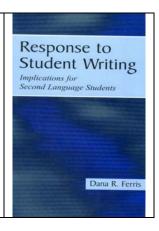***Response to Student Writing: Implications for Second Language Students***
By Dana R. Ferris (2003)
Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
pp. xiii + 216.
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Reviewed by Paul McNeill & Vivian Turnau
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Dana R. Ferris' goal in *Response to Student Writing: Implications for Second Language Students* (2003) is to trace, review, and analyze L2 writing research from a wide range of published and unpublished sources – books, journal articles, computer databases, master's theses, doctoral dissertations, conference papers, scientific studies – to suggest ways to improve and strengthen that research, and to map out practical methods whose purpose is to effectively implement teaching strategies in the classroom. Ferris' broader concentration is focused on response to student writing, with equal weight on teacher commentary, error correction, and peer feedback. She evaluates "the implications of the research for the teaching practice in the critical areas of written and oral teacher commentary, error correction, and peer response" (p. xi). Although Ferris attempts to give equal time to those who criticize and to those who sponsor each of the three aforementioned areas of L2 writing, one can't help but notice that she gives short shrift to older research. Although Ferris attempts in the first five chapters to provide an objective review of the history of second language writing research, it is clear she privileges research supporting each area considering the final three chapters of her volume discuss ways to implement each practice.

Ferris' primary concern is what she sees as a lack of consistent and reliable research dealing with second-language writing and the nature and effects of teacher feedback. She believes this absence of empirical evidence in the early days of L2 research – what she calls "the bad news 80s" – has led to faulty claims and unqualified conclusions, particularly the belief that teacher commentary deters the improvement of student writing. She believes that L2 writing lacks long-term studies with adequate regulations, such as control groups. Her call to action is for the triangulation of data collection methods and analysis procedures, with a growing concentration on the subjects (teachers and students) of the research, the settings of the research, the procedural methods of teacher feedback, and the instructional procedures utilized by teachers. She urges future teachers and researchers to conduct more controlled experiments, with larger

sample sizes, longer durations of instructional treatment and data collection, and more appropriate quantitative designs.

In simpler terms, what Ferris suggests is a more scientific approach to future L2 research. She urges future studies to close the gap in the research base that concerns itself with measuring student improvement as a result of teacher feedback. For instance, error correction, Ferris' métier, would seem to work in the short term. However, we must seek out research verifying the long-term positive or negative effects. We must seek the answers to important questions, such as: How long does it take for L2 writers to produce academic writing? What process or processes must be undertaken to become proficient in academic writing? L2 writing is ripe for such research; it is possible that the definitive research has yet to be conducted.

As a result of conflicting findings from L2 writing research and Ferris' presumed attempt to present a balanced and comprehensive depiction of the past and present L2 research field, *Response to Student Writing* offers more questions than answers. (Perhaps that is Ferris' goal.) Even though L2 writing calls for more longitudinal studies, Ferris seems to anticipate what the research will conclude, most notably that written and oral teacher commentary, error correction, and peer response produce beneficial results. Reservedly speaking, she is convincing in her book. Ferris has earned the respect of her peers, and any volume or article she publishes is a must read for anyone working in ESL or second language writing. In *Response to Student Writing*, however, she often appears as an ideologue trumpeting her position to the exclusion of others, giving the appearance of a lack of balance. An example of this perspective is that those of differing positions are accorded much less space in the volume than her position. Ferris' neglect weakens her argument. Based on Ferris's text alone, however, a reader can come away with the following conclusions:

- Teacher commentary – direct or indirect – encourages and helps students to improve their writing.
- L2 students are able to digest global and local feedback simultaneously, eliminating the need to save form corrections for the penultimate draft. Form and content are not separate entities; each influences the other. In fact, more grammar feedback is needed because, contrary to what some researchers believe, proper grammar does not come naturally over time.
- L1 and L2 research can and should inform each other.
- Offering indirect feedback on error correction may be impossible because of the teacher's role as authority/expert. It would seem that all feedback is direct.
- Students will improve over time if they are given *appropriate* error correction. (What qualifies as *appropriate* error correction is another area for discussion.)
- Although many endorsements of peer review, especially those that posit peer review as superior to teacher commentary, are unqualified, peer review can improve student writing so long as students are properly trained in the correct manners in which to respond. Ferris' manual offers such directions for properly training students to conduct effective peer review.

By Ferris' own admission in her Preface, *Response to Student Writing* should be used as a supplementary text, particularly when used for teaching ESL composition or second-language writing courses for future instructors. We believe that the volume should not serve as a primary text for future teachers or graduate students. The first section, Research, would be most beneficial for graduate students, while the second section, Application, could serve as a primer for novice teachers who need direction and practical suggestions to begin their teaching careers. As a whole, however, Ferris and John S. Hedgcock's *Teaching ESL Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice* (2005) is more user-friendly for beginning teachers who are charged with writing lesson plans and syllabi for the first time. We've included a chart comparing the two manuals to assist those who may want to use both books together in a course. By itself, *Response to Student Writing* will appeal most to researchers in L2 composition or experienced teachers looking to strengthen the theoretical base of their chosen pedagogy.

Chapter in Ferris (2003)	Title of the Chapter	Comparable Chapters in Ferris and Hedgcock (2005)
1	An Overview of L1 Composition Research on Response and its Influence on L2 Writing Theory and Practice	(1) Theoretical and Practical Issues in ESL Writing (2) ESL Writing and L2 Literacy Development
2	Teacher Feedback on L2 Student Writing	(5) Teacher Response to Student Writing: Issues in Oral and Written Feedback
3	Error Correction	(7) Improving Accuracy in Student Writing: Error Treating in the Composition Class
4	Research on Peer Response	(6) Building a Community of Writers: Principles of Peer Response
5	Student Views on Response	(5) Teacher Response to Student Writing: issues in Oral and Written Feedback (6) Building a Community of Writers: Principles of Peer Response 7) Improving Accuracy in Student Writing: Error Treating in the Composition Class
6	Preparing Teachers to Respond to Student	(5)Teacher Response to Student Writing: Issues In

	Writing	Oral and Written Feedback (6) Building a Community of Writers: Principles of Peer Response
7	Suggestions for Error Correction	(7) Improving Accuracy in Student Writing: Error Treating in the Composition Class (8) Classroom Approaches to ESL Writing Assessment
8	Implementing Peer Response	(6) Building a Community of Writers: Principles of Peer Response
Other	None	(9) Technology in the Writing Class: Uses and Abuses

Works Cited

Ferris, D. R. (2003). *Response to student writing: Implications for second language students*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Ferris, D. R. and Hedgcock, J. S. (2005). *Teaching ESL composition: Purpose, process, and practice*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Paul McNeill is working on an M.A. in teaching composition at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where he works as an academic skills counselor. He also teaches writing at Guilford Technical Community College. His professional and academic interests include developmental education and second language writing pedagogy. pdmcneil@uncg.edu.

Vivian Turnau has a B.A. in French and M.A. in Spanish. She spent many years teaching both languages at the secondary school level before becoming interested in English as a Second Language (ESL) for adults. She is presently working on a doctorate in English as a Second Language at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro and tutoring ESL for the YMCA Literacy Program. vwturnau@uncg.edu