UNIVERSITÉ DE SHERBROOKE

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Consistent Feedback for a Constructivist Pedagogy

Une analyse des rétroactions sur les travaux écrits dans les cours d'anglais aux cégeps anglophones

A Study of Feedback on Written Assessments in Cégep English Courses

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SUMMARY

In all Cégep programs, students are required to complete several General Studies courses. In the English colleges, these General Studies courses include four English courses: Introduction to College English, Literary Genres, Literary Themes, and a program-related English. Along with the Humanities, French and Physical Education requirements, these English courses reflect the importance accorded by MELS (*Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport*) to communication and critical thinking skills. Given the ministerial emphasis on communication skills in general and essay-writing and revision in particular, teachers must place their own emphasis on helping students develop these skills. Beyond simply correcting superficial mechanical errors and grading papers, teachers need to find ways to encourage deeper learning and transferable skills, and perhaps the most direct means of doing so is through feedback on written work. Feedback can provide students with metacognitive skills; timely and relevant feedback on an essay can not only draw attention to areas of strength or weakness, but also, ideally, allow the students to develop their self-assessment and editing skills.

In order to determine how consistent feedback is within the English Cégep system, this study explores three key aspects of feedback provided to students: the amount of feedback provided, the nature of the feedback according to the defined criteria, and the relative importance of the three categories. In so doing, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How consistent is the feedback provided to students on written work in terms of the nature of the comments made?
2. How consistent is the amount of feedback provided?
3. How does the feedback reflect the stated instructional objectives, based on the MELS criteria?

Twenty-three teachers in four English departments participated in the study. Data was collected from a detailed questionnaire to give some context in terms of teacher training, experience, and assessment practices. Respondents were then asked to provide written feedback on a sample student essay. Their comments were analysed in terms of the nature of the feedback, how consistent that feedback was between teachers, and how closely the feedback reflected the stated instructional objectives.

Several areas of inconsistency were in fact revealed. First, despite an equal weighting of the three criteria, more than half the comments provided were related to expression, although this imbalance may simply reflect the nature of the student population and the nature of the assessment format. Inconsistencies in terms of the nature of comments, that is, how feedback is phrased, were also revealed. There does exist some room for pedagogical development in this area, since students learn more from feedback which engages them, through questions, for example, than from feedback which merely corrects them. The biggest inconsistencies lay in the amount of feedback provided and the graphics and symbols used to indicate errors. Here, there is indeed the problem of creating confusion for students, who spend one semester with a teacher who tells them to watch their fused sentences, then move on to another teacher who berates them for comma splices, not realizing that both teachers are referring to the same kind of error. In terms of how much feedback is provided, respondents ranged from no comments on the student paper at all to final comments that represented more than half the length of the student's essay.

It seems that while there is consistency among teachers in certain aspects of their feedback and evaluation of students' written work, there remain some areas in which an effort must be made to make feedback a more valuable learning tool for students.

ABSTRACT

Dans le cadre de tous les programmes de formation collégiale, les étudiants doivent compléter un certain nombre de cours obligatoires. Dans les Cégeps anglophones, ces cours comprennent quatre cours d'anglais: *Introduction to College English*, *Literary Genres*, *Literary Themes*, et un cours d'anglais approprié au programme d'études. À l'instar des cours de philosophie, de français et d'éducation physique, ces cours d'anglais obligatoires reflètent l'importance accordée par le MELS (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport) à la communication et à la pensée critique. Compte tenu de l'importance accordée par le Ministère aux habiletés de communication en général et à la rédaction et révision de textes d'opinion en particulier, les enseignants doivent accorder une importance égale à aider les étudiants à développer ces habiletés. Au-delà de la simple correction grammaticale et de l'attribution de notes, les enseignants doivent encourager l'apprentissage durable d'habiletés transférables, et la méthode la plus directe pour y parvenir est probablement la rétroaction sur les productions écrites. La rétroaction permet aux étudiants de développer des habiletés métacognitives; une rétroaction prompte et pertinente sur une production écrite permet non seulement d'attirer l'attention sur les forces et les faiblesses de l'étudiant, mais aussi, idéalement, de l'aider à développer ses propres habiletés d'auto-évaluation et de révision.

Afin de déterminer la consistance de la rétroaction au sein du système d'enseignement collégial, la présente étude explore trois aspects critiques de la rétroaction offerte aux étudiants: la quantité de rétroaction offerte, la nature de la rétroaction selon les critères déterminés, et l'importance relative accordée à chacune des trois catégories. L'étude tente de répondre aux questions suivantes:

1. Jusqu'à quel point la rétroaction offerte aux étudiants sur leurs productions écrites est-elle consistante en ce qui concerne la nature des commentaires?
2. Jusqu'à quel point la quantité de rétroaction est-elle consistante?
3. De quelle façon la rétroaction reflète-t-elle les objectifs de formation établis en regard des critères du MELS?

