# *The Use of*
# *Written Corrective Feedback*

A Survey of Written Response from Teachers to ESL Students in English
A-Course Upper Secondary School

Our greatest glory is not in
Never falling but in rising
Every time we fall
- Confucius

**Title:** The Use of Written Corrective Feedback – A Survey of Written Response from Teachers to ESL Students in English A-Course Upper Secondary School

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## Abstract

Teachers and the main body of researchers seem to be of the opinion that in order to learn as efficiently as possible we need to know when we fail and preferably how we can correct our errors; that we need to be given *feedback* to progress in our learning. Ideas such as these seem to originate in the Sociocultural Theory and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Researchers in the field of language proficiency have nonetheless since Truscott's publication (1996) debated whether feedback is of good or evil. This study comprises a small descriptive rendering of 100 ESL students' experiences and attitudes towards written corrective feedback and how it is used and perceived at the English A-course level in four selected upper secondary schools in Gothenburg. It stems from the latest research observations in the field of linguistics and pedagogics. The present study finds that (a) feedback is used, (b) the types of feedback typically used are indirect WCF, (c) the students want feedback and (d) feedback is intertwined with the pedagogical aspects. Further research is also called for, which investigates feedback in a context.

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# Introduction

In this chapter background, aim, scope, method and a plan of study are presented in order to give a brief summary of the approach to the present study. It will guide the reader and show factors that might affect validity and reliability to the results presented.

## 1.1  Background

Research in the field of feedback and language learning gained new speed after Truscott's article (1996) on feedback as redundant and harmful, a study, which was followed by a still lively debate. Studies claiming feedback to be redundant have been presented by Truscott (1996); Truscott (1999) and Truscott & Hsu (2008). Other studies presented by Polio et al. (1998); Fazio (2001) and Robb et al (1986) did not find feedback to improve student proficiency in writing, but do not claim the use of feedback is completely redundant. Further, studies, showing that feedback is a vital instrument, have been presented by Ferris (1999; 2006), Ferris & Roberts (2001), Lalande (1982); Goldstein (2006); Guenette (2007) and Hyland & Hyland (2006). What is clear is that no one can be absolutely sure about the effect of feedback. To produce reliable facts and results we need more research built on equal conditions. This study will begin at the very beginning surveying the use of written corrective feedback used in ESL education at upper secondary level (in the English A-course), the student attitude towards it and the pedagogical implications it has.

## 1.2  Aim and Scope

The aim of this research is to find out the use of written corrective feedback (WCF) used by teachers in English as a second language classes. Questions will deal with:

- Whether feedback is used,
- the type of feedback given,
- the student perspective on feedback, and
- what the pedagogical implications for the feedback process might be.

My interest lies in written corrective feedback, excluding electronic feedback. This study focuses on feedback given within the English A-course (which is the second highest obligatory English course that the Swedish school system provides), using established theoretical data and empirical data derived from questionnaires.

## 1.3   Method

In this section a short presentation is given on the method used, i.e. questionnaires, and the present study's participants. It will provide the factors needed to reproduce the study, thereby giving the results consistency and reliability; and together with attached questionnaires (see appendix A & B) showing validity.

### 1.3.1   Questionnaires

The use of questionnaires is an economical and effective research method to accumulate data from many respondents in a short period of time because of the simplicity it provides in having many inquiries answered individually at the same time. Since the investigation compiles experiences and attitudes from 104 respondents, questionnaires therefore became the weapon of choice.

The questionnaires contained a number of questions distributed over experience/performance and attitude, a division supported by Dörnyei (2010 p. 5) who elucidates three different types of information given by questionnaires:

- Factual information – factual questions to find vital background information about the respondents, such as age, gender, and other factors that might interfere or otherwise affect the study.
- Behavioural information – behavioural questions that investigate the respondents' normal approach to the subject, e.g. "How do you give feedback on grammatical errors?" (E.g. Q. 7. Questionnaire for teachers, see appendix B).
- Attitudinal information – attitudinal questions examines the respondents' attitudes toward the subject, e.g. degree question: "I find written feedback to facilitate my teaching English" (E.g. Q. 14. Questionnaire for teachers, see appendix B).

Questionnaires are the superior research method in order to minimise the influence of the researcher on the respondent's answering (Esaiasson, et al. 2007). Thus, a completely survey-administrator free inquiry would have been preferable but might then again have rendered much fewer participants, fewer answers from the actual participants, and it would in addition have taken much more time. The questionnaires were answered by one class at the time, distributed and collected by the author of this study to ensure that the frequency of active participants was as high as possible and also to consume as little time as possible.

According to Dörnyei (2010) there is a possibility that the participants might be unwilling or unmotivated to read the instructions thoroughly (students in particular). Thus, they might not understand what was wanted from them; understand their right to be anonymous; or their right to withdraw. The informative part of the questionnaire was therefore read aloud to the participants and time was given for possible questions before they started responding to the questions. Another slight possibility, pointed out by Dörnyei (2010), is that the respondent (in this case mainly the teachers) answers the way he or she thinks is most profitable, or least

awkward (the topic might be delicate to the teachers if they are not secure in the anonymity that the questionnaire guarantees). To eliminate the presence of such phenomena the wish to obtain only truthful answers was stated clearly in the instructions and stress was put upon the fact that the investigation was both voluntary and anonymous.

An important factor contributing to the validity and reliability effect is the language in which the inquiries were made. Handing out questionnaires in English might have worked well for some students but imposed too much on the truthfulness of the answers from others. To get true facts from the participants was more important than anything else. Thus, the questionnaires were conducted in Swedish, the common language, to facilitate the participants' understanding and to relieve the stress of linguistic misinterpretations.

Great effort was made in order to ensure that the questions were clear and easy to comprehend. Therefore, after finishing the final version of the questionnaires, a pilot study was performed on a small group of students and teachers, which suggested the need for some minor adjustments (for final versions see appendix A & B).

There are minor disadvantages to questionnaires as a form. According to McKay (2006) these disadvantages are the potential risk that the respondents might answer in a way they think is required and that answers given are superficial or over-simplified. These issues will be brought to light during the introduction in class, but will not in any other way be compensated for. If time had been sufficient to perform additional interviews I would have done so. This is however a restriction in the present study only made up for by short informal conversations with some students and a teacher separately.

Further aspects to consider are the ethical considerations of allowing under-aged students to participate in an investigation without parental consent. This was unfortunately necessary as the time frame was strictly limited; it should however not be an issue as Dörnyei (2003) defines the matter as a grey-zone area and that in the case of neutral questionnaires, which do not require personal or sensitive information, "permission to conduct the survey can be granted by the children's teachers." (p. 93).


## 1.3.2  Participants – Students and Teachers

The present study's student population consisted of 100 ESL respondents in three different Swedish schools. The partaking students ranged from 15-16 years of age and they were all enlisted to the English A-course, which is an obligatory course in the Swedish upper secondary school. The population consisted of 49 girls and 51 boys. The student participant group is heterogeneous in its background as to which city district of Gothenburg they come from, what sociocultural background they have, what gender they belong to, which L1 they speak, and what schools they have attended before (informal spoken information from a teacher). Since there is no control group in this study I have not taken these variables into account. The questionnaires were responded to anonymously and the group of students was treated as one whole.

According to Dörnyei (2003) an ample sample size is between 1-10% of the whole population (p. 74). Since the reported number of students taking the English A-course in Gothenburg this year is 3216 (Information gathered through contact with the Gothenburg City

Office) the participating 100 students in the present study would then be a sufficient number (3,1%).

The teacher population consisted of 4 teachers in ESL in the upper secondary level. The respondents came from three different schools with experiences of teaching reaching from recently graduated to being a practitioner since 1979; all with different skills but with one thing in common, their qualification as teachers in English. The teachers have, in total, 72 years of experience as practitioners. They are thereby both highly experienced in their profession as well as sensitive to the concepts of learning theory and can by that give both the experienced practitioner's view as well as the newly graduate's view on how best to use feedback. It is admitted that this small population is not statistically representative, the results can therefore only be considered as qualitative "pointers".

Both the student and the teacher groups were heartily thanked and the teachers were asked if they would want a copy of the result, all in accordance with Dörnyei's (2003) recommendations.

## 1.4   Plan of study

This is a qualitative descriptive survey of the use of WCF in four English A-course classes in upper secondary level. As reader of this study you have been introduced to the topic, method and other important settings and conditions which discuss the present study's reliability and validity. In chapter 2, *Theoretical Background*, a short revision and summary of the Sociocultural Theory is given as background to the communicative aspect that feedback has, and then a revision of previous theoretical data is given showing the diversities in previous research as well as a typology of WCF displaying different ways of giving feedback.

Further, *Results and Discussion* presented in chapter 3, summarises the result of the inquiries made with the questionnaires as well as the potential consequences of the result. It discusses feedback from the teacher perspective as well as the student perspective. It also presents a focused section on pedagogical implications of feedback. In chapter 4, *Summary and Conclusion*, the aim and final results are briefly summarised showing the study's aim to be fulfilled.

# 2. Theoretical Background

In this chapter a brief rendition of the theoretical background as well as the light in which the results should be interpreted are presented. It will give a context to the study and the results found.

