Active and Transformational Engagement with Writing Feedback: Using Reflection as a Tool to Access Literary Disciplinary Knowledge

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Abstract
This article explores ways of encouraging student engagement with feedback on literature essays. In addition to standard practice of student-centred peer review coupled with feedback from teachers, we have developed a scaffolded pair of reflection tasks on an introductory-level English literature course. With a focus on our two-step model for student self-reflection, this article highlights some challenges in encouraging active and transformational student engagement with feedback they receive from their peers as well as from their teacher. Based on a study of 243 student reflections submitted during an introductory-level English literature module at a Swedish university from 2018 to 2019, we propose that scaffolding students' reflection practices is beneficent not only for their individual development as writers of academic texts, but also for their ability to address and engage with comments from peers and teachers.

Keywords: Student reflection, peer review, feedback, written proficiency, literary analysis

1. Introduction

How can disciplinary skills such as the ability to read, think, and write like literary scholars be taught in an undergraduate context? In recent years, scholarship in literature pedagogy which emphasises the importance of familiarising students with relevant disciplinary knowledge has been gaining ground (Wolfe & Wilder 2016; Corrigan 2017; Heinert & Chick 2017). Building on an interdisciplinary body of knowledge, this approach

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aims at demystifying the processes behind literary analysis and the development of teaching practices in order to make explicit rules of thinking and writing about literature. Furnishing students' written work with feedback gives teachers the opportunity to 'make the tacit expectations of a discipline explicit' (Van Heerden, Clarence & Bharuthram 2017: 967). A crucial tool for enabling an understanding of these tacit expectations of the literary discourse community is the feedback that teachers provide. Equally important is that students reflect on and interact with the formative feedback that they receive. Students' reluctance, or inability, to engage with feedback effectively means that the gap between what teachers expect from students' writing, and how they perform, is not bridged (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick 2006: 207). Building on these observations, we see understanding of and engagement with feedback as a vital transferable skill that students need to practise in order to develop as writers of academic texts.

Across our literary studies and academic writing courses, we have found that in providing feedback teachers must 'walk a fine line between being language editors and facilitating students' ongoing learning and development' (Van Heerden, Clarence & Bharuthram 2017: 974). In this article, we present and discuss a model for encouraging students to actively engage with the feedback they receive from peers and teachers on literary essays and we especially highlight the challenges that we as teachers face in encouraging active and transformational engagement with such feedback. The course on which this study is based is an introductory-level English survey module which was substantially redeveloped in the spring of 2018. The 7.5 credit module is part of a semester-long 30–credit general English course offered by a university in Sweden.

Since we have recognised a lack of student engagement with feedback, together with colleagues, we have explored ways of enhancing students' engagement with their writing. When our first-term literature course went through a substantial overhaul, the changes introduced in the writing component of that course thus formed part of an ongoing development strategy to create a *writing across the curriculum* programme (Bazerman et al. 2005; Bean 2011) intended to improve students' writing and analytical skills, as well as to create a line of progression throughout the various levels of study (Manninen & Wadsö Lecaros 2014). There is a shared focus on pedagogical and methodological considerations concerning process writing and formative assessment in the literature

course (which we define as targeting academic writing from a *writing-in-the-discipline* perspective) and a generic course in academic writing which runs concurrently with the literature course. The backbone of the team-taught first term literature course is a series of lectures which covers a variety of primary texts and theoretical and contextual frameworks for reading, analysing, and writing about literary texts. Each lecture is accompanied by a student-led discussion workshop, which is followed by a teacher-led seminar discussion. The assessment for the course consists of several components: active participation, two essays (750 words and 1,250 words, respectively), and a final exam. The two essays are submitted half-way through the course and at the end of the course, respectively.

This action research article presents a model we have developed for feedback practices on student writing, which we have implemented in a first-term course in English literature. In addition to the practice of student-centred peer review coupled with feedback from teachers, we have introduced a scaffolded series of reflection tasks which students are required to complete and submit with their essays. These tasks are consistent with our teaching philosophy which seeks to nurture learners' autonomy. We discuss the model based on 243 student reflections produced as part of this course in 2018–2019, in which students described how they used peer and teacher feedback.[1] In other words, the reflective texts are at the heart of our pedagogical strategy and they comprise our research data. Our analysis seeks to explore key trends that emerge across students' reflective texts in terms of what the task has meant for the engagement with feedback. By sharing our results from this practice-based study, we hope to contribute to the broader discussion on developing disciplinary knowledge in literary studies in higher education.