Vingt-trois enseignants de quatre départements d'anglais ont participé à l'étude. Les données ont été recueillies à partir d'un questionnaire détaillé comprenant des questions contextuelles sur la formation, l'expérience et les pratiques d'évaluation des enseignants. Les répondants ont ensuite été invités à rétroagir sur un exemple de production écrite étudiante. Leurs commentaires ont été analysés par rapport à la nature de la rétroaction, à la consistance de la rétroaction entre les enseignants, et à la manière dont la rétroaction répondait aux objectifs de formation établis.

Plusieurs inconsistances ont été révélées. Premièrement, en dépit du poids égal accordé aux trois critères, plus de la moitié des commentaires offerts portaient sur l'expression, mais il est possible que ceci soit dû à la nature de la population étudiante et du format d'évaluation. Des inconsistances ont également été relevées dans la nature des commentaires, c'est-à-dire la façon dont la rétroaction était formulée. Il existe toutefois une certaine latitude pédagogique à ce niveau, dans la mesure où les étudiants apprennent davantage lorsque la rétroaction est interactive, sous forme de questions, que lorsqu'elle est simplement corrective. Les inconsistances les plus importantes ont été relevées au niveau de la quantité de rétroaction offerte et des graphiques et symboles utilisés pour indiquer les erreurs. Ceci est cause de confusion pour les étudiants, qui peuvent par exemple passer une session avec un enseignant qui leur dira de faire attention aux phrases fusionnées, puis passer la session suivante avec un autre enseignant qui leur reprochera d'utiliser la virgule au lieu du point, sans se rendre compte que les deux enseignants font référence au même genre d'erreur. En ce qui concerne la quantité de rétroaction offerte, elle variait entre aucun commentaire et des commentaires d'une longueur égale à la moitié de la production écrite.

Bien qu'il existe une certaine consistance entre les enseignants pour certains aspects de leur rétroaction et de leur évaluation du travail écrit des étudiants, il semblerait que d'autres aspects ont besoin d'amélioration afin de rendre la rétroaction plus utile aux étudiants. À l'heure où les collèges et les enseignants s'engagent sur la voie de la pédagogie constructiviste, de l'apprentissage par compétences et de l'enseignement interdisciplinaire, il est impératif que des discussions aient lieu en ce qui concerne la façon, la fréquence et les raisons d'offrir de la rétroaction, et l'importance de la consistance afin de rendre cette rétroaction utile aux étudiants.

Si la consistance de la rétroaction est effectivement désirable, peut-être aurait-il lieu d'établir des normes départementales sous forme de rubriques communes et de systèmes de commentaires. En fait, dans certains collèges, des discussions sont déjà en cours sur la façon d'évaluer entre les disciplines, et ces rubriques communes et systèmes de commentaires pourraient être utiles afin d'assurer la consistance à travers les collèges. Un seul des quatre départements d'anglais participant à cette étude utilise présentement un système d'évaluation départemental, et le système n'est obligatoire que pour l'examen final du cours d'introduction. Il est intéressant de noter que les répondants de ce collège ont répondu de façon plus positive que les autres à la suggestion des rubriques communes, mais mêmes ces enseignants ont fait preuve d'une certaine réserve et n'ont pas complètement endossé cette idée. Les enseignants des autres collèges se sont, pour leur part, montrés divisés dans leurs réponses à cette question. Ceux qui ont rejeté l'idée ont indiqué qu'une rubrique commune serait "trop limitante" ou "restrictive", et ne reflèterait pas les méthodes, les critères et la variété des productions écrites demandées par les enseignants. Ceux qui se sont montrés quelque peu ouverts à l'idée ont souligné qu'un système commun ne serait possible que si les enseignants avaient la possibilité de l'adapter au besoin, ou même de ne pas

l'utiliser selon la production écrite à évaluer. De façon plus importante, les enseignants ont indiqué qu'il était essentiel qu'un système commun soit sujet à discussion au sein du département tout entier, afin qu'il résulte d'un processus de création commun plutôt que d'une décision imposée qui ne répondrait pas à leurs besoin ou à leurs critères.

Bien que l'idée d'un système commun puisse paraitre la façon la plus naturelle d'assurer la consistance dans les évaluations, un tel système impose des limites aux enseignants, qui sont habitués à un processus d'évaluation autonome. Un seul enseignant parmi les répondants a indiqué que le processus d'évaluation au niveau de son collège n'était pas suffisamment autonome; les autres ont décrit leurs processus d'évaluation comme "très autonomes", et plusieurs se sont montrés très satisfaits de cette indépendance. D'un autre côté, plusieurs enseignants ont décrit la consultation formelle et informelle au sein de leurs départements comme une ressource inestimable; certains ont mentionné qu'ils consultaient leurs collègues au sujet des cas difficiles. D'autres enseignants ont fait part d'un large éventail de ressources départementales, notamment le mentorat individuel, les ateliers d'évaluation, les séances sur les normes, et le suivi en cas d'écarts inhabituels entre le nombre d'échecs et de réussites étudiantes. Certains enseignants ont semblé convaincus que le processus d'évaluation devrait demeurer essentiellement autonome en autant que les normes ministérielles soient satisfaites, alors que d'autres ont indiqué que "les notes varient énormément entre les enseignants".

