzed trained and untrained students’ written peer feedback. The coders took part in a calibration session in order to set unified criteria. The researcher randomly selected four written peer feedback samples, two from Group A: Trained and two from Group B: Untrained. The coders read each of these samples and then discussed which categories

were addressed in each case, in order to reach consensus. The coders then analyzed six randomly selected written peer feedback samples and coded each. At end of the calibration session, the researcher answered questions and clarified the coders' concerns in order unify the coding criteria, after which written peer feedback comments were distributed for analysis between the two coders. A reliability analysis, Pearson product-moment correlation, was subsequently conducted after the coders had completed their codings, resulting in a high level of inter-coder reliability ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

## Results

### *Impact of Peer Feedback on Trained and Untrained Students' Writing Proficiency*

In order to investigate the impact of peer feedback on trained and untrained students' writing proficiency, various statistical analyses were preformed, namely, two one-sample *t*-tests and an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA).

The one-sample *t*-tests were used to test whether students in both groups showed improvement from first to final draft. In order to test for this, gain scores were computed for both groups and then compared to a test value of 0, which would indicate no improvement from first to final draft. A Levene's test of equality of error variances indicated that the homoschedasticity assumption was not violated ( $F = 2.957, p > 0.05$ ), so equal variances of Group A and Group B's scores were assumed.

The ANCOVA was used to test for differences in final draft scores between trained and untrained students, after equating for initial differences through the first draft scores (covariate).

The Levene's test of equality of error variances indicated that the homoschedasticity assumption was not violated ( $F = 3.111$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), so equal variances were assumed.

*Improvement from first to final draft.* The gain score for each student was computed by subtracting the first draft score from the final draft score and creating a new variable, gain scores. Table 1 shows means and standard deviations of first and final drafts scores, as well as of gain scores, for each group. The one sample  $t$ -test for Group A: Trained revealed that the mean gain score for this group was significantly higher than the test value of 0,  $t(34) = 10.667$ ,  $p = .000$ . In turn, the one sample  $t$ -test for Group B: Untrained revealed that the mean gain score for this group was significantly higher than the test value of 0,  $t(34) = 8.149$ ,  $p = .000$ . These results indicate that students in Group A: Trained and Group B: Untrained showed significant improvement in their writing scores after participating in the peer feedback experience.

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations of Students' First Draft, Final Draft and Gain Scores*

Scores <sup>a</sup>	Peer Feedback			
	Untrained (n = 35)		Trained (n = 35)	
	M	SD	M	SD
First Draft	2.71	.622	2.63	.808
Final Draft	3.43	.741	3.54	.741
Gain	.71	.519	.91	.507

<sup>a</sup>Maximum score = 5

*Trained versus untrained students.* An Analysis of Covariance was performed to investigate whether there were significant differences between Group A: Trained and Group B: Untrained in terms of students' scores on their final drafts, with the first draft as a covariate. The ANCOVA revealed no significant main effect for treatment,  $F(1,67) = 0.569$ ,  $p = .128$ . These results indicate that students trained and not trained in peer feedback showed equivalent improvement from first to final draft after participating in the peer feedback experience.

#### *Trained and Untrained Students' Written Peer Feedback Types*

Students' written comments were quantitized and organized in a binary table, where a value of 1 was assigned if the theme was addressed and specific feedback was provided to the author, and a value of 0 indicated that the theme was not addressed in the written peer feedback or that it was simply mentioned but no specific recommendations were provided. After being quantitized, the data were analyzed with the Mann-Whitney test, a non-parametric test that allowed the researcher to determine whether there were differences in the type of feedback, focused on either global or local aspects, between trained and untrained students.

*Themes addressed in students' written comments.* The analysis of the data related to reference to each theme in students' written comments is included in Table 2. The table shows the percentage of students in Group A: Trained and students in Group B: Untrained that addressed each theme. The data show that the most salient global theme for each group was "idea development and flow improvement", followed by "paragraph organization and transition improvement". Other themes addressed with high frequency by participants in both groups were "introduction improvement" and "conclusion improvement". In addition, the data show that the most salient local theme for both groups was "grammar improvement".

Table 2

*Percentage of participants in Groups A and B referring to each theme*

	Theme	Group A <sup>a</sup> (trained)	Group B <sup>a</sup> (untrained)
Global aspects	Idea development and flow improvement	77.1%	77.1%
	Paragraph organization and transition improvement	77.1%	65.7%
	Introduction improvement	65.7%	40%
	Conclusion improvement	62.9%	54.3%
	Deletions to improve composition	20%	14.3%
	Additions to improve composition	11.4%	2.9%
	Coherence and cohesion improvement	8.6%	5.7%
	Theme identification improvement	5.7%	2.9%
	Identification of point of view	0%	0%
	Composition thread improvement	0%	2.9%
Local aspects	Grammar improvement	31.4%	54.3%
	Punctuation improvement	20%	20%
	Structures improvement	17.1%	31.4%
	Vocabulary improvement	17.1%	28.6%

<sup>a</sup>*N* = 35

*Trained versus untrained students.* A Mann-Whitney U test was performed to investigate whether there were significant differences in the number of global and local aspect comments between Group A: Trained and Group B: Untrained. This test “evaluates the null hypothesis that the two sets of [numbers of comments] were sampled from identical populations” (Howell, 2007, p.653), which would indicate that the training treatment had no effect on the number of written comments provided by trained and untrained students. The test is performed by ranking all the

numbers of comments for each theme regardless of group, adding all the rankings within each group, and then comparing the sums of the ranks for each group to test for differences between groups. The Mann-Whitney test revealed significant differences ( $z = -2.017$ ,  $p = .044$ ) in number of global aspect comments between students in Group A: Trained and students in Group B: Untrained (see table 3). The results indicated that students in Group A: Trained provided a significantly higher number of comments focused on global aspects than did students in Group B: Untrained. The test further revealed significant differences ( $z = -2.363$ ,  $p = .018$ ) in number of local aspect comments between students in Group A: Trained and students in Group B: Untrained. The results indicated that students in Group B: Untrained provided a significantly higher number of comments focused on local aspects than did students in Group A: Trained.