## 2.1    The Sociocultural Theory

According to Hyland & Hyland (2006) written feedback is an instrument designed to carry a heavy informational load. The information "offers the assistance of an expert, guiding the learner through the 'zone of proximal development'" (p. 207). As such it is an instrument of Sociocultural Theory (SCT), a theory which can be seen as the prevailing paradigm in Swedish schools today. This can for instance be seen through the curriculum statement on knowledge and learning "all pupils shall be stimulated into growing with different tasks and have the opportunity to develop in accordance with their own abilities" (English version of Lpf -94 p.7), a statement interpreted as a paraphrase of the zone of proximal development (ZDP); as well as the  proclamation "the school's task of imparting knowledge presupposes that there is an active debate in the individual school about concepts of knowledge, on what constitutes important knowledge now and in the future, as well as the learning process itself" (p. 6) where the debate/discussion in and of the learning process is emphasised. The SCT therefore influences teachers' view on how to teach and respond to their students work to facilitate progress. It is thus important as a background for our understanding of their and the students' view on feedback.

The Sociocultural Theory stems from Vygotsky's era. It is a theory that has many advocates around the world, among them Roger Säljö (2006), who also has contributed to how we understand the theory in Sweden today. Säljö argues that knowledge and skills accumulated from our ancestors are instruments and artefacts (e.g. our language) which are implemented in our culture, society and heritage; and that the knowledge and insights are shared through *interaction*. Consequently he claims that the *communicative processes* are central for learning and development in the SCT (2006). Such a communicative process can be seen in the Zone of Proximal Development, which is the tutor-assisted process of internalisation where the tutor provides as little help as the student might need to make progress (Sheen, 2011). The ZPD shows not only where the learner is at the moment but the potential in his or her understanding.

**Figure 2.1** Based on Säljö's figure 2006:122
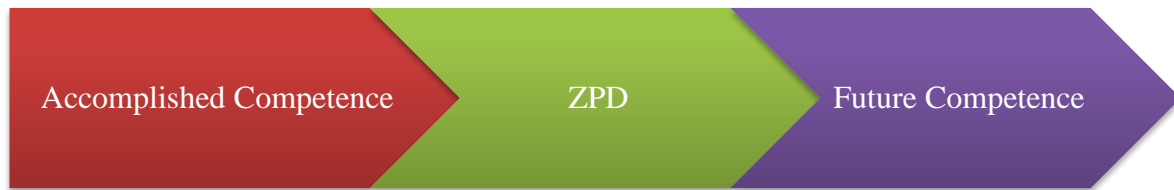


The first step in the figure symbolises knowledge already adopted by the learners; this is where the students are without being challenged - without improvement. In the next step we find the Zone of Proximal Development where the interaction between the learner and a more competent person takes place, a teacher or a more competent peer; this is where the learner is expected to make progress through engaging in a communicative process. The ZPD can be seen as the zone in which the learner is receptive to support and explanations, also called *scaffolds*. *Scaffolding* is a concept belonging to the ZPD; it is the provision of assistance from a more competent person to the learner. Scaffolding can be compared to crash barriers that keep the learner on the road by surveying and correcting the course of the act (Säljö, 2006). The third step in the process figure shows the potential competence and knowledge the learner obtains through the zone of proximal development and its scaffolds.

Sheen (2011) expresses the Sociocultural Theory as relevant only to oral feedback as it is focused on communicative part of learning, the interactional process. I do not fully agree with this claim since the communication in our society today is increasingly performed in written form. Due to the intensification in pace in life and the call for efficiency in our society we tend to use more written communication to reach people around us, more so than ever before. We leave notes to our children, we text our friends and we write to our students, not only because technology allows us to, but also because we are required to be at different places at the same time. Written communication has become so usual that it now could be seen as the ordinary way of communicating. Therefore I am going to interpret Sheen's (ibid.) understanding as to also include written feedback.

## 2.2 Typology of Written Corrective Feedback

Two versions of a typology of written corrective feedback are presented by Ellis (2009) and Sheen (2011) respectively. Ellis gives his version of the typology divided into six categories (focused/unfocused corrective feedback included) and makes a division between e.g. *direct corrective feedback* and *metalinguistic corrective feedback* whilst Sheen takes on a different approach merging e.g. the direct and the meta-linguistic forms into *direct metalinguistic written correction*. The contents are therefore about the same, but the categorisation is different. The mutual intention, however, of their typologies is the charting of types of feedback used by practising teachers.

**Table 2.1** Ellis' table of feedback types (2009 p.98)

| Type of CF | Description | Studies |
|---|---|---|
| **A** Strategies for providing CF | | |
| **1** Direct CF | The teacher provides the student with the correct form. | e.g. Lalande (1982) and Robb *et al.* (1986). |
| **2** Indirect CF | The teacher indicates that an error exists but does not provide the correction. | |
|   **a** Indicating + locating the error | This takes the form of underlining and use of cursors to show omissions in the student's text. | Various studies have employed indirect correction of this kind (e.g. Ferris and Roberts 2001; Chandler 2003). |
|   **b** Indication only | This takes the form of an indication in the margin that an error or errors have taken place in a line of text. | Fewer studies have employed this method (e.g. Robb *et al.* 1986). |
| **3** Metalinguistic CF | The teacher provides some kind of metalinguistic clue as to the nature of the error. | |
|   **a** Use of error code | Teacher writes codes in the margin (e.g. ww = wrong word; art = article). | Various studies have examined the effects of using error codes (e.g. Lalande 1982; Ferris and Roberts 2001; Chandler 2003). |
|   **b** Brief grammatical descriptions | Teacher numbers errors in text and writes a grammatical description for each numbered error at the bottom of the text. | Sheen (2007) compared the effects of direct CF and direct CF + metalinguistic CF. |
| **4** The focus of the feedback | This concerns whether the teacher attempts to correct all (or most) of the students' errors or selects one or two specific types of errors to correct. This distinction can be applied to each of the above options. | Most studies have investigated unfocused CF (e.g. Chandler 2003; Ferris 2006). Sheen (2007), drawing on traditions in SLA studies of CF, investigated focused CF. |
|   **a** Unfocused CF | Unfocused CF is extensive. | |
|   **b** Focused CF | Focused CF is intensive. | |
| **5** Electronic feedback | The teacher indicates an error and provides a hyperlink to a concordance file that provides examples of correct usage. | Milton (2006). |
| **6** Reformulation | This consists of a native speaker's reworking of the students' entire text to make the language seem as native-like as possible while keeping the content of the original intact. | Sachs and Polio (2007) compared the effects of direct correction and reformulation on students' revisions of their text. |

Ellis here states five different types of feedback (focused/unfocused corrective feedback are not seen as a category of type per se and has therefore been excluded here) with defining subgroups. He also categorises the focus of the given feedback (cf. point 4). Here are brief renditions of the listed types: (1) *direct corrective feedback*, when the teacher supplies the correct form, directly in the text or in the margin/at the end, no further division is made.

(2a) *indirect corrective feedback* is when the teacher *indicates* and *locates* the problem using underlining or other markers, but does not give the correct form. *Indirect corrective feedback* could also be used with *indication only* (2b) then only indicating in the margin that one or more errors have occurred. *Metalinguistic corrective feedback* (3), is when the teacher provides some kind of meta-linguistic clue "as to the nature of the error" (Ellis 2009 p. 98). Ellis makes a division between (3a) *use of error code*, placed in the margin, and (3b) *brief grammatical descriptions* of errors that have been numbered in the text and then explained at the end. Following the metalinguistic corrective feedback and preceding the fourth type we find two concepts, which can be applied to all of the different types of feedback and thereby deciding the focus of the feedback given. *Unfocused corrective feedback* (4a) when the feedback is extensive, focusing on all features in each hand-in and (4b) *focused corrective feedback* concerning only one or two features at the time. Ellis (2009) suggests that, in L2 acquisition, unfocused corrective feedback may be the most efficient in the long run, despite focused corrective feedback supplying more examples of corrections to the same type of error. The fourth form is *electronic feedback* (5) explained by Ellis as when the teacher provides a hyperlink to correct usage in an electronically submitted document. Yet another form of corrective feedback is the use of (6) *reformulation*, Ellis (2009) describes this final form of feedback as consisting of a native's reformulation of the student's text so as to make the text as native-like as possible while keeping the content intact (p. 98). All of these above mentioned categories, however, seem meant to be used simultaneously rather than individually.

Sheen (2011) proposes an approach that is based on Ellis' typology (table 2.1) but which combines and alters the categories slightly. Sheen states 7 seven categories all together:

1. *Direct non-metalinguistic written correction*
   Consists of simply providing the student with the correct form, by e.g. crossing out the error and replacing it with the correct word or adding something that is missing.

2. *Direct metalinguistic written correction*
   Explained as providing the student with the correct form and giving a written explanation of some sort, for instance by numbering the errors and giving the answer with an accompanying explanation at the end of the page.

3. *Indirect written correction (non-located error)*
   Explained as providing the student with an indication that an error has occurred but not locating or correcting it, these indicators appear only in the margin.

4.  *Indirect written correction (located error)*
    This type only differs from the previous one in that it is located. The teacher provides the student with an indication of an error and its location, but does not correct.

5.  *Indirect written correction using error codes*
    When providing an explicit comment on the "nature" of the error (e.g. "sp" for spelling or "voc" for wrong word choice), but not giving the correct form.

6.  *Indirect metalinguistic written correction*
    This type is similar to the direct metalinguistic written correction in that it gives a metalinguistic explanation to the error, but different in that it withholds the correct form. For example, "What tense does the main verb always have in a passive construction?"