La présente étude suggère que, même lorsque les enseignants évaluent de façon consistante en termes de notes numériques, la rétroaction offerte aux étudiants n'est pas complètement consistante. D'autres études sur la perspective étudiante de la rétroaction pourraient être utiles afin de déterminer si les inconsistances ont un impact réel sur l'apprentissage, et si c'était le cas, d'explorer la meilleure façon d'aborder le problème. Des études interdisciplinaires pourraient, jusqu'à un certain point, aider à établir une certaine consistance entre les collèges, et souligner l'importance d'une approche interdisciplinaire de l'apprentissage. Entretemps, les départements auraient avantage à envisager d'offrir des ateliers d'évaluation portant non seulement sur les notes numériques, mais aussi sur les pratiques communes de rétroaction.

Que la consistance en rétroaction soit possible ou non, désirable ou non, les résultats de cette étude mettent en lumière l'importance de former les étudiants à l'interprétation et à l'application de la rétroaction. En tant qu'enseignants, nous dépensons beaucoup d'énergie à offrir des commentaires qui, nous l'espérons, seront reçus avec attention et considérés utiles. Même si les enseignants et les départements ne parviennent pas à un consensus en termes de rubriques communes ou de symboles de correction, il appartient aux enseignants d'apprendre à leurs étudiants à faire bon usage de la rétroaction offerte. Les évaluations formatives, particulièrement celles qui

prennent la forme de productions écrites par étapes avec rétroaction à chacune des étapes, représentent une occasion pour les enseignants de démontrer leurs pratiques de rétroaction sans pénaliser les étudiants qui n'ont pas encore compris les symboles utilisés par l'enseignant ou les attentes d'évaluation.

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INTRODUCTION

In the current Quebec Cégep system, students are required to complete a certain number of General Studies courses, including four English courses[1]. The ministerial objectives for all four English courses include essay-writing skills; the length and scope of the essay requirements increase as students progress through the four courses. In order to graduate, all students, regardless of program of study, must pass the Ministerial Examination of College English, a universal assessment administered by MELS, Quebec's *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* (Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport) for which students are required to read a short text and compose an analytical essay in response to that text. Furthermore, recent revisions to the ministerial guidelines for English courses indicate a clear emphasis on editing and revision as a skill set to be developed; the ability to revise and rewrite is in fact one of the ministerial competencies associated with all four English courses. Clearly, course requirements and the Ministerial Examination of College English reflect a ministerial regard for the importance of essay writing as reflective of the student's ability to read analytically and to organize, write and revise a coherent response to a given text. This regard in turn reflects the value accorded to communication and critical thinking skills in general; regardless of field of study, a student must demonstrate the ability to analyze and communicate effectively in the language of instruction.

In order to determine how consistent feedback is within the English Cégep system, this exploratory study examines three key aspects of feedback provided to students: the amount of feedback provided, the nature of the feedback according to

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[1] In the English-language colleges students are required to complete four English literature courses and two French second-language courses; their counterparts in the French-language colleges are similarly required to complete four French literature courses and two English second-language courses. This paper focuses exclusively on students and teachers in the English colleges unless otherwise specified.

the defined criteria, and the relative importance of the three categories. In so doing, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How consistent is the feedback provided to students on written work in terms of the nature of the comments made?
2. How consistent is the amount of feedback provided?
3. How does the feedback reflect the stated instructional objectives, based on the MELS criteria?

In the first chapter, the context is described, that is, the current learning objectives for English courses at the Cégep level, as well as the researcher's own interest and impetus in conducting the study. In the second chapter, the theoretical framework is established, including the operationalization of the relevant terms used throughout the study, and an extensive review of scholarly literature on the subject of feedback and its role in constructivist pedagogy. In the third chapter, the methods of collecting and analysing the data for the study are set forth, including a discussion of the respondents and the ethical considerations taken. The data itself is presented and analyzed in the fourth chapter. The implications of the results are discussed in the conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE
PROBLEM DEFINITION

THE CONTEXT

The Quebec Cégep system is perhaps best compared to two-year colleges in other regions of North America. Quebec students complete their secondary school in Grade 11 (Secondary V).[2] The province's Cégeps offer two-year programs which prepare students for subsequent university programs and three-year programs which prepare students for direct entry into the workforce in a variety of technical fields. In 2010, there were almost as many students enrolled in Cégep (210,084) as university (277, 398) (Statistics Canada, 2010). There are five English colleges within the 48 public colleges (Lessard & Brochu, 2012), which, like their French counterparts, have implemented the program approach since the Robillard reform of 1993. In the program approach, competencies, which are expressed in terms of objectives and standards or "the goals of learning" are determined for each course, in relation to the larger goals of the program (Bateman, et al., 2007).