Table 3

*Mean Rank of Written Comments Provided by Students in Groups A and B*

	Group A <sup>a</sup> (trained)	Group B <sup>a</sup> (untrained)
Global aspects	Mean rank = 40.2	Mean rank = 30
Local aspects	Mean rank = 30.8	Mean rank = 41

<sup>a</sup> $N = 35$

### Discussion and implications

Research has shown that peer feedback can help students become better writers in a foreign language (Berg, 1999; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992) and that students focus their feedback on different aspects of their partner's writing (Roux-Rodriguez, 2003; Stanley, 1992). However, studies addressing the impact of peer feedback on both students' writing proficiency

and written feedback type are scarce and are focused primarily on English as a foreign language (Min, 2006). The present study addressed this gap by investigating the impact of peer feedback on the writing proficiency and written feedback types of students of Spanish as a foreign language in a North American university setting.

Students' participation in the peer feedback experience yielded significant impact on their writing proficiency between their first and final drafts, regardless of the type of scaffolding students received, guidelines with training and guidelines without training. These results indicate that the incorporation of a peer feedback experience into foreign language writing instruction helps students become better foreign language writers.

However, the results failed to indicate that there was a higher improvement in the writing proficiency of students who participated in a training session and received scaffolding in how to provide meaningful feedback to their peers than in the writing proficiency of students who only received guidelines but no training. This may have resulted from the training session only lasting 30 minutes, which may have been too short. Prior research on peer feedback in ESL contexts has shown that extensive training has a positive impact on the amount and quality of peer feedback provided (Min, 2005; Stanley, 1992). In addition, research in other areas such as professional development indicates that sporadic or short exposure to specific training does not have a significant impact on participants' behavior, and that training is "likely to be of higher quality if it is both sustained over time and involves a substantial number of hours" (Gret, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001, p.933).

It is interesting to note, however, that while training on the use of peer feedback guidelines did not result in a significant increase in students' essay scores, the training did result

in a significant difference in the type of peer feedback provided. In this sense, the results indicated that students who participated in the training session focused on global aspects significantly more than students who did not receive training. The results also showed an inverse tendency regarding feedback focused on local aspects. Students who did not receive scaffolding provided significantly more local aspect comments than students who participated in the training session.

Overall, this study shows that peer feedback can help students significantly improve their writing proficiency and that the impact of this type of strategy is immediate. In this sense, after participating in one peer feedback session, students who received both guidelines and training and those who received guidelines and no training significantly improved their writing scores from first to final drafts. This clearly shows the benefit of incorporating peer feedback into foreign language writing instruction, as it allows students to focus on writing as a process without adding to the instructor's workload.

In terms of the impact of specific training in how to provide meaningful feedback, this study shows that students who participated in the training session provided significantly more comments focusing on global aspects than those who did not receive training, which indicates that trained students chose to focus their feedback on improving communication of meaning than on form. By shying away from focusing merely on the surface of their partners' essays and commenting on the content, trained students helped their partners enhance their proficiency in terms of communication of meaning.

In sum, students who were trained in how to provide meaningful feedback showed a first level of change in the type of feedback they provided to their peers. With more intensive and extensive training, this trend may result in a significant impact on students' writing proficiency.

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## Appendix

### Essay Scoring Rubric

(Adapted from 2008 AP<sup>®</sup> Spanish Language Presentational Writing Scoring Guidelines)

<i>Score/ Description</i>	<i>Task Completion</i>	<i>Topic Development</i>	<i>Language Use</i>
5 – Demonstrates Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully addresses and completes the task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treatment of the topic is relevant and thorough</li> <li>• Essay is very well-organized and cohesive</li> <li>• Accurate social and/or cultural references included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control of a variety of structures and idioms; occasional errors may occur, but there is no pattern</li> <li>• Rich, precise, idiomatic vocabulary; ease of expression</li> <li>• Excellent command of conventions of the written language (orthography, sentence structure, paragraphing, and punctuation)</li> <li>• Register is highly appropriate</li> </ul>
4 – Demonstrates Command	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriately addresses and completes the task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treatment of the topic is relevant and well-developed</li> <li>• Essay is well-organized and generally cohesive</li> <li>• Generally accurate social and/or cultural references included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of control of a variety of structures and idioms, although a few grammatical errors may occur; good to very good control of elementary structures</li> <li>• Considerable breadth of vocabulary</li> <li>• Conventions of the written language (orthography, sentence structure, paragraphing, and punctuation) are generally correct</li> <li>• Register is appropriate</li> </ul>
3 – Demonstrates Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addresses and completes the task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treatment of the topic is relevant</li> <li>• Essay is organized, with adequate cohesiveness</li> <li>• Generally appropriate social and/or cultural references included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Errors may occur in a variety of structures</li> <li>• Appropriate vocabulary, but may have occasional interference from another language</li> <li>• May have errors in conventions of the written language (orthography, sentence structure, paragraphing, and punctuation)</li> <li>• Register is generally appropriate</li> </ul>
2 – Suggests Lack of Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partially addresses and/or completes the task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treatment of the topic may be somewhat irrelevant</li> <li>• Essay may be inadequately organized</li> <li>• Inaccurate social and/or cultural references may be included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent grammatical errors may occur, even in elementary structures; there may be some redeeming features, such as correct advanced structures</li> <li>• Limited vocabulary; frequent interference from another language may occur</li> <li>• Frequent errors in conventions of the written language (orthography, sentence structure, paragraphing, and punctuation)</li> <li>• Register may be inappropriate</li> </ul>
1 – Demonstrates Lack of Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fails to address and/or complete the task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treatment of the topic is somewhat irrelevant</li> <li>• Essay may be disorganized</li> <li>• Inaccurate social and/or cultural references included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numerous grammatical errors impede communication</li> <li>• Insufficient vocabulary; constant interference from another language</li> <li>• Pervasive errors in conventions of the written language (orthography, sentence structure, paragraphing, and punctuation)</li> <li>• Minimal to no attention to register</li> </ul>

Understanding students' perceptions of peer feedback in college foreign language classes: a  
triangulation study

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## Introduction

Writing instruction is an essential component of foreign language teaching. Despite its importance, however, research specifically addressing foreign language (FL) writing instruction is scarce. In addition, researchers have identified the need for clarification of the purpose of writing instruction as essential in FL writing research (Reichelt, 2001). One important aspect of FL writing instruction is the incorporation of peer feedback as part of the writing process (Omaggio Hadley, 2000; Shrum & Glisan, 2005). Grounded in sociocultural theory, peer feedback provides students with scaffolding opportunities to advance their zones of proximal development (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Liu & Hansen, 2005). The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving [...] in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In addition, peer feedback provides opportunities for students to reflect on their roles as writers and audience, on the negotiation of meaning needed in order for the intended message to be communicated successfully, and on the linguistic and rhetorical features necessary to achieve the communication of meaning (Hu, 2005; Kinsler, 1990; Williams, 2005).