7.  *Reformulation*
    This type consists of a provision of a complete reformulation of the erroneous part in the text. This does not only address the linguistic errors, it also indicates and addresses form problems and aims to improve the overall accuracy of the text. "Reformulation can be considered a form of direct CF in that it provides learners with the corrections. However, learners have to carry out a comparison of their own and the reformulated text, which places the burden of locating specific errors on them."

                                                              (2011 pp.5)

The chief difference between Ellis' and Sheen's approach to the various types of feedback is the division that Ellis proposes between the types, which is not similarly used in Sheen's version. Sheen also focuses on *written* feedback exclusively, a distinction not clearly made by Ellis. Nor does Ellis' table comprise the direct metalinguistic form of corrective feedback; Ellis does however define the *Reformulation* type as being made by a native, a distinction not made by Sheen.

   Ellis' typology is the model on to which Sheen relies but her alterations have refined the typology into a more pragmatic tool and it is thereby Sheen's typology that this study will depend upon. The categories she proposes are reflected in the questionnaires and will further be discussed in chapter 3.

## 2.3    Previous Research

Previous research demonstrates a clear discrepancy between two camps that on one side claim feedback is of good and that it is necessary for learners to become more proficient in their L2 acquisition (Ferris 1999 & 2006; Ferris & Roberts 2001; Lalande 1982; Goldstein 2006; Guenette 2007 and Hyland & Hyland 2006); while the other camp claim that feedback is not only unnecessary, it is also of no good and can be harmful to the student's learning (Truscott, 1996; Truscott, 1999 and Truscott & Hsu, 2008). The debate, therefore, is alive, vibrant, and an interesting field of research in which the history has not yet been completely written. This section provides a review of some of the previous research used in the present study; a few have been excluded because of lack of space and their similarity to other work.

The articles chosen for this study all deal with feedback for L2-learners. Truscott (1996) set off the debate on the importance or non-importance of feedback with an article that seriously questioned the good of grammar feedback (1996), it was responded to by Ferris (1999) and Truscott (1999) once more, and the debate is still not settled.

Truscott (1996) limited his research to grammar feedback (which still is somewhat vague as a concept) and with a line of evidence, despite of his acknowledge of feedback as an "institution" (p. 327), claim that such feedback is not only unnecessary for students' writing skills – it is also harmful and sets the student back rather than contributing to successful learning. Truscott claims that teachers' response to students' grammatical errors is unclear, ambiguous and often incorrect. He insists that the time and effort that teachers put into corrective feedback could and should be put into other more fruitful features of language acquisition (1996). The strength in Truscott's article lies in its ability to put most of the researchers in the field on their toes; to realise that research thus far was insufficient and that ample investigation was (/still is) needed.

In Ferris' response to Truscott a refutation is made to most of Truscott's results, due to the poor research material and the inconclusive interpretations he presents (Ferris 1999). Ferris recognises Truscott's evidence for his argument to be bias, "premature and overly strong" (1999 p. 2) but does agree with his statement that no single form of feedback can be used to cover all different types of errors. Ferris calls for further research in the area as well as a plea for restraint not jump to conclusions until more reliable research has been presented (1999). Ferris further makes an important contribution to the research as she presents the concept of "treatable" and "untreatable" errors, a differentiation between rule-governed errors and errors without clear rules and thus points out that the former is much easier to correct than the latter. In doing so, she recognises the problem stated by Truscott, but instead of agreeing with his claim to abandon all grammatical feedback she suggests that teachers take the time to be more attentive, versatile and thorough in their corrections.

Other articles have been published where the writer investigates further phenomena that might affect students' abilities to improve their second language written proficiency. One of these is written by Goldstein (2006) who argues that students' abilities are not solely ascribed to the teachers' ability to give feedback. She claims it is contextual as well as dependent on other student and teacher variables, e.g. the personal relationship between the learner and the tutor. Goldstein states that research should be conducted in case studies to control for all

variables that may interfere. She proposes that those variables, e.g. the student's motivation, the personal relationship between the student and the teacher etc., are factors contributing to how the feedback is perceived by the student. Hyland and Hyland (2006) strengthen Goldstein's interpretation and maintain the importance of feedback as the expert's way to guide the novice. They claim feedback to be the means through which the teacher guides the learner through the Zone of Proximal Development. Hyland and Hyland conclude that feedback always carries the risk of being judgemental, as a result, teachers often use feedback as an interpersonal strategy; and that this feedback can either facilitate or undermine the students' writing (2006). So far most of the researchers advocate feedback, and sustain the importance of it in order to produce proficient L2 learners (cf. Ferris 2004; Ellis 2009 and Hyland and Hyland 2006).

Bitchener et al. (2005) charted the field of research and the effect of different types of feedback given to students' writing. Their research covers three different features (prepositions, the past simple tense and the definite article) and the effect of written and oral feedback on them. Although the overall result shows no true increase in the student's written proficiency, they conclude that direct feedback, in written and oral form combined, had significant effect at least on "treatable" rule-governed features (cf. Ferris, 1999), e.g. the past simple tense, but was not as effective on less "treatable" features, i.e. prepositions. Bitchener et al. do thereby not make a clear contribution to the feedback/no feedback debate but do give an interesting view on how to best treat rule-governed errors.

Guenette (2007) presents previous research from a different perspective. She attempts to answer to what extent conflicting results (for and against feedback) can be attributed to the research design and methodology, and to what extent the variables not considered in the design affect the result. Guenette found that most of the previous studies are not comparable because of the inconsistency in design and method and she suggests that "differences in research design and methodology are indeed at the root of the different results obtained." (p. 51). She concludes that there are so many variables to be considered that are difficult to isolate, but that it is necessary to do so in order not to end up comparing completely different aspects, a standpoint which can be compared to Goldstein's (2006) claim that the variables are vital contextual student and teacher factors that cannot be disregarded. The most rewarding contribution in Guenette's study is a factor merely touched upon at the end, which regards students' motivational levels as an attributing factor to whether feedback is of use or not. Guenette reflects over her own students in the past and their lack of instrumental motivation "They wrote to pass the exam or to please me, but very few were genuinely interested in improving their writing skills, just for the sake of good writing" a reflection echoing Ferris' suggestion that L2 students might be less motivated as they have no real use of their abilities to write in their L2 outside the classroom (1999 p. 47).

Bitchener and Knoch (2009) investigate the effect on the accuracy of two types of grammatical errors (i.e. the use of "a" for first mention and "the" for subsequent mentions) using three direct feedback options. This is a study that stretches over a period of ten months. Students were assigned to one group out of four which each was given feedback accordingly: written and oral (combined) metalinguistic direct feedback; written metalinguistic feedback; direct error correction; and no feedback at all (functioning as control group). Bitchener and

Knoch found that students who received feedback outperformed those who did not and that there was no significant difference in effect on accuracy for the three feedback groups.

Storch (2010) compiles early research on WCF and concludes, like Ferris (2004), that many studies lack a control group (which may have to do with the moral question of withholding feedback from students), research only revised material or inappropriate writing tasks (such as journal writing which is unlikely to be revised by the student as it is a channel for thoughts on the weekly events etc.) and the lack of comparability echoing Ferris (2004) and Guenette – who also claim that having a control group is not sufficient, and that the control group in every way must be comparable to the experimental groups (2007). Storch points out that more recent research (from 2005 and onwards) have learned from history in that it to a greater extent now uses control groups and does include new writing e.g. Truscott & Hsu (2008); Bitchener et al. (2005) and Bitchener & Knoch (2009), etc. However, we should consider that these aforementioned studies do not necessarily investigate the same problem.

Evans et al. (2010) present a unique study on feedback as it compiles over 1.000 participants' responses. It is a study aimed to show to what extent teachers provide WCF and what determines whether they do so or not. Evans et al found that feedback is used extensively; approximately 92% were reported typically to be using WCF as part of their teaching (pp. 63) that leaves only 8% (86 participants) to state that they do not use WCF. As to why or why not WCF is used in their teaching those against using feedback claim that substance, form and organisation matter most, while pro-feedback teachers say language matters too (pp. 64). Despite the majority of teachers being pro-feedback many teachers are reported insecure about to what extent the feedback they provide is useful or not to the students or to what extent the students actually consider the feedback and learn from it.

What needs to be considered is the fact that very few investigations do investigate the same thing and even fewer use the same method (cf. Guenette 2007). Many contributions to the on-going debate have compared and stated the disparities in the research done by various researchers over the years. Calls for controlled and longitudinal studies that use similar methods to be comparable have been heard over and over again. Then, and only then, it is asserted, can a result be claimed as valid and reliable. However, the previous research is nonetheless useful. It has helped to form the SLA studies of today and it has helped this present study to obtain an understanding of the research field to form grounds to build from.

# 3. Result and Discussion

In this chapter the results will be given according to the research questions previously stated in section 1.2 ((a) Whether feedback is used, (b) the type of feedback given, (c) the student perspective on feedback, and (d) what the pedagogical implications for the feedback process might be). The results, leaning on Sheen's typology, will be discussed in the light of previous research as well as the Sociocultural Theory.

## 3.1    Feedback or No Feedback

The studies presented in the previous chapter all assert that feedback is used, and Truscott goes as far as saying that feedback is an "institution" in L2 education (1996 p. 327). It is therefore not surprising that this study found feedback to be used by all participating teachers. Although this study does not have the benefit of reflecting more than 4 teachers' use of feedback it answers the study's first question on whether or not feedback is used. The result found is in alignment with the Evans et al study (2010), which charts over 1.000 participating teachers' use of feedback, and report that 92% of their population typically are feedback providers.