In all Cégep programs, students are required to complete several General Studies courses. In the English colleges, these General Studies courses include four English courses: Introduction to College English, Literary Genres, Literary Themes, and a program-related English. Along with the Humanities, French and Physical Education requirements, these English courses reflect the importance accorded by MELS (*Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport*) to communication and critical thinking skills. Instructional objectives, which are imposed by MELS, in all

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[2] Cégep is a French acronym, *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel* (College of general and professional studies). Cégeps are frequently referred to as "colleges" in Quebec. Students who complete their Cégep program are awarded a DEC (*Diplôme d'études collégiales*) or an AEC (*Attestation d'études collégiales*)

four required English courses, include the following (adapted for the specific focus of the four English courses):

1. To identify the characteristics and functions of the components of discourse by demonstrating
   1.1 accurate explanation of the denotations of words
   1.2 adequate recognition of the appropriate connotation of words
   1.3 accurate definition of the characteristics and function of each component[3]
2. To determine the organization of facts and arguments of a given discourse by demonstrating
   2.1 clear and accurate recognition of the main idea and structure
   2.2 clear presentation of the strategies employed to develop an argument or thesis
3. To prepare ideas and strategies for a projected discourse by demonstrating
   3.1 appropriate identification of topics and ideas
   3.2 adequate gathering of pertinent information
   3.3 clear formulation of a thesis
   3.4 coherent ordering of supporting material
4. To formulate a discourse by demonstrating
   4.1 appropriate choice of tone and diction
   4.2 correct development of sentences
   4.3 clear and coherent development of paragraphs
   4.4 formulation of a 750-word discourse
5. To edit the discourse by demonstrating
   5.1 thorough revision of form and content (Marking Guide p. 19)

In order to receive their DEC, students must not only successfully complete the four required English courses, but must also pass the Ministerial Examination of College English "designed to confirm that students have mastered the competencies" (Marking Guide p. 3).

Given the ministerial emphasis on communication skills in general and essay-writing and revision in particular, teachers must place their own emphasis on

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[3] According to MELS, the "components of discourse are the grammatical, literary, and rhetorical elements that constitute formal English expression" and discourse refers to both written and oral compositions (Marking Guide p. 19)

helping students develop these skills. Beyond simply correcting superficial mechanical errors and grading papers, teachers need to find ways to encourage deeper learning and transferable skills. Research has shown that one instructional strategy, providing timely and pertinent feedback, helps students learn and retain new concepts, and build on prior knowledge (see, for instance, Dohrer (1991) and Nichol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006)). Feedback can also provide students with metacognitive skills; timely and relevant feedback on an essay can not only draw attention to areas of strength or weakness, but also, ideally, allow the students to develop their self-assessment and editing skills.

In 2006, this researcher conducted an informal study that led to the current study. The initial study proposed to evaluate alignment within a single English department in three elements of the instructor's correcting role: the mark assigned to an essay, the criteria upon which the mark is based, and the comments and feedback given to the student.

The results of that project indicated general alignment in the criteria applied; however, the levels of transparency and detail regarding the criteria varied from no details provided whatsoever to extreme detail in all categories. In some cases, the lack of detail provided may simply have reflected the inclusion of criteria in the instructor's course materials, or teaching of the criteria in the classroom. The most divergent area of analysis was without a doubt instructor feedback. For the analysis, two forms of feedback were considered: marginal feedback, which included all in-text comments and error indications provided in the margins and between the lines of the student's text; and final comments, which included comments provided in the space following the student's text on the last page of the essay as well as comments included on the instructor's marking sheet, if provided.

Marginal feedback ranged from simple underlining and circling to lengthy, explicit remarks. Although the marks given to the essay clearly demonstrated consistency among reviewers with regard to the overall evaluation of the essay and

the individual criteria, only three reviewers provided any substantial marginal feedback about comprehension/insight or organization; most instructors focused their in-text feedback on errors or weaknesses in expression.

While the amount of feedback provided was one area of concern, the nature of the feedback provided was also inconsistent. For example, errors in subject-verb agreement were indicated by most reviewers, but of the ten reviewers who made in-text comments, no two used the same notation to indicate the error.

The current study has expanded the original study to incorporate data from other English colleges, in order explore more broadly how feedback on student writing is being used in the English Cégep system, and more specifically, how consistent this feedback is in various aspects, including the amount and nature of the feedback.

Within a constructivist, competency-based pedagogy, consistent feedback that touches on a range of aspects of student writing should provide students with better metacognitive skills, and allow these students to build on prior knowledge rather than reinventing the wheel in each successive English course. Walker (2008) contends that assessment practices have lagged behind other aspects of pedagogy in the paradigm shift to constructivist leaning approaches. The current study, which explores feedback strictly from the teacher perspective, does not explore the effectiveness of the feedback, as such exploration would demand input from and observation of the students themselves; however, based on the current literature on the topic, better consistency in various aspects of feedback provided to students, as well as conscious efforts on the part of the instructor to train students in the interpretation and application of feedback, are likely to make feedback more effective in terms of improving student writing and analytical skills.