## Peer Feedback

In the writing process, it is essential that students receive feedback on their progress before they submit their final drafts for summative assessment, as it is through explicit relevant feedback that student writers will be able to engage in the editing and revision of their writing, thus improving their work (Omaggio Hadley, 2000; Shrum & Glisan, 2005). Researchers have

highlighted the importance of responding to student writing in a variety of ways, including teacher and peer feedback (Omaggio Hadley, 2000; Shrum & Glisan, 2005; Williams, 2005). In relation to the latter, Williams (2005) stated that “all writers can benefit from having a real audience to write for, especially if the readers can provide helpful feedback. A readily available audience in the classroom is the writer’s classmates, or peers” (p. 93). Hence, the incorporation of a peer feedback component into FL writing instruction seems not only feasible but also a potential source of benefit for students.

### *A Social Constructivist Perspective*

A major justification for including peer feedback as part of writing instruction is the Vygotskian theoretical framework of social constructivism/ sociocultural theory. Liu and Hansen (2005) explained that “cognitive development is a result of social interaction in which an individual learns to extend her or his current competence through the guidance of a more experienced individual” (p. 5), thus helping her or him advance her or his zone of proximal development (ZPD). In this sense, students who engage in collaboration during peer feedback sessions have the opportunity to negotiate meaning and construct their understanding of language mechanics (local aspect) and discursive features (global aspect).

Social interaction and negotiation of meaning have been posited to be the basis for the construction of knowledge (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). This approach involves social interactions in which “a more knowledgeable ‘other’ structures the learning experience in a way that allows the novice to overcome whatever limitations in skill might impede his or her attainment of a desired goal” (Prawat, 1996, p. 217). Learning and knowledge construction are mediated through interaction with others. Another point of emphasis

is the importance of this social mediation being situated in authentic environments and tasks where the individual has the opportunity to interact with others and thus “becom[e] self-regulated, self-mediated, and self-aware [through] feedback received from the environment (e.g. others, artifacts) and self-reflection on [his/her] understanding and experience” (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003, p. 85).

This social constructivist perspective can be applied to the teaching of writing in a foreign language for the purpose of helping students improve their language and writing proficiency, both in terms of global and local aspects. Specifically, writing instruction in a foreign language should include peer interaction (social interaction) in the writing process (authentic task). Collaboration among peers “allows students to use language to mediate their language learning because in collaboration students use language to reflect on the language they are learning” (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 25). Researchers have thus identified peer collaboration as a viable approach to help students in their foreign language development through interaction (Donato, 2004; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

One way to incorporate peer collaboration in FL writing is in the form of peer feedback sessions, which Hu (2005) defined as “a collaborative activity involving students reading, critiquing, and providing feedback on each other’s writing, both to secure immediate textual improvement and to develop, over time, stronger writing competence via mutual scaffolding” (pp. 321-322). This definition highlights the significance of providing opportunities for student interaction that can help students ultimately become self-regulated learners.

### *Students' Perceptions of the Value of Peer Feedback*

The success of a writing instruction approach that incorporates peer feedback as one essential step in the writing process is related to students' perceptions of this type of strategy (Amores, 1997; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Hu, 2005; Liu & Hansen, 2005; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000). If students do not see peer feedback as a valuable and helpful process that can enhance their writing proficiency, and thus the quality of their foreign language essays, it is likely that they will not fully commit to the process.

One important aspect of peer feedback is its impact on students' motivation to give and receive peer feedback as measured through their perceptions of the peer feedback experience (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Nelson & Carson, 1998). Carson and Nelson (1996) investigated the interaction styles and perceptions of Chinese students who engaged in the editing of their ESL peers' writing. Carson and Nelson identified several perceptions of the Chinese ESL students in relation to their participation in a peer feedback experience; specifically, the students expressed a reluctance to criticize drafts, reluctance to disagree with peers, reluctance to claim authority, feelings of vulnerability, and conditions for speaking. Carson and Nelson (1996) concluded that "the kinds of behaviors that Chinese students would normally exhibit in groups are different from the behaviors that are frequently desired in writing groups" (p. 18). Moreover, Carson and Nelson stated that Chinese ESL students seemed more preoccupied with maintaining group cohesion than with giving their peers valuable feedback on their writing, recognizing "that making negative comments on a peer's draft leads to [group] division" (p. 18).

In a follow-up study, Nelson and Carson (1998) investigated the interaction styles and perceptions of Hispanic and Chinese ESL students in a peer feedback experience. Nelson and

Carson again identified several themes; specifically, students expressed a preference for negative comments, expressed a preference for teacher's comments, perceived peers' comments as ineffective, and perceived the effectiveness of peer feedback differently based on cultural differences. Students' rationale for preferring teacher's comments was based on their perception that the teacher, not their peers, was the expert. In addition, students sometimes perceived their peers' comments to be ineffective or unhelpful, especially since they "felt that too much time was spent talking about unimportant issues [including] grammar and sentence-level details" (Nelson & Carson, 1998, pp. 125-126).

Tsui and Ng (2000) also investigated students' perceptions of peer feedback. The subjects in this study were 27 Chinese students enrolled in grades 12 and 13 in a secondary school in Hong Kong in which English was used as the medium of instruction. The results of the study indicated that students favored teacher comments over peer comments, and that teacher comments lead to more revisions than peer comments. In addition, Tsui and Ng (2000) identified several results of peer feedback; specifically, peer feedback (a) enhanced students' sense of audience, who therefore viewed their peers as the real audience for their writing; (b) raised students' awareness through their giving and receiving feedback, and thus contributed to helping students transfer the ability to spot others' mistakes and develop metacognitive abilities to spot their own; (c) encouraged collaborative learning and negotiation of meaning among students; and (d) fostered a sense of text ownership among student writers, especially since students viewed their peers' comments as lacking authoritativeness, which let them decide whether to incorporate their peers' comments into their final drafts without feeling compelled to do so.

The results of these studies (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000) indicate that peer feedback is a viable option for improving FL writing that can be incorporated into learner-centered writing instruction. Peer feedback help students develop their writing ability in terms of global aspects, for instance, audience-awareness and sense of text ownership. Peer feedback also helps students develop metacognitive skills, such as awareness of their own mistakes when writing, as well as group interaction and negotiation of meaning. As indicated in Nelson and Carson's (1998) study, students may perceive a singular focus on local aspect errors as unhelpful, which may cause them to become discouraged from giving and receiving peer feedback. In this sense, it is important that students, as peer editors, recognize the significance of having global and local aspects foci in order to be able to provide meaningful feedback.