2. Some pedagogical underpinnings

Below, we outline some of the pedagogical premises that have informed the ways in which we have designed the literature course and that, in turn, serve to clarify our pedagogical reasoning with regard to writing in the discipline, reflection and feedback. As the course involves lectures on writing in the discipline (and is complemented by a parallel course on

[1] The data in this article has been collected and processed in such a way as to ensure respect for data protection and privacy in accord with EU General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

academic writing), the pedagogical principle guiding our teaching is that students learn via explicit approaches as well as via implicit approaches. In lectures, students are told what counts as accurate writing in the discipline as means of explicit teaching. Implicitly, however, students are shown examples of previous literary essays and given opportunities to write drafts on which they receive feedback (Ivanic 2004: 230).

Our definition of 'feedback' refers to the information that is given to students on their performance and that is intended to guide their future activities and/or behaviour (Ambrose et al. 2010: 125). This explanation is based on Ramaprasad's (1983) seminal definition in which feedback is described as 'information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way' (4). In our literature module, students receive feedback on the two essays that they submit and they are graded on both. Thus, the feedback they receive is both summative and formative and directly linked to practice. Additionally, the feedback given is based on grading criteria (which students have prior access to) that in turn are based on the learning outcomes for the course. The use of grading criteria allows teachers to communicate information such as *what* students are or are not understanding, *where* their performance needs to improve or is on target, and *how* they should proceed (Ambrose et al. 2010: 137). Hence, the grading criteria help teachers assess student performance, which, in turn, shapes feedback to be targeted and precise so that students are guided in their future practices.

As feedback and practice need to be closely linked in order to facilitate opportunities for learning to take place, it is important that the feedback students receive on the first essay they submit is timed appropriately in relation to their embarking on the second essay. Research on feedback suggests that it has the greatest potential to affect learning when delivered in a timely manner (Mathan & Koedinger 2005). We would argue that students are particularly susceptible to feedback on their first essay as they are beginning to consider their second essay, and that receiving feedback at this time encourages them to take a deeper approach to their learning and to their mastering of skills associated with academic writing and writing in the discipline of English literature. As accurate as this argument may be in theory, however, the reality is that students, to a great extent, do not engage with feedback. Our own experiences are corroborated by several studies that show how students tend to view formative feedback as

an end-product rather than as part of an on-going learning process that is crucial to their development. Gibbs and Simpson (2004) show that a majority of students seem to skim-read written feedback, and Hounsell (2007) reports that students tend not to even collect the feedback that is left for them. In Bevan et al. (2008), almost 30 percent of students admit to having forgotten the feedback they received before embarking on the next phase of their course work. The list of studies in which students are reported to not engage with feedback is long. The crucial questions, then, are *why* students fail to take an active part in a process that could potentially be very favourable to their learning (and which they often want more of) and *how* and *when* teachers can get students more involved with formative feedback as a way of diminishing the gap between where they are and where they want to be.

Nicol (2010) stresses the importance of regarding feedback as a two-way process which presupposes students' active participation. From Nicol's perspective, feedback forms part of students' construction of their own knowledge, and he encourages teachers and departments to design feedback so that it becomes part of a dialogical process. Such design, inevitably, requires a great deal of instruction, as students often are confused about their roles in a potential dialogue. They need guidance on how to deal with the feedback they receive (Blair et al. 2013), and they also need a certain degree of scaffolding with regard to the process of responding to feedback. The arrangement of self-reflections on peer reviews and on teacher feedback can form part of such scaffolding.

Studies show that students often regard the feedback they get from their peers as easier to understand than the feedback they receive from teachers (Topping 1998; Falchikov 2005). Additionally, peer reviews allow for more feedback and broader perspectives, which stimulates a comprehensive take on the draft work that students present. Real learning insights into writing in the disciplines, however, seem to be more extensively gained by giving feedback rather than receiving it. Cho and MacArthur (2010) and Cho and Cho (2011) show that when peer reviewing, students take on the role of critical readers and by so doing, they develop an understanding of how texts can be received. Additionally, students develop cognitive skills that have to do with analysing texts, identifying textual problems and constructively suggesting improvements or solutions. The studies above also suggest that students learn more about writing in the discipline when having to identify and explain what

characteristics of their peers' work are strong or weak. The concept of 'learning by teaching' comes into play through these types of explanations, and in fact Roscoe and Chi (2008) refer to it as the 'tutor learning effect', i.e. that students learn more about producing accurate texts by having to identify and explain strong and weak points in the texts of their peers.