Consistency in feedback practices on the part of teachers should also improve metacognitive skills for students. Several studies on feedback have examined

the nature of effective feedback and student perception of this feedback (see, for example, Dohrer (1991), Gibbs and Simpson (2003) and Lizzio and Wilson (2008)); some studies have also examined teacher approaches to providing feedback (see, for example, Chanock (2000) and Ellery (2001)).

Teachers at the Cégep level are not required to have pedagogical training and are generally hired based on their expertise in their discipline, which in the case of English teachers typically means a degree in English Literature, Creative Writing, or Comparative Literature. Although many teachers undertake pedagogical training to some extent on a voluntary basis, there is little incentive for Cégep teachers to invest much time and effort into teacher training, beyond the occasional workshop. While many teachers engage in informal discussions with colleagues regarding classroom issues, such as learning activities, recommended texts, grammar exercises and discipline issues, it seems that teachers do not consult with each other regarding how or what to provide in terms of feedback, although in constructivist pedagogical theory, feedback from teachers to students is a crucial instructional tool. Providing comments on written work is perceived as a very personal exercise, both in the sense that it is an autonomous activity and in the sense that it is a direct interaction between teacher and student. However, this lack of awareness of peers' feedback practices means that students are faced with interpreting teacher feedback without a common template.

Within the larger context of the scholarship of teaching and learning, the current study aims to contribute through the scholarship of application, defined by Fincher and Work (2006) as "the translation of knowledge to solve problems and answer questions (p. 294). In this instance, the question is the efficacy of feedback. The study explores the consistency of feedback provided to students of an introductory English course, in order to provide some further insight for teachers in the English Cégeps, and perhaps reiterate the fundamental role of feedback in the learning dialogue. As colleges and teachers move forward in their understanding of constructivist pedagogy, competency-based education and the value of

interdisciplinary literacy, it is imperative that discussions take place concerning how, when, and why to provide effective feedback, and what role consistency has to play in making that feedback an effective learning tool.

CHAPTER TWO
THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order to appreciate the role of feedback within the constructivist framework, it is important first to set the parameters of that framework. 'Constructivism,' along with 'feedback,' 'mastery' and 'competency' among other terms, is a catchphrase that is widely used in educational discussions, but whose meaning is not always clearly defined or universally agreed upon. Richardson (2003) posits at least two forms of constructivism, social and psychological, and while in both "there is an assumption that meaning or knowledge is actively constructed in the human mind" (p. 2), the two are rather remarkably different, which is perhaps why the general term is often quite fluid. According to Richardson, "the general sense of constructivism is that it is a theory of learning or meaning making, that individuals create their own new understandings on the basis of an interaction between what they already know and believe and ideas or knowledge with which they come into contact" (p. 1). Social constructivism, however, is notably influenced "by such things as politics, ideologies, values, the exertion of power and the preservation of status, religious beliefs, and economic self-interest" (Phillips, qt. in Richardson p. 2). Psychological constructivism, on the other hand, "relates to a developmental or learning theory that suggests that individual learners actively construct the meaning around phenomena, and that these constructions are idiosyncratic, depending in part on the learner's background knowledge" (p. 2).

It is this second form, psychological constructivism, which "focuses on the ways in which meaning is created within the individual mind and … how shared meaning is developed within a group process" (Richardson, p. 2). As such, constructivist pedagogy is student-centered and is characterized by "attention to the individual and respect for students' background and developing understandings of

and beliefs about elements of the domain" (p. 3) and "development of students' metawareness of their own understandings and learning processes" (p. 5). The goals, then, of constructivist pedagogy "focus on individual students developing deep understandings in the subject matter of interest and habits of mind that aid in future learning" (p. 5).

In the Cégep system, and in particular in the context of the mandate of the General Studies classroom, teachers must be engaged in helping their students develop these "habits of mind." Wiggins (1999) views education as "not merely a training" but essential to the development of "worthy habits of mind" (p. 36). For Wiggins, assessment is a crucial element of teaching, and "what must be assessed is not whether the student is learned or ignorant but whether he or she is thoughtful or thoughtless about what has been learned" (p. 37). Furthermore, feedback, or more specifically, what Wiggins terms a "system of feedback loops" (p. 185), is "the heart of competency-based education" (p. 186). Wiggins' system of feedback loops constitutes a form of formative assessment in that students are given "the feedback [they] need until [they] get the task done properly" (p. 185).

Since the post-1993-reform Cégep embraces the notion of competency-based education and the program approach, it stands to reason that its teachers be concerned with and dedicated to mindful feedback. Within a constructivist pedagogical framework, feedback is regarded as a significant instructional strategy, which works in conjunction with authentic assessment. Thus far, studies show overwhelmingly positive response to the general idea of formative assessment and feedback; however, there appears to be a significant gap between the paradigmatic shifts in other aspects of pedagogy and changes to the way teachers provide feedback, and how students are trained to use feedback. Although most teachers would agree that students benefit from feedback, Wiggins laments "how little … we understand what constitutes usable, helpful feedback" (p. 183). For feedback to be truly effective as a formative, constructivist learning tool, both the instructor and the student need to understand what to do with it, why to do it, and how to do it consistently.