The samples in the previous three studies were drawn from Asian and Hispanic populations of students learning English as a foreign language both in China and in the United States. However, given that cultural differences can potentially influence students' impressions of this method of foreign language writing instruction, it becomes relevant to further expand the knowledge base and thus investigate American foreign language students' perceptions of peer feedback.

The purpose of this study was to investigate American students' perceptions of peer feedback in college foreign language courses. Specifically, students enrolled in an Intermediate Spanish class were either trained or not trained to use specific peer feedback guidelines prior to engaging in the process of peer feedback. Students were subsequently surveyed regarding their perceptions of the peer feedback process. The rationale for conducting this mixed methods study

was to add to the knowledge base in foreign language writing instruction (Newman, Ridenour, Newman, & De Marco Jr., 2003, p. 176), particularly understanding in more depth students' perceptions of a peer feedback experience.

## Method

### *Participants*

Sixty-five undergraduate students enrolled in four intact Intermediate Spanish college classes at a major university in the southeastern United States participated in the study. Two classes were randomly selected and assigned to Group A: Trained (n=33) and the remaining two classes were assigned to Group B: Untrained (n=32). The students' average age was 19.4 years old, with 42 female and 23 male students. Regarding participants' ethnicity, the distribution was 51 Caucasian students, 3 African-American students, 2 Hispanic students, and 4 Asian/Pacific Islander students; 5 students did not report their ethnicity. In addition, 11 students were freshmen, 29 sophomores, 16 juniors, and 4 seniors; 5 students did not report their year in college. The average number of years of Spanish instruction these students had received before enrolling in this class was 4.25 years. In addition, prior to their enrollment in Intermediate Spanish classes, students take a placement test that evaluates their knowledge of diverse grammar topics, as well as their speaking and writing abilities, to ensure that students with equivalent knowledge and abilities are placed in these classes.

### *Instruments and Materials*

*Survey instrument.* The survey instrument was adapted from Tsui and Ng (2000) and consisted of close-ended and open-ended questions designed to elicit students' perceptions of the

peer feedback experience in which they had participated in their Spanish class as shown in Appendix A. This adaptation involved rephrasing several of the survey statements to better fit the foreign language focus of the class. In addition, three open-ended questions were added to the survey. Specifically, there were 10 Likert-scale questions, from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly-agree, consisting of three subsections representing three peer feedback phases: reading one's partner's essay (3 questions), receiving written comments from one's partner (3 questions) and participating in the face-to-face peer feedback session (4 questions). A reliability analysis of the survey data, following data collection, revealed a Cronbach's alpha of .94. In addition to the 10 survey items, there were 3 open-ended questions: (1) What are some specific examples of aspects of your composition that improved after participating in the peer feedback experience?; (2) What are some of the things that you liked most about the peer feedback experience? Why?; and, (3) What are some of the things that you liked least about the peer feedback experience? Why?

*Peer feedback guidelines and training.* The peer feedback guidelines consisted of instructions and a set of 14 questions. The instructions prompted students to provide meaningful feedback with the purpose of helping their partner improve the quality of his/her writing. Students were advised not to concentrate on local aspects only (e.g., punctuation or grammar mistakes), but also on global aspects (e.g., organization, transition of ideas, exemplification) so that their partner could successfully communicate the message he or she was trying to convey to his or her target audience. Students were asked to read their partner's essay and select the most relevant of 15 questions in the guidelines and answer them thoroughly in writing, to provide meaningful feedback. Students were asked to provide this feedback on a separate sheet of paper

following these formatting criteria: 12 point font, 1 inch margins, double spacing, and a two-page length. Finally, students were also informed that they could also write marginal comments on their partner's paper in addition to the other comments.

Students in two of the classes, Group A: Trained, were trained in the use of these guidelines. The training consisted of a 30-minute session in which the researcher modeled how to provide constructive feedback, similar to Hu's (2005) training sessions. The researcher provided each student with a writing sample. Using the guidelines, the researcher revised the writing sample using think-aloud techniques, describing orally what type of feedback she would give to the author and a rationale for that feedback. Students were also provided with sample written comments, which served to model the type and quality of comments regarding their partner's essay that students were expected to provide. Then, students were given additional excerpts of writing samples so that, in small groups, they could discuss the types of comments they would provide to that particular writing sample, following the guidelines. Finally, students in each group were asked to provide examples of the feedback they had given based on the excerpts, and a whole-class discussion was held in order to clarify the rationale for the type of feedback students provided, as well as to model rephrasing of student comments to make them more constructive. The session ended with the researcher addressing students' final questions and concerns regarding the feedback process. Students in the remaining two classes, Group B: Untrained, did not receive this training.

### *Procedure*

A triangulation mixed methods design was used in this study, which included data collected concurrently from undergraduate students enrolled in four intact Intermediate Spanish

classes who participated in a peer feedback experience as part of a writing assignment. The four classes were taught by the same instructor and all students completed the same writing assignment toward the end of the semester. The four intact classes were randomly assigned to one of two groups: trained peer feedback with guidelines (Group A), and untrained peer feedback with guidelines (Group B). The researcher trained students in group A during a 30-minute training session on how to critique their peers' essays and provide them with constructive feedback.

As part of the essay assignment, students completed a sequential series of tasks. On Day 1, students completed the first task, writing the first draft of an essay, at home. The essay prompt was provided by the course instructor and consisted of two possible topics, marriage or divorce. Students were asked to write an expository section on the advantages and disadvantages of marriage or divorce, and a persuasive section where students were asked to provide advice to a friend who was thinking of getting married or divorced.

On Day 2, students in Group A: Trained and Group B: Untrained received a set of printed guidelines in class to provide peer feedback. Students in Group A were trained on critiquing their partner's essay and providing constructive feedback using these guidelines. Students in Group B received no training. Students in both groups then exchanged drafts with their partner.

On Days 3 and 4, over the weekend, students completed the second task, which involved reading their partner's essay and providing constructive feedback. On Day 5, students completed the third task, which involved their participation in an in-class 50-minute face-to-face peer feedback session, where students discussed their partner's essay and clarified the feedback received.

On Days 5 and 6, at home, students completed the fourth task, which involved writing a final draft taking into account feedback received. On Day 7, in class, after submitting their final draft, students in both groups completed the paper-and-pencil survey addressing their perceptions of the peer feedback experience.