The success of peer reviews is very much dependent on student formations, however, and on whether or not students have the maturity and sense of responsibility to work independently and to take on the role of critical friend. Bente Mosgaard Jørgensen (2019) employs social theory on human action to decipher student engagement with feedback and suggests that engagement with feedback and especially engagement with peer feedback is a social practice that requires a great deal of social competence. Teachers may underestimate the performative aspect of peer reviews and might leave students unwilling to act in the role of teacher. Hence, students cannot be expected to understand what a peer review entails without instruction or a script as to how it should be carried out. Students need to be provided with specific details of aspects they should focus on relating to essay contents, presentation and how the essay meets the requirements set out in the grading criteria. Additionally, the logistics of when and where the peer review should take place should be provided by the teacher, at least when students are in their first term of university studies and may have no previous experience of engaging in this type of teaching and learning activity.

Reflection as pedagogical practice plays a key role in teaching and learning in higher education. Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) describe reflection as an 'important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull over and evaluate it. It is this working with experience that is important in learning' (19). The authors proceed to define reflection as a 'form of response of the learner to experience' (18). Indeed, reflection allows students to take time to consider their own development as well as the various perspectives offered to them on their performance. Apart from forming a key element in their learning, reflection also allows students some insight into their own academic identity. Discussing their own performance in relation to grading criteria with other students and negotiating interpretations of text facilitates their development into becoming literary scholars, which, in turn, captures the essential idea of writing in the disciplines.

With the introduction of written reflections, students develop their learning from several perspectives. By reflecting on their own writing about literature, they consolidate and deepen their understanding of the genre of literary studies and by having to critically assess others' writing as well as their own, they start scratching the surface of what it entails to think and write about literature. Hence, writing is used on various levels to develop disciplinary learning and to foster reflection. The writing of reflections provides students with the opportunity to take a step back from the learning experience and to analyse the task at hand from a distance. This type of distancing may focus students' attention and help them distinguish the important learning components from the less important ones (Boud, Keogh & Walker 1985).

The reflection component involves the development of meta-cognitive skills that allow students to become actively involved in their own learning process. The reflection forces them to assess the task at hand and to evaluate their own knowledge and skills and it encourages them to consider what strategies to adopt in future ventures. Additionally, written reflections foster creativity and strengthen students' abilities to critically assess their own performances; it helps them become self-directed learners. In effect, reflections serve as tools not only for learning the skills of the discipline, but also for developing generic competencies through which students understand how to manage their learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick 2006).

3. Method

3.1 The writing component on the course

In this present study, we focus on the writing component of the first term literature course. As previously stated, students are required to write two essays which contribute to their overall grade for the course. In each essay, students write on one of the literary texts and one of the theoretical frameworks covered on the course, developing their own essay topic and title. The essays are weighted, respectively, at 20% and 30% of the overall score for the course. As well as covering the relevant texts and theories in the lectures, workshops and seminars, prior to embarking on the first essay, students also attend a lecture and subsequent workshop and seminar which explore how to write within the discipline of literature. This lecture covers issues such as how to compose a literary analysis and some of the core conventions of writing within literary studies through exploring

examples from writing samples. This lecture has been developed to supplement the general academic writing course, adding concepts like *textual evidence* and *close reading* to the more generic writing skills highlighted there. In the accompanying workshop and seminar, students critique a sample first-term literature essay and begin the process of developing their own first essay.

When students have produced a draft of the first essay, they send this draft to their peer group (a small group of 3–4 students) and then meet to provide one another with peer feedback. They are then expected to consider the feedback they receive from their peers when finalising their essay. The instructions for this peer review activity specify that students are to comment on some central issues in their peers' drafts, such as whether the draft contains a clear thesis statement, and whether the proposed essay structure works and the argument is clear throughout the draft. Peer reviewers are also instructed to comment on the use of textual evidence from the primary text and on the use of a theoretical concept drawn from the textbook used on the course. Finally, they are asked to comment on the essay draft's main strengths and where there might be room for improvement.

Though there is no such formal peer review activity scheduled in relation to the second essay, students are expected to build on both peer and instructor feedback from essay one in composing their second essay. Asking students to compose two essays on the course—one to be completed half-way through the course, and the other one at the end of the course—the course thus aims to instil a process-oriented approach to writing. This is also evident in the set-up of the reflection assignments in which students are first to comment on peer feedback on a draft version and thereafter on teacher feedback on a final version.