An added dimension of the problem of inconsistent feedback comes from the fact that teachers at the Cégep level are not required to have any prior training as teachers, and receive minimal training once hired. Many colleges do offer pedagogical resources, and naturally many new teachers turn to more experienced colleagues for help with course preparation and assessment strategies; however, when it comes to providing feedback on students' written work, most teachers seem to assume that their comments are valuable and clear. However, Chanock (2000) found that without interaction, models and explanations of feedback, close to half the students she surveyed did not understand the fundamental concepts of instructor comments. Instructors, she found, did not provide such interaction because they felt that students "should know" how to interpret the comment (p. 102).

Of course, some Cégep teachers do have prior training, and many participate in training on an on-going basis. As well as resources in the form of *conseillers pédagogiques* (pedagogical counselors) on several campuses, and annual pedagogical day workshops, teachers in many disciplines take courses in the Master Teacher Program, offered through the Université de Sherbrooke. Among the compulsory courses in the MTP program is "Assessment as Learning," the competencies of which include using "feedback to increase student learning" (Consortium of the English Colleges, 2006, p. 5) and making the connection between the competency-based approach to teaching and "the use of authentic/performance-based assessments." Teachers who complete this course, therefore, have a deeper and clearer understanding of what Wiggins (1989) refers to as "authentic assessment." Wiggins argues that the perceived paradigm gap between the general shift to constructivist pedagogy and the lag in any shift in assessment and feedback is created by assessments which "remove what is central to intellectual competence: the use of judgment to recognize and pose complex problems as a prelude to using one's discrete knowledge to solve them" (706). Authentic assessments, on the other hand, "involve students in the actual challenges, standards, and habits needed for success in the academic disciplines or in the workplace" (706).

Naturally, any discussion of assessment in general and feedback in particular necessitates a definition of the terms themselves itself; however, both assessment and feedback are somewhat intangible, open-ended concepts. Theoretically, feedback can be defined narrowly or broadly; for the purposes of this study, feedback is any communication between the instructor and the student that provides information about the student's performance of an assessment task, or, as Wiggins puts it, "confirms or disconfirms the correctness of [the performer's] actions" (1999, p. 185). According to Wiggins, "feedback is information that provides the performer with direct, usable insights into current performance, based on tangible differences between current performance and hoped-for performance" (p. 182). As such, it is essential in Wiggins' model that feedback be provided during the assessment so that students can determine whether [they are] successfully doing what [the teacher] asked [them] to do and told [them] to accomplish, and based on the feedback" (p. 184). Similarly, Bérubé (2011), a teacher within the Quebec Cégep model, says that while "one main goal of feedback is to signal the satisfaction or displeasure of the teacher" (slide 12), best practice dictates that such affective feedback must be used temporarily and, more importantly, in conjunction with comments that "signal a gap between the product and the expectations" and with appropriate follow-up (slide 24).

Although many variations on this definition are used in different studies, the basic premise, that feedback consists of communication between the teacher and the student regarding the gap between the student's performance and the expected or ideal performance, is common to most definitions. In his seminal work on the topic, Sadler (1989) defines formative assessment as a set of judgments "used to shape and improve" competence (p. 120). The essential difference between formative and summative assessment is one of purpose and effect – formative assessment, unlike summative assessment, aims to help students shape their learning, rather than measure it. In this context, feedback provides information about how successfully a task has been, or is being, done (p. 120). Most importantly for Sadler, feedback

provides information about "the gap" between student performance and a specified standard – in fact, the information about this gap is only feedback if and when it is used to "alter the gap" (p. 121). In other words, in Sadler's view, feedback cannot be feedback if there is no interaction, no formative function. Furthermore, students must recognize the standard, and appreciate its quality, in order to monitor their own production and results. In Sadler's model, students must "possess a concept of the standard,… compare the actual… with the standard, and… engage in appropriate action [to close] the gap" (p. 121).

Sadler's notion of the "performance gap" echoes Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (1978). According to Vygotsky, children learn by observing more competent models, such as parents, then assessing their own performance of the same skill, and determining the 'gap' between desired, modelled performance and actual performance (see also Ramaprasad, 1983).

In Black and Wiliam's comprehensive overview of the subject (1998), formative assessment includes any activities from which students receive feedback which in turn modifies subsequent activities. According to this definition, then, feedback does not merely "overlap" with formative assessment; it is an integral component. Based on their review of a number of quantitative studies, Black and Wiliam make several generalizations regarding formative assessment and feedback:

- By definition all formative assessment involves feedback between student and teacher;
- The success of this interaction directly affects the learning process;
- It is difficult to analyze the contribution of the feedback alone or, conversely, the assessment technique without the impact of the feedback;
- Feedback must be applied in order for the assessment to be truly formative;
- Feedback is most effective when it is objective (i.e., relevant to the task) rather than subjective (i.e., relevant to peer performance) (pp. 16-17).