## Results

### *Perceptions of the Peer Feedback Phases by Trained and Untrained Students*

In order to assess trained and untrained students' perceptions of peer feedback across the three peer feedback phases, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. This ANOVA was used to test for differences between trained and untrained students' perceptions of peer feedback, student's perceptions of the three phases of peer feedback, and trained and untrained students' perceptions of the three phases of peer feedback. Mauchly's Test of Sphericity for equality of variances showed that the sphericity assumption was violated, Mauchly's  $W(2) = .887, p < .05$ ; therefore, the Huyn Feldt correction was used.

Table 1

### *Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Perceptions of Peer Feedback*

Peer Feedback Phase	Peer Feedback			
	Untrained (n = 32)		Trained (n = 33)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Reading partner's composition	5.17	1.11	5.36	1.11
Receiving written comments	5.53	1.17	5.74	0.98
Receiving face-to-face feedback	5.31	1.07	5.45	1.15

*Trained versus untrained students.* The ANOVA revealed no significant main effect (between subjects) for trained versus untrained students,  $F(1,63) = 0.55$ ,  $p = .45$  (see Table 1). These results indicate that students trained and not trained in peer feedback had similar general perceptions of the peer feedback experience. Further, these results show that, in general, students had positive perceptions of the peer feedback experience.

*Peer feedback phases.* The ANOVA did reveal, however, a significant main effect (within subjects) for peer feedback phase,  $F(2,126) = 5.90$ ,  $p = .04$ . A series of pair-wise comparisons (paired-samples *t*-tests) revealed that overall, students had a higher perception ( $p < .05$ ) of *receiving written comments* than either *reading partner's composition*,  $t(64) = .415$  or *receiving face-to-face feedback*,  $t(64) = .217$ . There was, however, no significant difference ( $p > .05$ ) between *reading partner's composition* and *receiving face-to-face feedback*,  $t(64) = .959$ . These results indicate that students perceived the peer feedback phase of *receiving written comments* more positively than either of the other two phases.

*Interaction between training and peer feedback phases.* Finally, the ANOVA revealed no significant interaction in students' perceptions of peer feedback between trained and untrained students' across the peer feedback phases,  $F(2,126) = 0.05$ ,  $p = .94$ .

#### *Analysis of High and Low Peer Feedback Perceivers*

In order to assess whether or not students who perceived the peer feedback process more positively viewed the process differently than students who did not, a composite peer feedback score was computed. The composite peer feedback scores were simply the means of all 10 survey questions. These peer feedback composite scores were used to group the students into quartiles. The mean peer feedback composite perception score for the bottom quartile ( $n=16$ ) was

4.14 ( $SD = 0.43$ ), whereas the mean peer feedback composite perception response for the top quartile ( $n=16$ ) was 6.68 ( $SD = 0.23$ ). A  $t$ -test comparing the bottom (lower) and top (higher) quartiles resulted in a significant difference,  $t(30) = 20.8$ ,  $p = .00$ . The three open-ended questions were analyzed to identify differences between those students that perceived the peer feedback process more highly (higher peer feedback perception) and those students that had more neutral perceptions regarding the peer feedback process (lower peer feedback perception). This analysis was conducted using a data transformation, mixed methods approach (Caracelli & Greene, 1993). Specifically, the students' responses were evaluated for common themes, these common themes were then defined and described, and finally, students' responses were re-evaluated for the presence of these themes and numerical counts were determined based on the presence or absence of the themes in each student's responses.

*Composition improvement after peer feedback.* What aspects of their composition did students feel improved after participating in the peer feedback process? An analysis of students' responses to this question resulted in two main categories, global aspect improvements and local aspect improvements. The *global aspects* category refers to comments on text coherence and cohesion, development of main and subordinate ideas, exemplification, flow, and organization. The *local aspects* category refers to comments on vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. Among the global aspects category, several themes were identified: introduction and conclusion development ("I added a better opening sentence and a stronger closing"); enhancement of flow, organization and transitions ("I was able to rearrange the paragraphs so that my paper had a better flow to its organization"); topic and idea development ("my points became more distinct") and incorporation of richer examples ("I also provided more examples to support my thesis").

Among the local aspects category, several themes were also identified: improved grammar accuracy (“my partner helped me fix some of my grammar”), enhanced richness of vocabulary (“my vocab choices ... of my paper definitely improved”) and complex structure development (“she also helped me see that I needed more varied sentence structures”).

Table 2

*Students with Higher and Lower Perceptions of Peer Feedback Referring to Each Theme Related to Composition Improvement*

Composition Improvement Themes	Perceptions of Peer Feedback	
	Lower	Higher
Global Aspects Category		
Enhancement of flow, organization and transitions	63%	63%
Topic and idea development	31%	50%
Introduction and conclusion development	31%	44%
Incorporation of richer examples	6%	13%
Local Aspects Category		
Improved grammar accuracy	81%	56%
Complex structure development	13%	13%
Enhanced richness of vocabulary	13%	6%

Note: n=16 for both higher and lower perception groups.

Table 2 shows the percentages of higher and lower peer feedback perception students referring to each composition improvement theme. The data in Table 2 were subsequently collapsed into a 2 x 2 matrix addressing the number of lower and higher perceiving students who provided global and local aspect comments in response to the “what aspects of your composition improved after participating in the peer feedback experience” question (see Table 3). A 2 (peer

feedback perception) x 2 (aspect category) chi square analysis revealed that peer feedback perception was not related to aspect category,  $\chi^2_{(.05,1)} = 1.57$ ,  $p > .05$ . An ensuing one-way chi square addressing the frequency of global and local aspect responses indicated that, overall, students provided more global aspect responses than local aspect responses,  $\chi^2_{(.05,1)} = 4.68$ ,  $p < .05$ . These results indicate that while lower and higher peer feedback perceiving students did not differ in the number of global and local aspect comments, overall, students reported receiving more global aspect comments than local aspect comments.

Table 3

*Observed Counts of Global and Local Improvement Comments Made by Higher and Lower Peer Feedback Perception Students*

Improvement Comments	Perceptions of Peer Feedback	
	Lower	Higher
Global	21	27
Local	17	12

*Aspects of the peer feedback experience that students liked the most.* What aspects of the peer review process did students like the most? An analysis of students' responses to this question resulted in three themes: getting a different perspective on and a real audience for one's essay ("it is always nice to have someone else read your work and point out aspects/points you wouldn't have noticed yourself"), getting new ideas ("the discussion of the topic gave a better understanding of the views of other people on marriage"), and being able to notice one's own mistakes ("[peer feedback] allows you to see the problems in your own paper while you see them in another's paper"). Table 4 shows the percentages of higher and lower perception students

referring to each theme regarding aspects of the peer feedback experience that they liked most. These results indicate that students' primary support for peer feedback involved the benefits obtained from a new perspective (i.e., new perspectives and new ideas from others and self).