Alongside the two essays, students are required to submit short paragraphs where they reflect on the feedback that they have received. On essay one, this reflective text (100–200 words) addresses the way in which students have developed their essay based on the peer feedback they received, and is designed to encourage them to engage actively with peer feedback and to meta-cognitively evaluate their own writing process. This first reflective task is situated approximately at the mid-point of the course at a stage when they have drafted their first essay, received peer feedback, and are submitting a final draft of the first essay for teacher assessment. In the reflective task for essay two (200–300 words), the focus is on the way

in which they made use of the teacher feedback they received on the first essay in writing their second essay. This reflection is submitted alongside their second essay at the end of the course.

It should be mentioned here that the teachers involved in the marking and assessment of the essays made use of a jointly developed set of comments directly connected to the assessment criteria for the essays. To assure fair assessment, an essay moderation procedure was implemented whereby teachers involved in essay marking also compared notes on randomly selected essays marked by both of them.

The instructions for the two self-reflection texts were intentionally broad to avoid leading questions, although students were instructed to be as specific as possible when considering how they engaged with the received feedback. Students wrote their short reflections before handing in their essays, and the reflections were submitted at the end of the essay documents. Instructions made it clear that the self-reflections formed an obligatory part of the essay submissions, but also that the self-reflections were not included in the assessment of the essays.

3.2 Methodological approach

As has been stated, the overarching goal of the self-reflection component in the literature module is to encourage first-term students' engagement with feedback to help them identify ways of developing their writing and their analytical skills. Therefore, in order to explore key trends in student reflections, our approach in this study was predominantly constructivist, with the assumption 'that social reality is constructed by the [participating] individuals' (Gall, Gall & Borg 1996: 19). Attendant with this premise is the emphasis on the contextual and non-universal nature of data (Willis 2007: 95). Such an approach recognises that 'all knowledge' is necessarily 'contingent upon human practices' and is 'constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context' (Crotty 1998: 42).

The reflective texts that form the core of this current project were produced as part of what we recognised as a dialogue between student and teacher and thus are fundamentally products of a social exchange. Furthermore, according to Creswell, the aim of constructivist research is 'to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied' (Creswell 2003: 8). In the case of our study, the emphasis was on participants' experiences of both peer and teacher feedback. Thus,

our research is highly contextualised and the product of a specific set of students, taking a particular course at particular times.

3.3 Sample and data collection

The sample for this present study consists of reflections submitted by students who took the literature course between the spring of 2018 and the autumn of 2019. Students produced two essays, and thus two reflective texts each. The self-reflections, which were submitted together with the essays, were short; the first self-reflection assignment 100–200 words, and the second one 200–300 words.

From a total of 138 students, 243 responses (132 first reflections and 111 second reflections) were collected. The partial dropout can be explained by three factors: a few students did not hand in a reflection with their first essay; a small number of students who produced the first essay and reflective text did not go on to write the second essay; and some students who failed to submit their first reflection, submitted the second one.

The reflective texts were collated at the end of the course, after the assessment process had taken place. Texts were extracted from essays and placed in an Excel document for analysis, with the reflections from the first and second essay paired (reflection one and two for each respective case were placed side by side) for ease of comparison. At this stage, the texts were anonymised with each case being allocated a number.

3.4 Data analysis

In line with its overall interpretivist strategy, this project employed a qualitative approach to data analysis. Qualitative content analysis can be defined as ‘a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns’ (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1278). Content analysis is compatible with our overall theoretical framework and philosophical assumptions in that it presupposes that texts are highly dependent on context and that they ‘have no objective reader-independent qualities’ but instead ‘have multiple meanings and can sustain multiple readings and interpretations’ (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007: 573). Though it recognises texts as complex social constructions, the method afforded by content analysis allows for an analysis of data that is

'divorceable from the personal authority of the researcher' (Krippendorff 2019: 24). As practitioner researchers, such issues of replicability and reliability are of particular importance to us.

