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Editorial: Written Corrective Feedback (WCF): Teachers' Knowledge, Beliefs and Practice

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Over the last two decades or so, largely triggered by Truscott's seminal paper (1996), there has been an exponential growth of research interest in written corrective feedback (WCF) in L2 contexts (for a review, see Reinders & Mohebbi, 2018). After almost three decades, Truscott still adheres to his strong stance regarding the ineffectiveness of WCF (see Mohebbi's interview with Truscott, 2021). Extant WCF research has mainly focused on feedback scope (i.e. focused versus comprehensive WCF), WCF strategies (i.e. direct, indirect, and metalinguistic), and student uptake of WCF, with relatively less attention paid to teachers themselves who play an important role in the WCF process. As deliverers of WCF, the knowledge and beliefs teachers bring to L2 writing classes can have a significant impact on the ways in which students react to and engage with WCF. Teacher beliefs may also have a direct bearing on the way WCF is implemented, though teachers' WCF practices may not necessarily reflect their beliefs. In recent years, concerns have been expressed about the lack of ecological validity of WCF studies that have taken place in controlled classroom conditions, as well as their limited pedagogical relevance (e.g. Atkinson & Tardy, 2018; Lee et al., 2021). By addressing the teacher dimension, this special issue aims to explore teachers' knowledge, beliefs and practices regarding WCF in authentic L2 classroom contexts, with potentially relevant implications for real-world practices.

In general, L2 teachers' knowledge and beliefs about WCF tend to be heavily influenced by their prior learning experiences, referred to as the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975). Through observing their previous teachers' feedback practices, many L2 writing practitioners may form ingrained beliefs about how they should respond to student writing, which is not necessarily based on sound principles in educational assessment. A case in point is the primarily summative orientation of teacher WCF, which serves the purpose of reporting (through indicating errors comprehensively) rather than promoting student learning (e.g. through involving students actively in the WCF process) (Lee, 2007). Even though some teachers may harbour beliefs that are in line with good feedback practices in the literature, such as the use of focused WCF (instead of comprehensive WCF) to reduce cognitive load on students and to render WCF less overwhelming and confusing, they may be hamstrung by contextual constraints that mandate detailed WCF (Lee et al., 2016). The relationship between teacher beliefs and practices regarding WCF is intriguing and definitely worth exploring; in particular, there is a lack of robust research conducted in less investigated educational contexts.

This special issue features four articles that directly or indirectly address the teacher dimension of WCF, advancing our understanding of teachers' knowledge, beliefs and practices about WCF in different contexts. We begin the special issue with a study by Lira-Gonzales, Valeo, and Barkaoui, which was conducted in an underrepresented, French as a foreign language (FFL) context in Costa Rica. While the bulk of WCF research has taken place in ESL/EFL classrooms, this study about FFL teachers' beliefs and practices about WCF is a welcome addition to the field. Drawing on multiple data sources from five FFL teachers, Lira-Gonzales et al. found that the teachers shared some common beliefs about WCF, such as the use of comprehensive, coded WCF alongside evaluation grids. A few factors were found to influence FFL teachers' WCF beliefs, such as their participation in professional development activities on WCF. However, their WCF practices were constrained by contextual factors like large class sizes and time constraints, as revealed in previous research (e.g. Lee, 2009; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019).

Also conducted in an underrepresented context, Yang et al.'s large-scale survey study reported on 2,012 EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about WCF in primary and secondary writing classrooms in Mainland China. Different from the university teachers in Lira-Gonzales et al., the school teachers in Yang et al. had less faith in students' ability to take responsibility for their learning, such as in locating and correcting their own errors, though they believed that feedback is a shared responsibility between teachers and students. As shown in previous studies, Yang et al.'s teachers demonstrated disjuncture between their belief about the importance of global WCF (vis-à-vis local WCF) on the one hand and their practice that prioritized local WCF on the other (e.g. Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019). In the study, most teachers provided WCF selectively rather than comprehensively and believed that their WCF was beneficial to students. The teachers who were interviewed admitted the lack of training, however. Overall, Yang et al.'s study points to the need to step up teacher education on WCF to enhance the effectiveness of EFL teachers' feedback.

The third article by Ene and Yao provides a new perspective on the teacher dimension by examining student engagement with feedback, including WCF, when the teachers involved are native and non-native English-speaking teachers. Their study involved a native English teacher (NET) and a Chinese English teacher (CET) in the undergraduate EFL context in Mainland China. The participating students responded to anonymous feedback from the NET and CET and shared their feelings and thoughts via a survey. The findings show that students perceived the CET's feedback less positively, which focused more on WCF and less on areas other than language. Despite the small sample size, Ene and Yao's study suggests that teachers' knowledge, beliefs and practices about WCF/feedback are likely to impact student engagement in different ways. Like Yang et al., Ene and Yao underline the importance of teacher education and professional development to help teachers become more aware of the knowledge and beliefs they bring to their own writing classrooms, which can impact student engagement with teacher WCF / feedback in positive or negative ways.

Liu's final paper also addresses the notion of student engagement in the EFL undergraduate context in Mainland China, involving one non-native English teacher – a native Chinese teacher with 15 years of teaching experience and a master's degree in Linguistics. The findings suggest that students appreciated the teacher's effort in providing written feedback, including WCF, which accounted for over 70% of the feedback. They were pleased that the teacher showed awareness of student effort in using newly learnt sentence patterns (such as parallel structure) in their writing. However, when the teacher provided direct corrections that students did not understand, the WCF might not lead to student uptake. Teacher WCF was found to trigger a range of emotions, including negative ones, and in general, students wished that criticism could be provided alongside concrete guidance to help them learn and improve. Like the research by Ene and Yao, Liu's study shows that teachers do have a significant role to play in impacting student engagement with feedback.

While each of the four papers in the special issue addresses a specific area, with the first two focusing on teacher beliefs and practices and the last two on student engagement, they share a common concern about the significant role teachers play in the feedback process. The studies are all situated in real writing classrooms and ultimately address how WCF can be rendered more effective and meaningful for students. Admittedly, this special issue is unable to capture all potential topics about the teacher dimension in WCF research; nonetheless, we hope that it will garner interest in the teacher role in WCF and provide new directions for future research. Areas to be further explored include WCF and teacher language awareness, teacher metacognition, teachers' feedback/assessment literacy, emotions in teacher WCF, teachers' WCF practices across different learners' proficiency levels and target structures, and teacher professional development.

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