   Moreover, students and teachers in the present study find it useful, a result that is coherent with Hyland and Hyland (2006), Ferris (2003) and Guenette (2007). Certainly, a further look is required. The teachers were all asked to consider how they give feedback by positioning themselves according to nine statements concerning the different types of feedback. These are partly based on Sheen's typology (2011) and partly (the two last statements) based on contributions made by myself, the author of this essay: (1) I give the correct answer; (2) I mark the erroneous part and give a comment at the end of the assignment with the correct form; (3) I give an indication in the margin that an error has occurred but do not give the location nor the correct form; (4) I give an indication as well as the location of the erroneous part, but not the correct form; (5) I give an indication of the nature of the error using a code, e.g. "sp" for spelling, but do not give the correct form; (6) I give an explanation to the error but do not provide the correct form, e.g. "what type of tense does the main verb always have in a passive construction?"; (7) I reformulate the erroneous part and let the student find and name the error/s; (8) I grade it; and (9) I refer the student to suitable literature and exercises.

## 3.2    The Type of Feedback Given

All the teachers asked are found, as mentioned before, to be giving feedback, but none claims to do so in its direct non-metalinguistic form of WCF, i.e. they claim that they do not provide the students with the correct form of the error within the students' writing assignments. One idea as to why this result was found is that the participating teachers all teach older students who need not only the correct form but also an explanation why the form the student has supplied is wrong, what the correct form is and what rules that govern it. Another idea could

be found in the way the question was formulated: questionnaires are effective and economical devices to procure answers from many participants in a short period of time, but can lead to answers that are not completely true. The teachers might feel that they are under time pressure and thereby do not reflect enough over their own routines of feedback providing. There is also a slight possibility that the respondent answers the way he or she thinks is most profitable, or least awkward (topic presumed to be delicate). Moreover, as mentioned before, the questionnaires might carry the potential risk of the respondents answering in a way they think is required and the risk that the answers given are superficial or over-simplified. This was of course investigated through a pilot study, but such a test is also somewhat insecure in its result as the participators all are individuals with different backgrounds and experiences influencing how they perceive and react to the questions. An obvious flaw in the present study is, then, the lack of interviews investigating the loose ends provided by the questionnaires. Such interviews would have given a deeper meaning to the result. However, these loose ends have generated a positive aspect as an interest in further research, and the subject will be investigated further in a succeeding essay coming semester.

Two of the four teachers claim to occasionally give direct meta-linguistic written corrective feedback at the end of the assignment, providing the student with the correct form and giving written explanation of some sort – for instance by numbering the errors (or otherwise indicating) and giving the answer with an accompanying explanation at the end of the page. This form of WCF was the preferred form by 45% of the students (20% and 25% of the male and the female students respectively) who stated direct metalinguistic WCF as their number one choice of type of feedback thereby making it the number one choice by most of the students.

However, the present study reveals that the participating teachers' typical choice of approach is the use of indirect WCF. All of the participating teachers reported to be providing the student with an indirect WCF of some sort, but predominantly the indirect WCF with located error which gives an indication that an error has occurred and the location of said error but without providing the student with the correct form. This type of WCF was preferred by only 7% of the students (3% and 4% of the male and the female students respectively) but then again undesired only by 1% of the students, thereby not making it the students' favourite type of feedback or the students' most unwanted type of feedback.

The indirect WCF without location of the error/s form was also typically used by the teachers in all sorts of writing assignments; this type of WCF was least preferred by 28% of the students (10% and 18% of the male and the female students respectively) who stated indirect WCF without location of the error/s to be the least preferred type of WCF, thereby making it the *least* preferred type of feedback by the majority of the participating students.

Indirect WCF using error codes, in which the teacher provides explicit comments on the "nature" of the error but does not give the correct form, was also reported to be in use, the students seem to like this form of feedback as 13% (10% and 3% of the male and the female students) answered that this form is the one they prefer the most. Of course, it should be noted that if coded abbreviations are to be of any use it is important that the teacher and the students share the knowledge of what the teacher means and implies with the used code. It is also important that the students are able to read the feedback given, a fact that was brought to my attention by several students who claim they cannot.

No teacher reported indirect metalinguistic corrective feedback as an approach in their giving feedback. Indirect metalinguistic WCF is similar to direct metalinguistic WCF in that it gives a metalinguistic explanation to the issue, but different in that it withholds the correct form. For example, "What tense does the main verb always have in a passive construction?" Only 4% of the students claim this type of feedback to be the one they prefer most and only 5% of the students as the type of feedback they prefer least, these low numbers could be interpreted as a reflection of the students not being aware of what is implied with indirect metalinguistic WCF as they may have not been exposed to it.

Contrary to the previously mentioned idea that because of the nature of reformulation feedback as time-consuming (reformulation would not occur in the area of teacher-provided feedback that has been investigated (cf. section 2.2)), one teacher claims to use, or has used, reformulation at some point. Reformulation is a type of WCF, defined by Sheen (2011) as, providing a complete reformulation of the erroneous part in the text, which does not only address the linguistic errors, it also indicates and addresses form problems and aims to improve the overall accuracy in the text. "Reformulation can be considered a form of direct CF in that it provides learners with the corrections", however, learners need nonetheless to make "a comparison of their own and the reformulated text, which places the burden of locating specific errors on them" (2011 p. 7). The teacher in question reported that a reformulation of the erroneous part was used, but did not, however, develop his/her statement and it is not revealed if the type of WCF is/was repeated or merely a one-off event and is therefore not taken into account. Only 4% of the students (1% and 3% of the male and the female students respectively) claim this type of feedback to be the one they prefer the most, and only 2% of the students (male students only) claim reformulation to be the least preferred type of feedback. Thereby, an interpretation can be made similar to the previous type of feedback, that the students are not completely aware of what is implied with the WCF in question. As to the question whether the teachers supply only a grade or references to literature for further studies none of the teachers in the present study claim to do so, despite some students' wish for these types of feedback.

In accordance with Lalande 1982 and Ferris (1999; 2006) Ferris and Roberts (2001) suggest that indirect feedback is preferable because it engages students in their learning in a way that direct feedback does not, this strengthens the participating teachers in the present study's approach. Studies performed by Lalande (1982) and Ferris (2003) also found that indirect feedback is beneficial for long term acquisition. Ferris et al (2001) thereby suggest that indirect feedback is preferable for most student writers as it involves them and that the involvement leads to reflection and the probable prospect of long-term acquisition (2001 p. 164). They suggest, however, that direct corrective feedback is better suited for students at lower proficiency levels as they may not be sufficiently skilled to procure a correct form on their own – but point out that giving direct feedback is disadvantageous since it requires minimal processing on the student's behalf. The same results were found by Lee (1997) who suggests a guiding principle

> To vary the degree of salience of error feedback according to the learner's
> proficiency – for instance, less salient information for more advanced
> learners, and more salient information for less advanced learners
>
> (p. 471)

a finding that is contradicted in Robb et al (1986) but which supports the participating teachers' use of indirect feedback as they are teachers to more proficient students at a higher level of education. Storch (2010) also hesitates on the use of indirect feedback as she suggests that indirect feedback can only "lead to an increase in control of a linguistic form that has already been partially internalized" and therefore cannot lead to new learning.

Ferris and Roberts (2001) further suggest that indirect feedback may even help students to self-edit idiosyncratic (sentence structure, etc.) errors. As to what form is the most efficient instrument for improvement of students' proficiency in writing, Ferris (2001) found that there was no significant difference on improvement between the two groups of students participating in her study receiving direct and indirect feedback respectively. Other research has been done on what type of feedback is the most efficient and preferred by teachers and students with varying results. The common notion, however, seems to be that feedback should be given to prevent "stagnation" in students' development for higher proficiency levels.

What type should be given is dependent on the students' attitudes and preferences (Hyland & Hyland, 2006) and the situation and type of task given to the students (Ferris, 2004). Most importantly, awaiting more longitudinal and valid research, feedback needs to be varied and adjusted to suit the individual student and situation (Ferris, 2004; Bitchener et al, 2005); in the present study teachers also claim to be using WCF in combination with oral feedback, an approach supported by a number of studies (cf. Bitchener et al 2005 and Ferris 2004) and definitely an approach that would cure the issue of students not being able to read their teacher's handwriting.

To sum up, the present study shows that participating teachers mainly use an indirect approach to written corrective feedback. Most of the teachers reported to be providing the student with an indication that an error has occurred and the location of the error but without providing the student with the correct form (indirect written correction with located error). The type of indirect feedback non-located error/s was also typically used. Indirect WCF using error codes, in which the teacher provides explicit comments on the "nature" of the error but does not give the correct form, was also reported to be in use.

What needs to be recognised is that none of the participating teachers uses only one form of WCF in accordance with the recommendation to use a varied approach made by several studies (cf. Ferris 1999; 2004; Ellis 2009 and Bitchener et al. 2005).