The process of analysing and interrogating data can be both deductive through the use of 'pre-existing categories' generated from theory, and inductive, through the discovery of 'emergent themes in order to generate … a theory' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007: 573). Our approach rested at the more inductive end of the scale utilising a conventional content analysis approach. Our goal was to allow the categories to emerge from the data itself rather than to superimpose a pre-existing theoretical framework on the reflective texts. In order to achieve our aim of describing the phenomenon of how students use feedback, we used a method defined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) as summative content analysis. Consistent with such an approach, our process (which is described below) had the goal of 'identifying and quantifying certain words or content in text with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of the words or content' (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1283). This method allowed us to move beyond a purely quantitative analysis of the reflections (i.e., one that merely counted words), to a deeper analysis of the emergent themes in context. This process is termed latent content analysis and allowed us as researchers to 'immerse [ourselves] to some extent in the data in order to identify hidden meanings in the text' (Bengtsson 2016: 12).

In order to facilitate the analysis of the reflective texts, we made use of the computer software package NVivo, which can be used in the analysis of qualitative data. Our process of analysis consisted of three steps. Once the research data, comprising of 243 student reflections, had been imported to NVivo, word frequency queries were run for each of the two datasets (the first reflective texts exploring peer feedback, and the second set of texts exploring teacher feedback). Rather than simply running a basic query to identify the frequency of exact words, we instead searched for clusters of words which centred around certain key concepts. For this, we selected an NVivo function that searches for exact matches along with words with the same stem, synonyms, and specializations. NVivo defines specializations as 'words with a more specialized meaning—a "type of"' (QSR international n.d.). For instance, under the concept of *writing,* specific types of writing such as *story, thesis,* and *book* might be included. The second step of the analysis process was to use NVivo's autocoding process in order to substantiate findings from the first

step of the analysis process, and enable us to better identify key themes to explore through qualitative means. The autocoding tool provided by NVivo enables the detection of key themes in a dataset through finding frequently occurring noun phrases and filtering these to determine those with most relevance. The final stage in our process was to then use these key themes and concepts to qualitatively analyse the texts, drawing out particular examples to explore in greater depth.

3.5 Ethical considerations

All three researchers involved in this project were teachers on the course in question, and whilst this means that we have a level of insight into the specific context of the course that could not easily be achieved by an outsider, as practitioner researchers (Hanson 2013; Trowler 2019), we are aware of potential conflicts of interest when it comes to 'conducting research in [one's] own backyard' (Malone 2003: 800). Concurrently, we were also alert to the fact that we may be more predisposed to confirmation bias due to our closeness to the project (Masnick & Zimmerman 2009). In the interests of transparency, it is important for us to state that, based on previous research, we believed that by exposing students to the reflective process as part of receiving peer and teacher feedback students would be affected positively, and thus we were attentive to treat the data analysis process as objectively as possible. In order to limit the negative effects of potential power asymmetries, both for the students and for the study itself, only reflective texts from past student cohorts were included in the analysis. Texts were collected after assessment had taken place. On the whole, we have explored general trends in the data, at times exemplified by using quotes from student texts. Texts were anonymised prior to analysis, and no sensitive or identifying data were used in the text examples provided.

4. Results

In analysing the data we obtained from the reflective texts produced by students on both peer and teacher feedback, a number of interesting findings emerged. In this section, we outline three of these findings, which concern 1), peer feedback as distinctive from teacher feedback in that it is seen as a collaborative and mutually beneficial process; 2), reflective texts on both peer and teacher feedback which show substantial evidence of

higher-order cognitive processes in action; and 3), reflection on feedback that encourages action.

4.1 Key finding 1: Peer feedback as a mutually beneficial process

Through exploring word frequency in the first set of students' reflections (on their experience of the peer review assignment), we found that the kinds of words that appeared most consistently in this set of reflections centred around positive notions of communication and collaboration (see Figure 1). Words such as *helped*, *communicating*, *positive*, *give* and *take* all appear relatively frequently in the reflective texts and are indicative, we believe, of a generally positive perception of peer feedback in which students feel they can symbiotically work together in their writing journeys. This suggests that one function that reflecting on peer feedback might serve is to assist in fostering a positive attitude to both the giving and receiving of feedback, and also to facilitate an environment in which students are more receptive to receiving and responding to more critical components of feedback received. The kinds of words listed above do not appear nearly so frequently in the second set of reflections (see Figure 2), which focused on teacher feedback, suggesting that there is something fundamentally different about how students perceive the two kinds of feedback practice.