While Black and Wiliam conclude that further investment in formative assessment should produce "significant learning gains" (p. 17), they also find that in general, teachers do not really understand formative assessment, which means that the application of formative assessment techniques is weak or simply neglected altogether (p. 20). Studies also suggest that feedback is most effective when it focuses on the task rather than the student, which, as Black and Wiliam point out, explains why research shows that praise frequently has a negative effect on performance. Comments that focus instead on the objectives, and the gap between performance and the standard, are more likely to produce learning gains. Furthermore, scaffolded responses, which provide as much or as little information as individual students need to accomplish the task, produce greater overall learning as well as better performance on individual tasks.

As teachers, we may believe that our criteria, instructions, and written feedback are very clear, but the recipients of our messages may not read them as we intended, or apply them as we expect; furthermore, our individual commenting styles and focuses vary from teacher to teacher, and as such, may inadvertently create gaps for students trying to interpret one teacher's feedback based on a previous teacher's habits. Sadler (1998) refers to the notion that students are conditioned to ineffective or even "defective" feedback, as well as a wide variety in the nature, amount and depth of feedback provided by different teachers. Through temporal conditioning, Sadler claims, students learn "survival habits" (p. 77) which must be overcome in order to establish a more effective learning culture. One aspect of this study, therefore, explores consistency in feedback provided in different aspects of the teacher comments, namely, the amount of feedback provided, the nature of that feedback, and the follow-up on feedback (that is, instructions regarding interpretation and application, and the opportunity to rewrite).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There exists a large body of recent literature regarding effective feedback, although little of this literature is directly related to college-level English courses. In researching this topic, several databases and pedagogical journals were consulted. In an effort to find relevant literature with specific treatment of Quebec institutions, either in English or French, the catalogue from the Centre de documentation collégiale (CDC) was also consulted, and was found to include several examples of research on the importance of formative assessment, feedback and student application of feedback, which is as much a concern for French teachers in the francophone Cégeps as is it for English teachers in the Anglophone colleges, for the same reasons. Roberge (2008) states that:

> Correcting is demanded of teachers in all disciplines, but for the French teacher, this task consists of multiple implications, given that s/he is responsible for two aspects of the discipline: the consolidation of the competencies in written language and the study of literary works. As the pedagogical act represents the primordial dimension of the college teacher, 'it is important to understand the organic connections which exist between teaching, learning and assessment' (Ouellet 2003, as cited in Roberge, 2008) in the context of the competency model in teaching and learning. (p. 1, my translation).

In the existing literature, four distinct themes emerge: what constitutes formative assessment and how feedback fits into that concept; how best to make feedback interactive and effective; how feedback functions within a constructivist pedagogy; and how students perceive feedback, including how that perception may interfere with the learning process.

2.1 Formative Assessment and Feedback

In response to Black and Wiliam (1998), Hattie and Jaeger (1998) argue that psychometrics should have "a critical role" (p. 111) in assessing student learning; like Black and Wiliam, Hattie and Jaeger recognize the importance of feedback in the

assessment process. Their definition of feedback, however, differs from the former, which Hattie and Jaeger see as too narrow. Feedback, for their purposes, is "polymorphous" (p. 113) and refers to any information subsequent to performance, which means that feedback goes beyond external sources to include self-assessment. Furthermore, Hattie and Jaeger emphasize the duality of feedback, that is, that the teacher must provide opportunities for feedback on the one hand, and on the other, that students must be trained to receive feedback. Like Black and Wiliam, Hattie and Jaeger conclude that assessment must emphasize feedback and subsequent action, and that testing should be a learning tool rather than a learning measuring stick.

In a more focused response to Black and Wiliam, Sebatane (1998) discusses the implications of their findings in the specific context of "the so-called developing countries" (p. 123). As Sebatane argues, despite the overwhelming research that underlines the importance and benefit of formative assessment, reforming pedagogical practice is a slow process, because to date no one "optimum model" of a formative assessment-based system has been proposed, and because all the studies to date have concluded that such reform requires substantial, radical changes in classroom practices and institutional standards (p. 124). More recently, Nichol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) reviewed research on formative assessment and postulate that such assessment can be used to help students become independent, self-regulated learners.

In one of the most-cited discussions of formative assessment and feedback, Sadler (1989) describes a qualitative judgement as "one made directly by a person" in which the source and instrument of the appraisal is that person's brain (p. 124). Thus qualitative assessments, unlike quantitative, cannot be mechanized or automated, or even performed by a "non-expert." According to Sadler, there are five characteristics of qualitative assessment (pp. 124-5):

1. Multiple criteria

'Multiple criteria' means not just different criteria, but the patterns and relationships between them; the "more criteria there are, the greater the number of ways in which work of a given quality may be construed" (p. 128).

2. Fuzzy criteria

Unlike "sharp" criteria, which imply that a response can be only correct or incorrect, "fuzzy" criteria imply a gradation, rather than well-defined states. 'Creativity', for instance, is a fuzzy criterion, in that it is "an abstract mental construct denoted by a linguistic term which has no absolute and unambiguous meaning independent of its context" (p. 124).