Further, teachers in the present study claim that the feedback process is intricate and complex and that there is not ample time to develop or deepen the explanations that students might need. They also express that other factors are taken into account, such as feedback as a student-teacher channel for communication, knowledge of affecting events and situations outside the school, the type and size of the assignment, etc. Some of them claim that they do not only look at linguistic errors, but on the assignment as a whole and that they document the student's development as material for assessment and mid-term evaluations. This does not affect the feedback per se but puts it in a context. The fact that the teachers' report feedback to be more than error correcting is highly interesting since it strengthens the suggestion that feedback is a way of communicating; an increasing number of studies report on feedback with a similar perspective (Hyland and Hyland 2006; Hyland, 2010; Goldstein, 2006; Guenette, 2007).

## 3.3    Feedback in the Student Perspective

Despite the fact that 87% of the participating students claim that they find feedback useful, 52% of them state that they read through the feedback they get but do nothing with it and 4% that they simply do nothing with the feedback they receive at all. We might ask ourselves why students do not revise more attentively. In response some students claim they would do more with the feedback if they were able to read their teacher's handwriting:

> Our teacher often has a completely undecipherable handwriting, which results in him having to explain to each and every one of us what is written. We understand the meaning of it though, that is not the issue.
>
> <div align="right">(From student questionnaire, my translation)</div>

> Since the written comments I get from my teacher aren't legible and difficult to understand I'm not helped by them – and I don't get any help to understand them.
>
> <div align="right">(From student questionnaire, my translation)</div>

These are comments that are in line with Truscott's (1996) claim that the teachers' response to students' errors are unclear, ambiguous and unhelpful. However, a general conclusion cannot be drawn from these comments as there are too few participating teachers in this study. Other students express that they simply are not motivated to revise which are statements concurring with Ferris (1999) in her comment that L2 students might be less motivated as they have no real use of their abilities to write in their second language outside their classroom (1999 p. 47). Hyland & Hyland (2006) present a view on learners and aspects that might affect their motivational levels through a sociocultural perspective:

> Learners are historically and sociologically situated active agents who respond to what they see as valuable and useful and to people they regard as engaging and credible. They learn through purposive interaction with teachers and their learning environment to develop knowledge and strategies and to engage with others in communities of practice.
>
> <div align="right">(p. 220)</div>

Students would, then, be motivated to pay attention to the feedback they have been given and revise their written assignments if they felt that it had a purpose, which is a notion strengthened by student responses in the questionnaire "I think constructive and positive comments on our assignments are very uplifting" and "The written feedback makes you understand that your teacher really knows what you are doing."

Through a question battery based on Sheen's typology (2011) the students were asked to reflect on what type of feedback they prefer and think helps them the most. They were asked to grade nine statements (similar to the statements given to the teachers in section 3.1 above) with numbers from 1 to 9 where 1 is the most preferred type of feedback and 9 the least preferred type. "I prefer:" (1) the error/s crossed out and replaced with the correct form; (2) an indication of the error with the correct answer and an accompanying explanation at the end of the paper; (3) an indication in the margin without the location of the error or the correct

answer; (4) an indication of the error with a location but *without* the correct answer; (5) an indication of the error with a code, for example "sp" for spelling error; (6) an explanation to the error but without the correct form, for example "what type of tense does the main verb always have in a passive construction?"; (7) when the teacher reformulates the erroneous part so that I get to find and name the errors myself; (8) only a grade; and (9) a reference to suitable literature and exercises. The results can be seen in figure 3.1 below.

**Figure 3.1 Most preferred types of feedback**
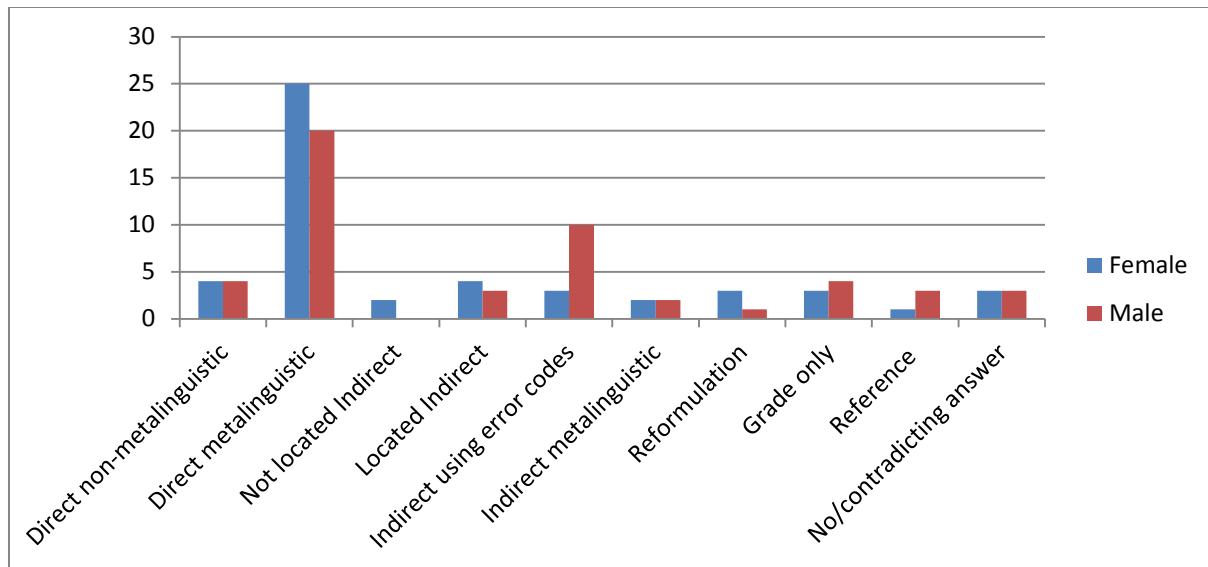


As shown, 45% of the students (20% and 25% of the male and the female students respectively) prefer direct metalinguistic WCF, making it the most preferred type of feedback. This can be put in contrast to the teachers' claims that they are using foremost indirect WCF and we might ask ourselves why the teachers' approaches should be so different from the students' thoughts of what type of feedback works best. Is it because of the teachers' old habits of giving a certain type of feedback, or are the teachers not aware of what the students prefer and think works best for them? Does it have any connection to the teachers' wishes for higher student motivational levels and the factual, perhaps lower, motivational levels in the students? Well, as mentioned before, most students do nothing constructive with the feedback that they receive. This could be an indication that there is a disparity between the teachers' wishes for their students to keep revising their hand-ins post-feedback, and the students' lack of motivation to do so perhaps because they know that the teacher will not review it again, thereby echoing both Ferris' (1999) idea of the less motivated L2 learner and Guenette's (2007) thoughts about her students in the past and their lack of instrumental motivation "They wrote to pass the exam or to please me, but very few were genuinely interested in improving their writing skills, just for the sake of good writing" (p. 52). The idea of indirect feedback, in whatever form it may come, can then only be truly successful if the teacher reviews the students' writing assignments a second time. Only then will the student actually be involved in revising their texts which supposedly will lead to reflection and the probable prospect of

long-term acquisition. Complementing comments made by the students show why some of them prefer e.g. indirect WCF without location of error/s:

> I think it's helpful when the teacher indicates where the error is but lets you correct it yourself. You'll learn better that way and you will remember what you did wrong and will hopefully not make the same error again.
>
> (From student questionnaire, my translation)

or why they prefer errors replaced with the correct form, i.e. direct (metalinguistic/non-metalinguistic) WCF:

> I don't care about correcting errors when they're only indicated, it's too much trouble. I prefer when the error is pointed out and replaced with a suggested more correct form.
>
> (From student questionnaire, my translation)

Looking closer at the students' answers it is shown that 53% of the students prefer direct WCF (including both metalinguistic and non-metalinguistic direct WCF), 26% of the students prefer indirect WCF (including located/non-located error as well as coded indirect WCF), 4% of the students prefer reformulation, 7% only a grade and 4% of the students prefer references to literature for further studies. Note that 6% of the questionnaires lacked/had contradicting results in this particular question and are therefore not represented further.

One thing most students do have in common, despite the fact that 94% of the students claim that there is time for questions and response between them and the teacher, and their various preferences in WCF, is their call for more individual time with the teacher (informal conversation with students). A problem which some of the students in the present study expressed concerned the fact that they sometimes lack the ability to read their teacher's handwriting and understand what the teacher means by a certain expression. Some of the students also feel the need to discuss the error to understand it to the fullest. This is a problem that the teachers seem aware of but feel they can do nothing to change as they have too much work as it is already (informal conversation with a teacher). Time was the number one commodity that the teachers in the present study claimed to lack and might be the reason why they do not let the students revise their hand-ins twice before starting up with new assignments.

Looking at the other end of the spectrum and the types of feedback students prefer least this can be put in contrast.