This finding is supported with evidence from the autocoding of reflective texts, as well as through our qualitative analysis of the texts. One student remarked that the peer review process was 'rewarding,' 'challenging' and that 'peer groups are of necessity' during the writing process, whereas another student commented upon the collaborative nature of their peer group: 'our group worked more from a you-can-do-it perspective, meaning that we encouraged each other to do our best'. We also found that students frequently remarked upon the way in which peer reviewing enabled them to see their own essay from a fresh perspective and from 'an exterior point of view,' as one student put it. Other students wrote that peer review 'helps open your eyes to your own text' and commented on the 'challenge' of getting involved in the work of others so as 'to see their views and perspectives'. Furthermore, and in line with findings in previous research (Lundstrom & Baker 2009), several students commented that the greatest benefits to be found in the peer review process were those related to the giving of feedback:

giving peer review feedback to someone else really helped me to re-evaluate my own work as it was possible to apply the comments I left on my classmate's essay on my own essay. Reading someone else's work helped me see the flaws in my own and made me think from different perspectives.

Figure 1. Word cloud illustrating word frequency in reflections on peer feedback

Figure 2. Word cloud illustrating word frequency in reflections on teacher feedback

4.2 Key finding 2: Reflection and evidence of higher-order cognitive processes

Another cluster of words which appears with regularity in the reflections on receiving peer feedback hint at the development of higher-order thinking competencies of the variety presented towards the top of the hierarchy in Bloom's taxonomy. In the word frequency cloud presented in Figure 1, we saw that reflections tended to use verbs associated with the three higher-order cognitive processes mapped out in the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy published as *A Taxonomy for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Analysis, Evaluation, and Creation* (Anderson, Krathwohl & Bloom 2001). In ascending order, the three top tiers of the taxonomy are categories concerning *analysis, evaluation,* and *creation.* As the word frequency analysis of the reflections on peer feedback show, all three of these categories are represented to some degree.

The reflection on the cognitive process of analysis which involves 'break[ing] material into its constituent parts and determin[ing]' relations between parts of the whole (Anderson, Krathwohl & Bloom 2001: 31) is apparent through the use of words such as *whole* (and related words such as *bridge, build, complex, connection, construction,* and *integrate*) which appear in the first set of reflections. Though references to the concept of *whole* do not feature at the very top of the word frequency list, it still has a significant count of 428 appearances in this first set of reflections. In the second set of reflections, which instead focused on teacher feedback, the word *whole* (and its related words) sits in a similar position with 479 appearances. Given that we had a 12% drop in submissions between the two sets of reflections, this implies a slightly greater count of this particular concept in reflection two. Nevertheless, the results obtained from the word frequency analysis thus point to remarkably similar results between the two sets of reflective texts in terms of signals that relate to the cognitive process of analysis. These findings were substantiated by our manual qualitative analysis which found frequent references to integrating literary concepts into arguments, and connecting these with evidence from the primary texts. It should also be remarked upon that some mentions of *integration* may have been misleading as on several occasions it was found that students used this word to refer to the more formal (rather than analytic) process of correctly configuring quoted material. This was especially the case in the reflections on teacher feedback and this may have been due to the fact that we explicitly used the word *integrate* when

discussing how to format direct quotations. This serves as another reminder to us of the inherent limitations of relying too heavily on word frequencies generated through NVivo.

When it comes to cognitive processes related to evaluative competencies, analysis of the two sets of reflections in terms of word frequency also point to some interesting findings. According to the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy, this category is concerned with 'mak[ing] judgements based on criteria and standards' (Anderson, Krathwohl & Bloom 2001: 31). The taxonomy category can be broken into two component parts, 'checking' and 'critiquing'. In the first set of reflections on the peer review feedback, there are a considerable number of words which could be connected to this category in the taxonomy and which appear with relatively high frequency. For instance, the word *evaluate,* along with related words such as *assessment, challenge, compliment, critical, critique, develop, evaluate, evaluations, examine, rethink, review,* and *value* appears in twentieth place in the word frequency rankings with 640 instances. Our manual analysis of the reflections on peer feedback supported this, with students commenting on, for instance, the highly valued role that peer comments played in evaluating and re-evaluating their own work. Particularly interesting here is that this evaluation process was often linked to the process of giving feedback (as we discuss in relation to the first finding above). In the reflections on teacher feedback, *evaluate* (and related words), is some twenty places behind in the word frequency ranking, but still features over 500 times. Typical of the reflections on teacher feedback that pertained to evaluative competencies were those that hinted that this process allowed them to take "a more critical view" of their own writing.