Table 4

*Students with Higher and Lower Perceptions of Peer Feedback Referring to Each Theme Related to Aspects of the Peer Feedback Experience They Liked the Most and the Least*

Peer Feedback Themes	Perceptions of Peer Feedback	
	Lower	Higher
Themes Liked the Most		
Getting a different perspective on and real audience for one's essay	56%	88%
Being able to notice one's own mistakes	56%	50%
Getting new ideas	13%	31%
Themes Liked the Least		
Feeling unsure about the accuracy of feedback provided and received	38%	13%
Lengthy face-to-face session	19%	38%
Writing a formal critique	13%	6%

Note: N=16 for both higher and lower perception groups.

*Aspects of the peer feedback experience that students liked least.* What aspects of the peer review process did students like the least? An analysis of students' responses to this question resulted in three themes: lengthy face-to-face session ("talking for twenty mins per essay was a little long"), feeling unsure about accuracy of feedback provided and received because both students are developing their Spanish proficiency ("I am afraid I will give them wrong or incorrect advice"), and writing a formal critique ("I didn't like having to write two pages of

feedback”). Table 4 shows the percentages of higher and lower perception students referring to each theme regarding aspects of the peer feedback experience that they liked least. These results indicate that students’ primary concerns regarding peer feedback included both structural concerns, such as length of feedback sessions, and proficiency concerns, such as accuracy of feedback given and received.

## Discussion

Research has shown that peer interaction is a valuable component of foreign language instruction since it leads to language development through scaffolding processes and negotiation of meaning with peers (Donato, 2004; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Shrum & Glisan, 2005). It is important, however, to take into consideration students’ perceptions of the value of peer interaction in the development of their own language proficiency, since lower perceptions may result in decreased willingness to interact with peers providing and receiving feedback, thus hindering the expected language development.

The present study addressed this issue by considering students’ perceptions as part of a peer feedback experience in foreign language writing instruction. After participating in the experience, students reported their perceptions of this method of writing instruction. The quantitative findings of the study demonstrate that regardless of the type of scaffolding students received, either trained or untrained peer feedback with guidelines, all participants expressed positive perceptions of the peer feedback experience, with a significant preference for written comments.

The qualitative data suggested that students perceived that the quality of their writing improved after the peer feedback experience. Students expressed that the experience enabled

them to improve their essay's organization, transition and flow, "she said to use transitional sentences, which I needed in my paper to make it flow better [...] the last body paragraph flowed better after she pointed out to me it was choppy and awkward." This not only indicates that students focused on giving their partners detailed feedback of global aspects, but it also illustrates the student's enhanced metacognitive awareness when she acknowledged that she needed to make the change to her essay in order to increase its flow.

Further, previous research (Tsui & Ng, 2000) found that students assign value to the peer feedback experience in terms of its contribution to providing a real audience, different perspectives, and raising metacognitive awareness. The results of the present study echo these findings as both higher and lower peer feedback perceiving students expressed that getting a different perspective on their essay and a different audience were some of the aspects of the experience they liked the most, "it gave my paper another person's perspective. It made me see how another person would perceive what I had written," and "the feedback helped me get a fresh perspective on what my paper was lacking." In addition, students expressed that participating in the experience helped them notice their own mistakes, thus helping to enhance their metacognitive awareness, "it helped me to think in more detail about my own writing, which made it better," and "the feedback was encouraging and had suggestions I had never thought of. I'm not confident in Spanish and enjoy any aid to making me a better writer."

In contrast, there were some aspects of the experience that students did not particularly like. Students expressed that the face-to-face session was lengthy: "we spent too long on it. It did not take very long for us," and "it took a lot of class time." Similar to some of the findings in the literature (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Nelson & Carson, 1998), students identified their lack of

confidence in providing accurate feedback as an issue, due to the fact that both students in the dyad were still developing their language proficiency, “I didn’t feel comfortable editing other people’s papers because I am not very helpful with my Spanish... I don’t give good comments,” and “peer editing makes improving Spanish difficult since both people are at approximately the same level.”

These findings have several implications. They clearly show that students find participating in peer feedback experiences useful and valuable in contributing to the enhancement of the quality of their writing. Therefore, these types of experiences are viable in foreign language writing instructional design, given the benefits expressed by the participants. Contrary to previous studies (Nelson & Carson, 1998), however, the present results show that students focused on both global and local aspects. This may have been the result of students’ focusing on the guidelines provided, which included questions related to both global and local aspects. In this sense, the guidelines might have helped focus students’ comments and prevent a singular focus on grammar and punctuation in the feedback provided. Therefore, providing students with guidelines may make the feedback richer and more meaningful, thus increasing students’ perceived value of the experience.

Finally, given students’ expressed concerns with the length of the face-to-face session, the instructor might consider shortening the session to take half a class period (30 minutes). Although students were advised to discuss their written comments and elicit further clarification from their partners, it took students a shorter time than planned to engage in the negotiation of meaning with their partner. Therefore, a viable option would be to incorporate this kind of

experience into regular writing instruction so that students become used to engaging in meaningful interaction with their partner and make the experience richer.

Overall, this study shows that peer feedback is perceived highly among students and that peer feedback has immediate benefits in terms of providing students with a chance to enhance the quality of their essays, including both global and local aspects. In addition, peer feedback can also have long-term benefits, as it contributed to activate students' metacognitive awareness, which can result in enhanced writing proficiency in a foreign language.

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## Appendix A

### Peer Feedback Survey

1. I liked reading my classmate's composition.
2. I found reading my classmate's composition useful.
3. Reading my classmate's composition helped me improve the quality of my composition.
4. I liked reading my classmate's written comments.
5. I found my classmate's written comments useful.
6. My classmate's written comments helped me improve the quality of my composition.
7. I liked the face-to-face peer feedback session.
8. I found my classmate's comments in the face-to-face peer feedback sessions useful.
9. I found discussing my classmate's written comments in the face-to-face session useful.
10. My classmate's comments in the face-to-face peer feedback session helped me improve the quality of my composition.

## Conclusion to the dissertation

This dissertation aimed to explore how peer feedback, a specific strategy focused on active student involvement in the process of writing in a foreign language, could help students become more proficient writers. Specifically, given the complexity and multiplicity of factors that can affect the successful implementation and impact of an instructional strategy on student learning, this series of studies investigated the effect of peer feedback from multiple perspectives. The findings of these studies are summarized in Table 1.