**Figure 3.2 Least preferred types of feedback**
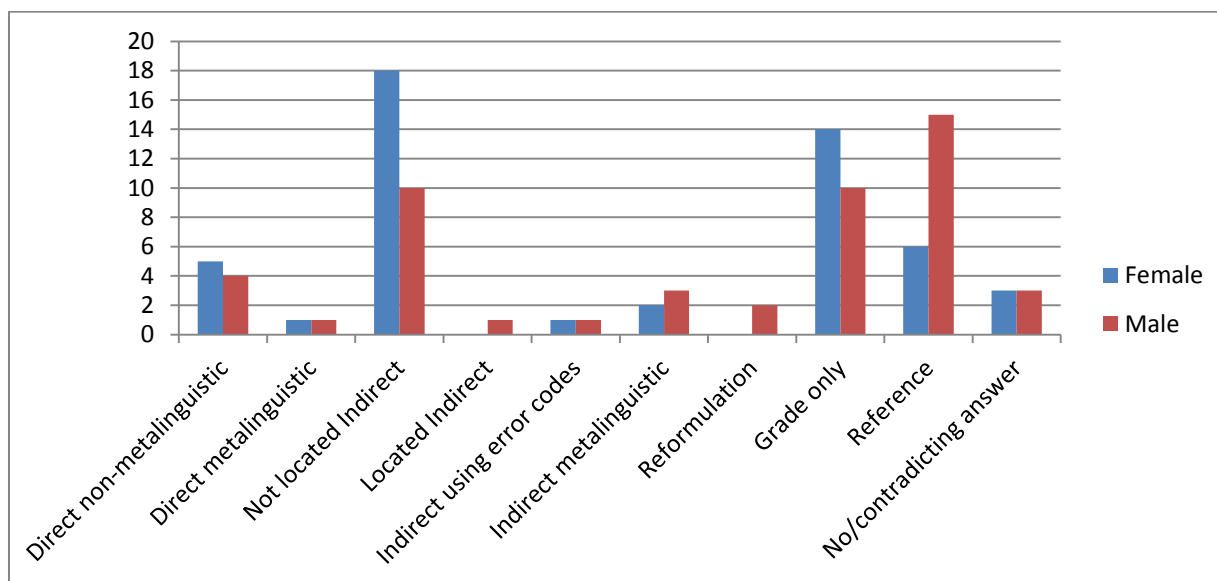


This result shows a wider diversity in the types of feedback as 9% of the students (4% and 5% of the male and the female students respectively) state that the direct non-metalinguistic WCF is the type they prefer least. Only 2% of the students (1% of each sex respectively) state that direct metalinguistic WCF is the type they prefer least (compare this to the 45% that do prefer this type of feedback). 28% of the students (10% and 18% of the male and the female students respectively) state that the least favourable type is the indirect WCF without location of the error/s (compare this to the teachers' statement that they are typical providers of indirect WCF). 1% of the students (male only) state that they prefer the indirect WCF with the error located the least, and 2% of the students (1% of each sex respectively) state that indirect feedback using error codes is the least preferred type of feedback. 5% of the students (3% and 2% of the male and the female students respectively) state that they prefer the indirect metalinguistic WCF the least. 2% of the students (male only) state reformulation to be the least preferred feedback type. 24% of the students (10% and 14% of the male and the female students respectively) state that the least favourable feedback is a grade only and 21% of the students (6% of the female and 15% of the male students) state that the least favourable feedback is a reference to literature for further studies. The two latter options stated in this question are not feedback types per se but are still assumed to likely occur, these two were also the options least preferred by students in general, together with the indirect WCF non-located error.

These are interesting results as the participating teachers report to typically be providing the students with the indirect written corrective feedback, both with an indication that an error has occurred and the location of said error (indirect WCF with located error) or an indication but without location of the error (indirect WCF without location of error) at the same time as the students claim the indirect type to be the least preferable type. Again we might ask ourselves the question "is it because of the teachers' old habits of giving a certain type of feedback?", or "are the teachers not aware of what the students prefer and think works best for them?" Does it have any connection to the teachers' wishes for higher student motivational

levels and the true perhaps lower motivational levels that the students might have? And again, as mentioned before, most students do nothing constructive with the feedback they receive, which then could be seen as an indication that there is a disparity between the teachers' wishes for their students to keep revising their hand-ins post-feedback, and the students' lack of motivation to do so, again thereby, echoing both Ferris' (1999) idea of the less motivated L2 learner and Guenette's (2007) thoughts about her students in the past and their lack of instrumental motivation.

## 3.4    Pedagogical implications

What pedagogical implications can be concluded from this study? Firstly, it should be recognised that feedback can be many things, and that used in a correct way feedback has the strength to lead the students to a long-term acquisition of the second language. Feedback can be seen as a medium for contact with the student (Hyland & Hyland, 2006), it can be seen as an instrument for improving student proficiency (Ferris & Roberts 2001 and Brown 2007, and more), or even as redundant and harmful for language acquisition (Truscott 1996 and Truscott & Hsu 2008). A suggestion, after considering the results of this study, is that feedback also can be seen as a counter-performance on the teacher's behalf, i.e. as a receipt that what the student has worked hard to complete is received by someone and thereby experienced by the student as of any worth. This could be seen as a result of the fact that the stress factor is more and more salient in our society throughout. Thus, if effort and devotion are put into something the sense that it will be received and considered is likely to be craved for. The same request for confirmation would, then, apply to the students as well, a notion supported by a statement presented by Brown (2007), when in his study a student claims that as he/she puts more energy and emotional effort into the work at the level he/she is at (postgraduate level), adding that although it might be selfish, with that expects more from the teacher (p. 44). The Brown study presents the feedback that the participating students "sought at postgraduate level was more than they looked for when undergraduates" (p.44) Brown thereby makes a distinction between the postgraduate students' desires and the desires of i.e. the upper-secondary level students. But desires of postgraduate students to get response from their teachers are not that different to the desires that the upper-secondary level students have, on the contrary, in this respect they seem quite similar. The more effort they put into the work, the more effort they expect from the teacher. Ferris (2004) presents similar thoughts of feedback and the students' attendance to it:

> Students are likely to attend to and appreciate feedback on their errors, and this may motivate them both to make corrections and to work harder on improving their writing. The lack of such feedback may lead to anxiety or resentment, which could decrease motivation and lower confidence in their teachers.

<div align="right">(p. 56)</div>

In Ferris' claim my own thoughts on feedback as a counter-performance is strengthened. What she claims is that feedback is needed for student motivation provided by the teacher attention that is given.

Secondly, according to the SCT, there is an importance of acknowledging learning as part of a two-way communication. Thus, students are not only empty vessels waiting to be filled and teachers are not only mediators of the unknown. If anything they should rather be seen as actors on the communicative field of learning. Feedback given to students, then, has the ability to lift the levels of proficiency when given as a genuine response to the students' work but should at the same time be recognised as a communicative tool.

The teachers in this study all report that they tailor their feedback to suit each student's needs, a result which can be compared to the previously mentioned concept of the ZPD and the Sociocultural Theory. Sheen (2011) explains that according to the SCT "CF needs to be tailored to the developmental needs of individual learners and thus one type of CF that works for one learner might not work for another learner" (p. 29), a statement concurring earlier mentioned studies calling for various approaches (Ferris 2004; Ellis 2009 and Bitchener et al. 2005). According to the SCT, to learn as efficiently as possible, learners need to know when they fail and preferably how they can correct their errors. That is, learners need to be directed forward in their learning, they need someone more proficient in the subject to help them improve by giving feedback (cf. scaffolding in section 2.1) on their accomplishments.

> Students who receive feedback on their written errors will be more likely to selfcorrect them during revision than those who receive no feedback—and this demonstrated uptake may be a necessary step in developing longer term linguistic competence.
>
> Ferris (2004 p. 56)

Again, according to the Sociocultural Theory, humans are social beings who learn through communication. Thus, feedback is of great significance and research should, perhaps, give more attention to factors such as the personal chemistry between the giver and the receiver of feedback, and of the expectations of the teachers and the students, and more. And what is more, how feedback is presented is also significant as it has the ability to construct or deconstruct the teacher-student relationship and can thereby either facilitate or undermine the progress of the second language acquisition (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Thirdly, it is important to be aware of the potential of WCF as a constructive tool and the effect it might bring not only to the student's writing but to the personal and emotional investments made by the student in the writing. According to Hyland and Hyland (2006) students are often committed to what they write and therefore invest emotionally in their assignments and thereby they suggest that the content of the students' writing represent the students' personal views and standpoints. Hyland and Hyland suggest that "unhedged criticism" therefore poses a threat to the self-image of the students, damaging the confidence in the teacher (p. 217). Thus it is not only an instrument to help the student forward but also a social act and an expression of human relationships. The feedback teachers use should perhaps then need to be recognised as a multifaceted instrument which has much greater effect than the effect that simply crossing out one error and replacing it with the correct form has. The way we use feedback is therefore of utter importance.

How teachers use feedback should perhaps be analysed in relation to how the students report that they learn English best. The students in the present study were all asked this question, how they responded is shown in figure 3.3 below.