We also saw evidence of the use of the top tier cognitive process in the revised Bloom's taxonomy which centre around skills involving creative capacities such as those concerned with 'generating', 'planning', and 'producing' (Anderson, Krathwohl & Bloom 2001: 31). Ultimately, our goal was to specifically encourage these competencies, and the evidence from the reflective texts would suggest that we have been largely successful in doing so. In the peer reflections, *change* (and related words such as *adapt, adjust, align, alter, develop, enhance, fix, improve, progress, reconstruct, rectify, remedy, strengthen, substantiate,* and *utilize*) appears as the eleventh most frequently occurring cluster of words, with 679 appearances. In the manual analysis, we saw that many students

explicitly remarked upon how the process had enabled them to plan for 'next time'. The figure for a similar cluster of words centred on *change* on the second set of essays was even greater, with 1,432 instances putting it sixth in the rankings. The word *plan* also appears in a number of reflective texts, although with lower frequencies. This was supported by a closer examination of the second set of reflections where we found that students frequently mentioned how the knowledge that they had gained here would be useful in other writing contexts beyond the literature course.

4.3 Key finding 3: Timing of feedback, relevance, and action

In accordance with our aforementioned hypothesis that students would be most receptive to feedback in relation to their first essay as they could use that in writing their second essay, the first set of student reflections tended to have a relatively strong focus on action. It can be assumed that the reason for this is that at the time they received this formative feedback, they were engaged in preparing to write their second essay and any feedback received at that stage would be of immediate relevance to them. In the word frequency search, vocabulary clustered around the words *actively* and *acted* appear as the ninth and tenth most frequently occurring words respectively. Amongst other related words, the NVivo word frequency search highlighted the following similar words: *action, development, direction, discipline, effort, process, review, try, usage, use, using*. On the surface, what this might suggest is that students' attention is here directed at considering how feedback might lead to change.

It is interesting to note that the word *act* features as the second most frequently occurring word (second only to the word *writing*) in the second set of reflections which explore how students have used teacher feedback, with the word *change* appearing as number six in the list. One might infer from this that if students were inclined towards action after receiving peer feedback, the teacher feedback seems to encourage this to an even greater extent. Our findings might be seen as running counter to both previous research on student reception to feedback as well as our own and our colleagues' anecdotal evidence, both of which suggest that students have a tendency to skim feedback thus avoiding active reflection on how this feedback might lead to change. Our results here instead seem to suggest a possible discrepancy between the way in which students perceive that they engage with teacher feedback and the way in which teachers perceive that students do. However, it is important to note that previous research in

which student engagement with feedback has been studied has not built on the premise that students are actively instructed to respond to the feedback they receive. It seems to make a significant difference to the way in which students interact with feedback, whether or not they are expected to present their engagement with the feedback or not.

Our review of the reflections supported the above findings, with students frequently mentioning specific ways in which the feedback they received led them to make changes. Students purported making changes to their texts in relation to grammar, structure, use of textual evidence from the novels, and formatting issues such as referencing. They also frequently remarked upon how peer reviewing each other's texts better helped them to understand the assignment instructions.

However, it is important to note that a qualitative analysis of the reflective texts also elicited findings which seem to run contrary to those that emerged from using the word frequency count in NVivo. For instance, in the first set of reflective texts, many mentions of *action* and *change* are actually in reference to the feedback that students chose explicitly not to use in revising their texts. For instance, one student writes 'after my feedback I did not make any major changes'. Other examples include a student who states that 'some of the suggestions I was given was a bit misleading and I felt like those changes wouldn't improve my essay, so I chose to be selective and only apply the ideas that I agreed with'. Yet another writes, 'in some cases I disagreed with the peer reviewers' opinions and kept my text the way it was'. There are many other such examples in the texts. Thus, NVivo might have initially given us a false positive perception that students were utilising feedback to make active changes to their texts, when in actual fact they oftentimes reported that they were actually doing the opposite of this.

When it comes to the reflections on receiving teacher feedback, students tended to mention change in a more positive sense. One student, for instance, makes general remarks about how they used teacher feedback in preparing their second essay: 'I made good use out of the feedback I got. Many changes were made from how I would previously write a lot of things'. Another student describes having 'made a list of what my tutors and peer reviewer thought was negative on my first essay. I used the list throughout when I worked on this essay'. Other reflections comment on specific issues that the student had tried to work with in their second essay, e.g., 'When I got my feedback, I realized I had several grammar mistakes

and I understood I need to work on my grammar ... I also got notes about not using [the textbook] as much as I was supposed to do. I have now tried to use the book more and I believe I have improved this'. As is apparent in the above examples, and many of the other reflective texts exploring teacher feedback, students report considerable and systematic revision as a result of the feedback received.