The first study focused on a crucial aspect related to the success of a newly-implemented strategy: its impact on student learning. The study was designed to investigate the impact of peer feedback on students' writing proficiency as measured through their performance on a writing task. Given that prior knowledge can play a key role in how much a student has gained from participating in an experience such as the one object of this study, students' initial foreign language writing proficiency was measured and taken into account when drawing conclusions from the data gathered. In addition, the amount of written feedback received by each student writer was measured and analyzed in order to investigate on what specific aspects of writing, whether global or local, students focused their feedback to their peers.

The results of this study show that peer feedback had a significant impact on students' foreign language writing proficiency after just one intervention. These results are promising and shed light on an aspect of peer feedback scarcely explored through prior research: its effect on student learning. In this sense, students who participated in the peer feedback experience, on average, improved the quality of their writing as measured by their performance on a writing task and after taking into account their initial writing proficiency. These results indicate that peer

feedback is an effective strategy that can contribute to the improvement of students' foreign language writing proficiency.

The study also investigated the effect of training on students' increase in writing proficiency. Although no significant differences were found between trained and untrained students in terms of gain in scores after participating in the peer feedback experience, the results show that, on average, all students improved significantly, regardless of training. As was discussed in the conclusions to first study, this lack of significant results might have been due to the brevity of the training to which students were exposed. In addition, since all students were provided with a set of guidelines for peer feedback, the results obtained may be an indication that the guidelines alone were enough scaffolding for students to provide meaningful feedback to their peers.

Regarding the types of written comments students provided, the results showed that students who received training focused on global aspects significantly more than untrained students. In contrast, the results showed that untrained students focused on local aspects significantly more than trained students. However, there were no significant differences within the groups between global and local aspects. This indicates that training had an impact on the type of feedback students provided, which were more focused on global aspects. These results are promising since they show that in fact students who have received some type of scaffolding in the form of guidelines and, especially, training are capable of focusing their feedback on aspects such as organization of ideas, flow, exemplification, etc., which seems to indicate that they may have undertaken the task of providing feedback to their peers as critical readers who are trying to focus on communication of meaning rather than simply on form.

The second study investigated another important aspect that might affect the successful implementation of an instructional strategy: students' perceptions. The study was designed to address this issue by eliciting from students their perceptions about the peer feedback experience and its impact on their writing through the use of a peer feedback survey administered at the end of the experience. In an attempt to address potential issues caused by students' reticence to participate in such an experience, the study investigated whether students liked taking part of it and whether they deemed it useful.

The results of the study showed that, on average, all students had mid to high perceptions of the peer feedback experience, favoring particularly receiving written comments from their peers. Students reported that what they enjoyed the most about participating in the experience was getting a different perspective on their writing and realizing some of the shortcomings of their own writing by reading their partner's essay. The results further indicate that students felt that their partners contributed significantly to the improvement of global and local aspects of their essays through their feedback, which shows that students perceived that they benefitted from the experience.

With regard to the aspects of the experience that students liked the least, they reported that they thought the face-to-face session was too lengthy. One possible explanation for this perception might be that students had to face the person whose work they were critiquing, which could have caused them to feel uncomfortable. In contrast, written feedback might be a better option, not only because students specifically expressed a significant preference for this type of feedback, but also because it would help students feel more detached from the author of the work they are critiquing, thus allowing them to provide more meaningful feedback. Students further

reported that they did not feel confident enough in their own language proficiency to feel they could provide meaningful feedback to their peers. This issue might be more difficult to address directly in the classroom, but a viable strategy might be to train students extensively and intensively in providing feedback so that they can overcome that perception.

Table 1

*Summary of findings*

Impact of peer feedback on students' written comment types and writing proficiency	Understanding students' perceptions of peer feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After participating in a peer feedback experience, students had significantly higher scores in their final drafts as compared to their first drafts</li> <li>• Training had no significant impact on students' scores</li> <li>• Students who received training in how to provide meaningful feedback to their peers focused their written feedback on global aspects significantly more than untrained students</li> <li>• Untrained students focused their written feedback on local aspects significantly more than trained students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students who participated in a peer feedback experience had mid to high perceptions of the experience, regardless of training</li> <li>• Students had significantly higher perceptions of <i>receiving written comments</i> than of <i>reading partner's composition</i> and <i>receiving face-to-face feedback</i></li> <li>• Lower and higher perceivers indicated that they saw global and local improvements in their essays after participating in the peer feedback experience</li> <li>• The aspects of the experience students liked the most were getting a different perspective for their writing and gaining metacognitive awareness</li> <li>• The aspects of the experience students liked the least were the length of the face-to-face session and feeling insecure about their ability to provide meaningful feedback</li> </ul>

Further studies could focus on investigating the relationship between students' perceptions and their actual improvement in writing proficiency. Another viable line of further research could be the investigation of the role of extensive and intensive training in helping students to improve their writing proficiency in a foreign language, as well as impact of different types of guidelines – or lack thereof – on students' foreign language writing proficiency.

## Appendix A

### Essay Scoring Rubric

(Adapted from 2008 AP<sup>®</sup> Spanish Language Presentational Writing Scoring Guidelines)

<i>Score/ Description</i>	<i>Task Completion</i>	<i>Topic Development</i>	<i>Language Use</i>
5 – Demonstrates Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully addresses and completes the task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treatment of the topic is relevant and thorough</li> <li>• Essay is very well-organized and cohesive</li> <li>• Accurate social and/or cultural references included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control of a variety of structures and idioms; occasional errors may occur, but there is no pattern</li> <li>• Rich, precise, idiomatic vocabulary; ease of expression</li> <li>• Excellent command of conventions of the written language (orthography, sentence structure, paragraphing, and punctuation)</li> <li>• Register is highly appropriate</li> </ul>
4 – Demonstrates Command	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriately addresses and completes the task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treatment of the topic is relevant and well-developed</li> <li>• Essay is well-organized and generally cohesive</li> <li>• Generally accurate social and/or cultural references included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of control of a variety of structures and idioms, although a few grammatical errors may occur; good to very good control of elementary structures</li> <li>• Considerable breadth of vocabulary</li> <li>• Conventions of the written language (orthography, sentence structure, paragraphing, and punctuation) are generally correct</li> <li>• Register is appropriate</li> </ul>
3 – Demonstrates Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addresses and completes the task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treatment of the topic is relevant</li> <li>• Essay is organized, with adequate cohesiveness</li> <li>• Generally appropriate social and/or cultural references included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Errors may occur in a variety of structures</li> <li>• Appropriate vocabulary, but may have occasional interference from another language</li> <li>• May have errors in conventions of the written language (orthography, sentence structure, paragraphing, and punctuation)</li> <li>• Register is generally appropriate</li> </ul>
2 – Suggests Lack of Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partially addresses and/or completes the task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treatment of the topic may be somewhat irrelevant</li> <li>• Essay may be inadequately organized</li> <li>• Inaccurate social and/or cultural references may be included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent grammatical errors may occur, even in elementary structures; there may be some redeeming features, such as correct advanced structures</li> <li>• Limited vocabulary; frequent interference from another language may occur</li> <li>• Frequent errors in conventions of the written language (orthography, sentence structure, paragraphing, and punctuation)</li> <li>• Register may be inappropriate</li> </ul>
1 – Demonstrates Lack of Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fails to address and/or complete the task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treatment of the topic is somewhat irrelevant</li> <li>• Essay may be disorganized</li> <li>• Inaccurate social and/or cultural references included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numerous grammatical errors impede communication</li> <li>• Insufficient vocabulary; constant interference from another language</li> <li>• Pervasive errors in conventions of the written language (orthography, sentence structure, paragraphing, and punctuation)</li> <li>• Minimal to no attention to register</li> </ul>