**Figure 3.3 How students claim they learn English best**
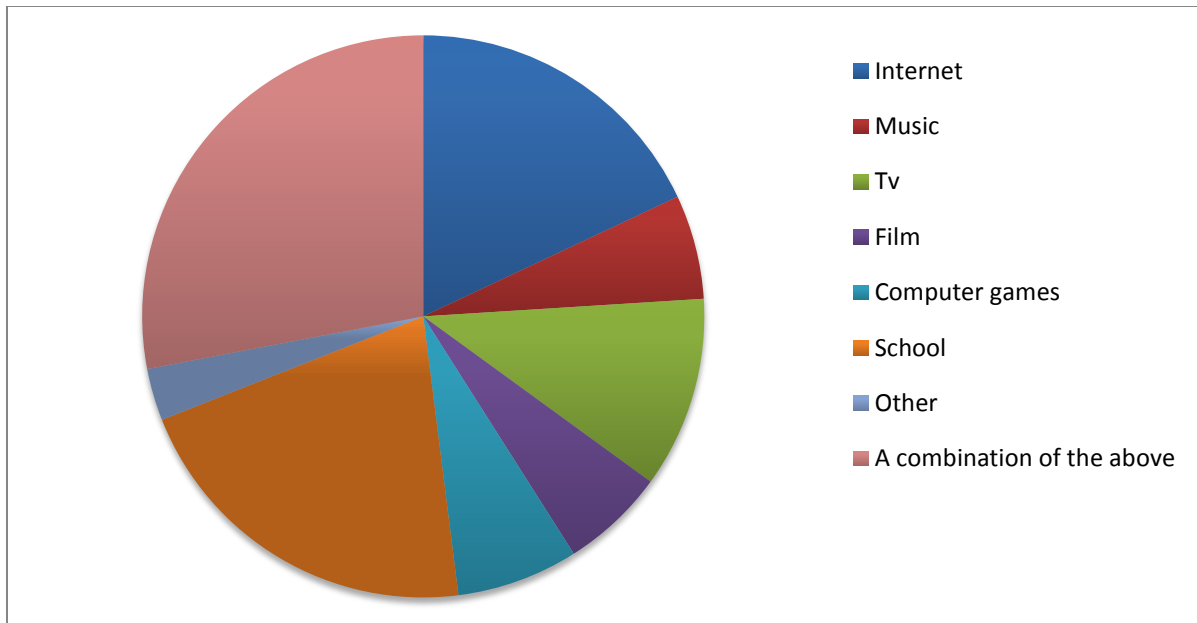


The students were asked which mediator of language learning they prefer and learn best from, a question to which 51% of the students answered their out-of-school activities, e.g. music, film and computer games. What these out-of-school activities have in common are, among many other things, the commitment and interest the students presumably show for the activity, i.e. the students' motivational level and connection to out-of-the-classroom life. 21% of the students singled out school and language studies as the best mediator of language learning, which represents the number one single choice made by the students. According to the participating students school is thereby the single best way to learn another language, but it should also be noticed that 28% of the students think that second language learning is best through a combination of some kind of the above mentioned mediators. From this aspect of the result perhaps a hypothesis can be drawn: "it is the variation and the sense of worth of use of the new language that is important for learners' second language motivation and thereby acquisition."

As stated earlier, most of the students (56%) do nothing with, or only read through, the response they get which is discouraging news for teachers who in general seem to believe that feedback is helpful for students becoming more proficient – and who put great effort and time into it. This can be put in contrast with the Evans et al study (2010) where over 1.000 teachers from different parts of the world were asked how effective WCF was for the students. Many respondents answered in a rather reserved way, despite the fact that most of the participating teachers were practitioners of WCF (92%). The general indication shows that teachers believe WCF to be only "'somewhat' effective in helping students" (p. 64), and a similar result was found to the question of how effectively students apply the WCF they receive to the

succeeding assignments. This shows the teachers' awareness of the fact that students might not be motivated enough to revise or even pay attention to the given feedback. Then again feedback is so much more, it is not only an instrument to help students improve, it is also a receipt for the work that the students put into writing these assignments; it is a tool for communication between the student and the teacher, a notion confirmed by both students and teachers in this study. Hyland and Hyland (2006) state that there is always a risk with giving feedback because of its evaluative nature, they argue that although giving criticism can undermine a student's will, motivation and ability to write, giving praise can be equally dangerous as it reveals the hierarchical imbalance between teachers and students; they suggest that feedback should be given and is given as a personal contact with the individual student as well as an error correction.

As mentioned before, teachers in the present study claim that the feedback process is intricate and complex and that there is not ample time to develop or deepen the explanations that students might need. They also express that other factors are taken into account, such as feedback as a student-teacher channel for communication, their knowledge of affecting events and situations outside the school that the students might experience, the type and size of the assignment, etc. Some of them claim that they do not only look at linguistic errors, but on the assignment as a whole and that they document the student's development as material for assessment and mid-term evaluations. This does not affect the feedback per se but puts it in a context. The fact that the teachers' report feedback to be more than error correcting is highly interesting since it strengthens the previously suggested idea that feedback is a way of communicating, an idea echoing an increasing number of studies with similar perspective (Hyland and Hyland 2006; Hyland, 2010; Goldstein, 2006; Guenette, 2007).

It should lastly be mentioned again that the idea of indirect feedback, in whatever form it may come, can only be truly successful if the teacher reviews the students' writing assignments a second time. Only then will the students actually be involved in revising their texts which supposedly will lead to reflection and the probable prospect of long-term acquisition.


# 4. Summary and Conclusion

Prior to Truscott (1996) it seems no one really questioned the effect of feedback or even dared to conclude that feedback might be of no good. Despite the fact that few studies are conducted in a similar way we have now come further than before.

In this study I have aimed to answer four questions (a) if feedback is used, (b) what type of feedback is given, (c) what the student perspective on feedback is, and (d) what the pedagogical implications for the feedback process are. The present study found many perspectives from which feedback is looked upon; from investigating various aspects such as what form of indirect feedback is to be preferred and if feedback is of any use at all. It has nonetheless found that *feedback is used*. It has reported that *several of types of feedback* are used and also reflected upon *the students' view on feedback as helpful and needed*. The study shows that the teachers participating typically prefer to give indirect WCF whilst the students

participating typically prefer direct feedback. The pedagogical implications of feedback are many; the present study, which investigates feedback through the perspective of the Sociocultural Theory, has strengthened the notion of feedback as a *communicative tool*, thus important to facilitate a higher level of proficiency and as a way for teachers to construct a relationship between themselves and their students.

Despite these results, teachers seem typically not taught how to give feedback, they have to rely on their own common sense and their own experiences from the past. If feedback is to be considered an important tool for improving students proficiency levels in writing, which it is by many teachers and researchers, this study has found, echoing Hyland (2010) that teacher training programmes need to put "Feedback" on the schedule.

Conclusively, Confucius once said "Our greatest glory is not in never falling but in rising every time we fall" (n.d.) which is a beautiful saying well suited for how we might comprehend our learning and the use of feedback. Feedback would then be seen as a constructive part, or as an instrument which can either make the student fall or make her/him rise and make progress.

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Appendix A.

**Framför Dig har Du en enkät om användandet av skriftliga kommentarer i engelskundervisningen.**

### Hur har vi hittat just Dig?

Vi har valt att dela ut denna enkät på ett antal slumpvis utvalda skolor i västra Sverige. Elever i årskurs 1 gy ombeds medverka i undersökningen och vi är tacksam för varje enskilt svar. Uteblivna svar försämrar undersökningen så vi hoppas att Du vill medverka. Observera att enkäten är anonym.

### Vilka är vi som skickat ut enkäten?

Vi är två lärarstudenter vid Göteborgs Universitet, som för närvarande läser kursen Engelska C: Språklig uppsats. Uppsatsen är en av två examensarbeten på Lärarprogrammets avancerade nivå. Vi har valt ämnet skriftliga kommentarer eftersom vi är intresserade av hur stort inflytande de har i engelskundervisning.

### Enkäten

Enkäten innehåller ett antal frågor om användningen av och attityder till skriftliga kommentarer. Det är viktigt att Du svarar uppriktigt - alltså vad Du anser, inte vad Du tror att vi förväntar oss.

### Vad händer med svaren?

Svaren behandlas anonymt. Ingen inom skolledning eller kollegiet kommer att få tillgång till materialet. Resultaten beskrivs endast som siffror och anonymiserade citat.

**Vi som genomför undersökningen kan nås via mail om ni vill ställa frågor om studien.**

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Åsa Lindqvist: guslinase@student.gu.se

# Lycka till och tack för hjälpen!

## Bakgrund

**Fråga 1. Kön**

Man ☐   Kvinna ☐

**Fråga 2. Ålder**........................

**Fråga 3. Hur lär du dig engelska bäst, via:**

Internet ☐   Tv-spel ☐

Musik ☐   Dataspel ☐

Tv ☐   Skolan ☐

Film ☐   Annat:…………………………

## Dina upplevelser av skriftliga kommentarer i engelskundervisningen

**Fråga 4. Vilka är Dina upplevelser av skriftliga kommentarer**

**Får Du kommentarer på dina inlämningar om:**

|  | Vid större inlämningar | Vid mindre inlämningar | Aldrig |
|---|---|---|---|
| Grammatik | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Innehåll | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Betyg | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Struktur | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Ordförråd | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

**Fråga 5. Finns det en tid och plats för Dig att fråga Din lärare om Du inte förstår kommentarerna:**

Ja ☐   Nej ☐

**Fråga 6. Arbete med självreflektion och kamratrespons**

**Arbetar Ni med följande:**

|  | Större | Mindre | Använder ej |
|---|---|---|---|
| Självreflektion | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Kamratrespons | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

**Fråga 7. Efterarbete**

**Vad gör Du med skriftliga kommentarer?**

Ja

Jag får chans att rätta mina fel och lämna in igen ☐

Jag rättar felen utan kontrollering från läraren ☐

Jag läser igenom och tar till mig men rättar inte ☐

Jag gör inget ☐

## Din uppfattning om skriftliga kommentarer i skolan

**Fråga 8. Hur ställer du dig till följande påståenden:**

| | Håller absolut inte med | Håller inte med | Håller med | Håller absolut med |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jag tycker att skriftliga kommentarer hjälper mig att bli bättre på engelska | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag skulle vilja ha fler skriftliga kommentarer | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag förstår inte alltid kommentarerna | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag tycker att skriftliga kommentarer är onödiga | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Kommentar: ...................................................................................................................................
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**Fråga 9. Vilka skriftliga kommentarer enligt Dig fungerar bäst för Dina inlämningar**

**Numrera följande påståenden från 1 till 9, där 1 är den kommentarsform Du föredrar mest.**

Endast det rätta svaret ☐

Markerat fel med en kommentar i slutet med det
rätta svaret ☐

Markering i marginalen utan varken rätt svar
eller hänvisning till var felet är ☐

Markering av var felet finns, men utan rätt
svar ☐

Markering av fel med en kod (t.ex. st för stavning) ☐

Ledtråd till felet, utan markering eller rätt svar
(ex. Vad sätts framför ett substantiv när det nämns för första gången?) ☐

Läraren omformulerar den felaktiga delen och jag själv får namnsätta
och identifiera felen ☐

Endast betyg ☐

Hänvisning till lämplig litteratur och övningar ☐

Kommentar: ......................................................................................................................
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# Ett Varmt Tack för Din medverkan!