5. Discussion

One of the most significant findings that emerged from our study was the focus that students placed on the very kinds of metacognitive skills that the reflective texts were designed to foster. We find it encouraging that words such as *think, review, act,* and *change* appear consistently across both sets of student reflections. Nonetheless, our results must be interpreted with some caution given the fact that the self-reflections were written as part of an examination. Students were told that the reflections were mandatory parts of the essay submissions, but also that the reflections as such would not form part of the assessment. Nonetheless, students may have taken into consideration that their reflections would be read by the examiner during the assessment process, and it can therefore be assumed that their comments reflected what they thought the examiner expected to see in such submissions. Furthermore, it is likely that some students were inspired by the reflections in the sample essays that we provided, even though the wording of the sample reflection was not used in the student reflection. There is of course an inherent risk in providing samples, since writers may choose to use them as templates for their own writing. This was something we were aware of, but we decided to include the reflection part in the first sample essay in order to remind students that it was a mandatory part of the essay submission.

Regardless, however, of whether students took inspiration from sample reflections or wrote their reflections with an aim to please teachers, the mere fact that they were instructed to engage with feedback on both occasions, we believe, affected their understanding of what writing in the discipline of literature entails and benefited their comprehension of the skills they need to work on in order to do so. Hence, the obligatory component of responding to feedback could be regarded as a trigger for the metacognitive skills students need to develop in order to reach further in their learning. One such metacognitive skill concerns the ability to work

in a structured manner, and as the student reflection quoted above indicates, the reflection assignments may have fostered such strategies.

By the time students carried out the peer review assignment which formed the basis for the first reflection, they had met with the other students in six workshop and seminar discussions focused on the novels upon which they were writing their essays. Often, these discussions had been carried out in peer group format with the students whose essays they then reviewed. It can therefore be assumed that students who regularly attended class felt comfortable commenting on each other's drafts.

We did not correlate students' reflections on teacher feedback with the actual feedback that they had received. To get a full picture of to what extent and how students actually engaged in their second essay with the teacher feedback provided on their first essay, an additional study with a focus on that is required. The formative feedback that students received on the first essay concerned contents as well as language and format, and when we marked the second essays (in which students were expected to avoid issues that had been highlighted to them in their first essay) it was clear to us that whereas some students avoided repeating the same types of mistakes, many still struggled with certain language problems that had been highlighted in their first essay (e.g., sentence structure, subject-verb agreement and genitive case errors). This is in agreement with our experience from the first-term academic writing course in which it takes a whole semester for many students to become so aware of the kinds of language problems they make that they are able to avoid those issues when producing new text. Another type of feedback bestowed on the first essay concerned contents and literary analysis. Common issues identified in the first essays were lack of engagement with a theoretical concept and lack of textual evidence based on a close reading of the novel they discussed. These issues were often addressed in a better way in the second essay, which indicates that hands-on individual feedback on how to conduct literary analysis can more easily lead to improvement.

6. Conclusion

As this article has proposed, scaffolding students' reflection practices is advantageous for academic writing development, as well as student engagement with peer and teacher feedback. This article explores a set of 243 student reflections concerning feedback on essays on an introductory-level English literature module. We discuss challenges that teachers often

encounter in encouraging active and transformational engagement with peer and teacher feedback and suggest that scaffolded reflection practices can serve to increase students' awareness of areas for improvement in their own writing. Our study is based on two sets of student reflections; the first reflection was written half-way through the course and based on peer review feedback of a draft version of the first essay, and the second reflection was written at the end of the course and based on teacher feedback received on the first essay. Our analyses suggest that the students' reflections on feedback stimulate the development of higher-order thinking competencies as the reflections to a great extent tend to use verbs associated with the higher order cognitive processes such as those outlined in Bloom's taxonomy. From this may be inferred that active instruction to engage with feedback (as part of a student's grade) may promote the development of the meta-cognitive skills that students need in order to assess the task at hand, to evaluate their own knowledge and skills and to consider strategies for future learning. In effect, the students' self-reflections seem to have served not only as tools for learning the discipline of literary analysis but also as means through which students can practise self-directed learning. As indicated, a follow-up study on how students actually engage with previous feedback in writing the second essay is required to gain a better understanding of how students develop as writers from receiving formative feedback.

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