## Appendix B

### Peer feedback guidelines

Your main role is to provide meaningful feedback so that your partner can improve the quality of his/her writing. Try not to concentrate on pointing out punctuation or grammar mistakes only, but rather on what your partner can do so that potential readers understand and enjoy reading his/her composition. For these purposes, you need to focus on answering the following questions as thoroughly as possible, on a separate sheet of paper. You may also write marginal comments to your partner's composition on their paper, but this may not be a substitute for your answers to the questions provided below.

You may answer the questions in English or in Spanish.

1. Can you easily identify the theme/topic of the composition? Describe it briefly, and suggest ways in which this can be improved.
2. Can you easily identify the point of view your partner selected? Describe it and give an example of what helped you identify it.
3. Is there anything that your partner can add to make the composition better? Give examples.
4. Is there anything that your partner could delete to make the composition better? Give examples.

5. Are the paragraphs well organized, including the use of transition words? What can your partner do to improve this?
6. Does the composition have a clearly defined introduction? What can your partner do to improve it?
7. Does the composition have a clearly defined conclusion? What can your partner do to improve it?
8. Do the ideas in the composition flow and are they well-developed? What can your partner do to improve this?
9. Is the composition coherent and cohesive? What can your partner do to improve this?
10. When reading the composition, did you feel that you were “getting lost” or that you lost the thread of the composition? What can your partner do to improve this?
11. Have you identified any salient punctuation mistakes? Mark them on your partner’s essay and provide suggestions on how to correct them.
12. Have you identified any salient, recurring grammar mistakes? Mark a few examples on your partner’s composition and provide suggestions on how to correct them.
13. Have you identified any salient vocabulary mistakes? Mark a few examples on your partner’s composition and provide suggestions on how to correct them.
14. Have you identified any salient sentence structure mistakes? Mark a few examples on your partner’s composition and provide suggestions on how to correct them.

Appendix C  
Consent Form

**Consent form**

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**Title of research study:** Writing Instruction in Foreign Language Courses

**Research Investigators:** Dr. Judith Shrum, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Virginia Tech, and Laura Levi Altstaedter, Graduate Student, School of Education, Virginia Tech

**Where and when the study will be conducted:** Virginia Tech, Fall 2008 – Spring 2009

You are being asked to participate in a study that involves a specific method of writing instruction. We are investigating the effects of using this method in the classroom. You will be a participant in one of two groups. Specifically, we will analyze your performance on a writing task. This study will take approximately one week to complete. You will be expected to participate as you would normally do in class.

Your decision whether to allow the researchers to use your scores in this study is completely voluntary and does not pose any significant risk for participating. You have the option to request at any time that your scores not be used for analysis. There is no penalty if you do not want your scores used in this study.

Your information will be kept completely confidential. In order to ensure confidentiality, you will be assigned a unique number for data collection purposes. The document linking numbers and student names will be stored in one of the researcher's locked office and only the two researchers (listed at the top of this letter) and their research assistant will have access to these records. The records will be kept for five years after the completion of the study and then promptly destroyed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

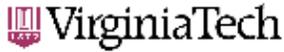
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person  
obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person  
obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Appendix D

IRB Approval Manuscript #1



**Office of Research Compliance**  
Carmen T. Green, IRB Administrator  
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4358 Fax 540/231-0959  
e-mail [ctgreen@vt.edu](mailto:ctgreen@vt.edu)  
[www.irb.vt.edu](http://www.irb.vt.edu)  
FVA00000572 expires 1/20/2010  
IRB # is IRB00000887

DATE: September 30, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Judith L. Shrum  
Laura Altstaedter

FROM: Carmen Green 

SUBJECT: **IRB Exempt Approval:** "Peer Feedback and Writing Instruction in Foreign Language Courses", IRB # 08-570

I have reviewed your request to the IRB for exemption for the above referenced project. The research falls within the exempt status. Approval is granted effective as of September 30, 2008.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in the research protocol. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

cc: File

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## Appendix E

### IRB Approval Manuscript #2

 <b>VirginiaTech</b>	<b>Office of Research Compliance</b> Institutional Review Board 2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497) Blacksburg, Virginia 24061 540/231-4991 Fax: 540/231-0959 e-mail <a href="mailto:moored@vt.edu">moored@vt.edu</a> <a href="http://www.irb.vt.edu">www.irb.vt.edu</a>
DATE: October 17, 2008	<small>PWA00000572, expires 1/20/2010 IRB # is IRB00000867</small>
<b>MEMORANDUM</b>	
TO: Elizabeth G. Creamer Laura Altstaedter	<b>Approval date: 10/17/2008</b> <b>Continuing Review Due Date: 10/2/2009</b> <b>Expiration Date: 10/16/2009</b>
FROM: David M. Moore 	
SUBJECT: <b>IRB Expedited Approval:</b> "Students' Perceptions of Peer Feedback in Foreign Language Courses", IRB # 08-628	
<p>This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective October 17, 2008.</p> <p>As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.</li><li>2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.</li><li>3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.</li><li>4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.</li></ol> <p><b>Important:</b> If you are conducting <b>federally funded non-exempt research</b>, please send the applicable OSP/grant proposal to the IRB office, once available. OSP funds may not be released until the IRB has compared and found consistent the proposal and related IRB application.</p>	
cc: File	

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