Appendix B.

**Framför Dig har Du en enkät om skriftlig feedback i engelskundervisningen.**

### Hur har vi hittat just Dig?

Vi har valt att dela ut denna enkät på ett antal slumpmässigt utvalda högstadie- och gymnasieskolor i västra Sverige. Lärare i engelska ombeds medverka i undersökningen och vi är tacksamma för varje enskilt svar. Uteblivna svar försämrar undersökningen så vi hoppas att Du vill medverka. Observera att enkäten är anonym.

### Vilka är vi som skickat ut enkäten?

Vi är två lärarstudenter vid Göteborgs Universitet, som för närvarande läser kursen Engelska C: Språklig uppsats. Uppsatsen är en av två examensarbeten på Lärarprogrammets avancerade nivå. Vi har valt ämnet skriftliga kommentarer eftersom vi är intresserade av hur stort inflytande skriftliga kommentarer har i engelskundervisningen.

### Enkäten

Enkäten innehåller ett antal frågor om användningen av och attityder till skriftlig respons. Det är angeläget att Du svarar uppriktigt - alltså vad Du anser, inte vad Du tror att vi förväntar oss.

### Vad händer med svaren?

Svaren behandlas anonymt. Ingen inom skolledning eller kollegiet kommer att få tillgång till materialet. Resultaten beskrivs endast som siffror och anonymiserade citat.

**Vi som genomför undersökningen kan nås via mail om ni vill ställa frågor om studien.**

Thérèse Fridolf: gusfridth@student.gu.se
Åsa Lindqvist: guslinase@student.gu.se

# Lycka till och tack för hjälpen!

Observera att undersökningen endast gäller skriftlig feedback, som ges till elever vid skriftliga inlämningar, det vill säga inte prov eller muntliga framställningar.

**Bakgrund**

**Fråga 1. Kön**

Man ☐          Kvinna ☐

**Fråga 2. Ålder**

-30 ☐     31-40 ☐     41-50 ☐     51-60 ☐     61- ☐

**Fråga 3. När börjande Du arbeta som lärare** (vilket år eller hur länge sen): ......................................
....................

**Fråga 4. I vilka ämnen har Du behörighet att undervisa i**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Idrott | ☐ | Samhäll | ☐ |
| Geografi | ☐ | Historia | ☐ |
| Matematik | ☐ | Religion | ☐ |
| Svenska | ☐ | Engelska | ☐ |
| Fysik | ☐ | Kemi | ☐ |
| Biologi | ☐ | Teknik | ☐ |
| Bild | ☐ | Slöjd | ☐ |
| Musik | ☐ | Dramapedagog | ☐ |
| Moderna språk | ☐ | Hemkunskap | ☐ |
| Svenska som andraspråk | ☐ | Annat:............................ | |

## Feedback i skolan

**Fråga 5. Ditt användande av skriftlig feedback i engelskundervisningen**

**Kommenterar Du följande vid skriftlig respons:**

| | Ja | Nej |
|---|---|---|
| Grammatik | ☐ | ☐ |
| Innehåll | ☐ | ☐ |
| Struktur | ☐ | ☐ |
| Vokabulär | ☐ | ☐ |

Annat:…………………………………..

**Fråga 6. Ditt användande av skriftlig feedback i engelskundervisningen**

**Hur kommenterar Du *grammatiska* felaktigheter?**

| | Större inlämningar | Mindre inlämningar | Använder ej |
|---|---|---|---|
| Jag ger endast det rätta svaret | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag markerar felet och ger en kommentar i slutet med det rätta svaret | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag gör en markering i marginalen men ger varken rätt svar eller visar var felet är | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag markerar endast var felet finns, men ger inte det rätta svaret | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag markerar felet med en kod (t.ex. st för stavning) | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag ger en ledtråd till felet, utan markering eller rätt svar (ex. Vad sätts framför ett substantiv när det nämns för första gången?) | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag omformulerar den felaktiga delen och låter eleven själv namnsätta och identifiera felen | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag sätter betyg | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag hänvisar till lämplig litteratur och övningar | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Kommentar: ..........................................................................................................................
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**Fråga 7. Ditt användande av skriftlig feedback i engelskundervisningen**

**Hur kommenterar Du *innehållsliga* felaktigheter?**
(uppgiftstrogenhet/faktatrogenhet):

| | Större inlämningar | Mindre inlämningar | Använder ej |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kodning (t.ex. "…" för citat) | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Kommentar | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Betyg | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Hänvisning till fördjupning | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

**Fråga 8. Ditt användande av skriftlig feedback i engelskundervisningen**

**Hur kommenterar Du *strukturella* felaktigheter?**

(layout och disposition)

| | Större inlämningar | Mindre inlämningar | Använder ej |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kodning (t.ex. mb för meningsbyggnad) | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Kommentar | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Betyg | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Hänvisning till fördjupning | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

**Fråga 9. Ditt användande av skriftlig feedback i engelskundervisningen**

**Hur kommenterar Du *ordförrådsfelaktigheter*?**
(ordval)

| | Större inlämningar | Mindre inlämningar | Använder ej |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kodning (vok för vokabulär) | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Kommentar | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Betyg | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Hänvisning till fördjupning | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

**Fråga 10. Ditt fokus vid feedback i engelskundervisningen**

**På vilket sätt ger Du skriftlig feedback?**

| | Ja | Nej |
|---|---|---|
| Jag kommenterar enbart en viss feltyp (t.ex. kongruens) | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag kommenterar alla feltyper men inte alla fel | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag kommenterar alla feltyper och samtliga fel | ☐ | ☐ |

Annat:…………………………………..

**Fråga 11. inverkan på skriftlig feedback i engelskundervisningen**

**Vilka faktor skulle Du säga påverkar mängden skriftlig feedback som Du ger?**

|  | Ja | Nej |
|---|---|---|
| Tid att tillgå | ☐ | ☐ |
| Typ av uppgift | ☐ | ☐ |
| Storlek på uppgift | ☐ | ☐ |
| Ålder på elev | ☐ | ☐ |
| Kön på elev | ☐ | ☐ |
| Personlig relation till eleven | ☐ | ☐ |
| Vetskap om faktorer som påverkar elevens prestation | ☐ | ☐ |

Annat:………………………………..

**Fråga 12. I vilket syfte använder Du feedback?**

|  | Ja |
|---|---|
| Som personlig kontakt | ☐ |
| För att uppmärksamma elevens svagheter | ☐ |
| För att stärka eleven | ☐ |
| För att få undervisningsunderlag | ☐ |

Annat:…………………………………………..

**Fråga 13. Annan form av feedback**

**Arbetar Dina elever med följande:**

|  | Större inlämningar | Mindre inlämningar | Använder ej |
|---|---|---|---|
| Självreflektion | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Kamratrespons | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

**Fråga 14. Använder Du någon annan form av feedback**

| | Större inlämningar | Mindre inlämningar | Använder ej |
|---|---|---|---|
| Muntlig feedback | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Muntlig kombinerat med skriftlig feedback | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Annat:……………………………

**Fråga 15. Efterarbete**

**Hur arbetar Du vidare med feedbacken?**

| | Ja |
|---|---|
| Undervisningsunderlag | ☐ |
| Provunderlag | ☐ |
| Underlag för utvecklingssamtal | ☐ |
| | |
| Inget | ☐ |

Annat………………………………..

**Fråga 16. Egen kommentar om hur Du arbetar med skriftlig**

Beskriv med egna ord hur Du använder skriftlig feedback i undervisning

Kommentar: ........................................................................................................................
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## Din uppfattning om feedback i skola

**Fråga 16. Hur ställer Du Dig till följande påståenden:**

|  | Håller absolut inte med | Håller inte med | Håller med | Håller absolut med |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jag tycker att skriftlig feedback underlättar min undervisning | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag skulle vilja arbeta mer med skriftlig feedback | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Det finns resurser att arbeta med skriftlig feedback på min skola | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag har tillräcklig kunskap om skriftlig feedback idag | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag tycker skriftlig feedback kräver för mycket tid | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag känner mig osäker på mina kunskaper om skriftlig feedback | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Jag tycker att skriftlig feedback hjälper till att höja elevernas studiemotivation | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Kommentar: ..................................................................................................................................
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Vi är medvetna om att det har tagit tid för Dig att svara på våra frågor. Du har kanske också tyckt att några av dem varit besvärliga att svara på. Vi är därför tacksamma för att få Dina synpunkter på formulärets och frågornas utformning

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# Ett Varmt Tack för Din medverkan!