3. Limited and changeable criteria for any one assessment

For any given assessment, a competent judge can appraise the criteria and determine which criteria are relevant.

4. No definably "correct" judgment

Sadler argues that it is meaningless to speak of correctness in judgment, as "there is often no independent method of confirming … whether the decision or conclusion (as distinct from the student's response) is correct" (p. 125).

5. No grading

Numbers/grades, if used at all, are determined after the judgment has been made.

Sadler points out that certain forms of student production result in an artifact that has an "existence separate from the learner" – essays, musical compositions, etc. – whereas others are transient, and are received in real time – a play, a presentation. In the first instance, the production process offers infinite possibility for scaffolding and revision, none of which is necessarily evident in the final, independent product (p. 125). Different "end products" require different approaches to evaluative feedback.

2.2 Interactive and Effective Feedback

The interactive nature of feedback, whether through pre-assessment instruction, in-class interaction, or conferences with the student to review comments post-assessment, is a recurring theme in the literature. Sadler's notion of effective formative feedback (1998) depends on effective teachers, who, according to Sadler, manifest six essential traits: content knowledge, an attitude toward teaching, pedagogical skill, deep knowledge of the standards and criteria, evaluative experience, and "expertise in framing feedback" (p. 80-82). At the same time, Sadler argues that chief among a teacher's responsibilities is training students to become independent learners, so that "teacher-supplied feedback [can] give way to self-assessment" (p. 82). Indeed, one of the key premises upon which Sadler bases his research (1989) is that students can only improve if they "develop the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work" (p. 119).

Price and O'Donovan (2006) suggest "inviting students to participate actively" in the assessment process to "enable more effective knowledge transfer of assessment processes and standards" (p. 103). In fact, several researchers – Covic and Jones; Walker (2008); Chanock (2000); Bardine, Bardine and Deegan (2000); *et al.* – conclude that feedback without interaction and guidance is ineffective, for the most part because students frequently do not understand instructor feedback. Clearly, students cannot use feedback effectively if they do not understand it, or appreciate its potential, and it is up to the instructor to teach students how and why to consider feedback. Like Chanock in the UK, Bardine *et al.* (2000) explored what teachers "need to consider when they respond to their students' writing" (p. 94). Based on questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions with high school students in the American Midwest, Bardine, Bardine and Deegan confirmed that students frequently do not understand what instructors mean by their comments. Furthermore, students ignore comments altogether if there is no opportunity to rewrite their work; this finding is supported in other studies, and is clearly related to the idea of interaction as a fundamental aspect of effective feedback. Covic and Jones (2008)

reported that the rewrite process is demonstrably successful; perhaps even more so if students are required to rewrite based on instructor feedback, rather than rewriting as an option. Bardine, Bardine and Deegan further contend that in-class writing time is needed; students should be able to solicit feedback even during the writing process. Many researchers come to the conclusion that direct interaction between the teacher and student is essential to the feedback process; Puhr and Workman (1992) claim that the comment conference is universally recognized among English teachers as "the best way to give… students evaluative feedback and instruction for further improvement of their writing" (p. 49). Meeting with students to discuss teacher feedback allows teachers to address any potential misinterpretation, and to clarify and reinforce feedback.

2.3 Feedback and Constructivist Pedagogy

Another important theme that emerges from the literature is the use of feedback within a constructivist pedagogy. Walker (2008) cites Ramsden's claim that it is impossible "to overstate the role of effective comments" in the learning process (Ramsden, 2002, p. 193). Like Bardine, Bardine and Deegan, among others, Walker found that a significant number of students did not really understand instructor feedback; however, she notes that many students were able to apply comments to "alter gaps" in their learning retrospectively and proactively (p. 10). Similarly, Nichol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) identify a delay in shifting assessment practices to match the more general shift to constructivist approaches. For instance, formative assessment should help students become self-regulated learners, but in order to do so, feedback has to be relevant and specific. At the same time, feedback as purely formative tends to be regarded negatively by students. Although Dohrer (1991) concluded that feedback must be considered separately from grading, Smith and Gorard (2005) determined that purely formative feedback was ineffective and unpopular with students.

Radical change is a key point for several proponents of formative assessment, including Yorke (2003), who echoes Black and Wiliam's conclusion that formative assessment is universally lauded but generally misunderstood, or at least insufficiently supported. Yorke, among others, argues that assessments can − and often must − be both summative, providing a quantitative measure that contributes to the student's grade, and formative, providing feedback that contributes to the student's learning. According to Yorke, there is a definite place within constructivist teaching for summative assessment, in that it can be a "test of independence" (p. 497) that counters the potential pitfalls of student overconfidence from success that is really attributable to "the work the teacher put in at the draft stage" (p. 481). Similarly, Taras (2002) sees no conflict between summative and formative assessments, and in fact argues that "since the grade is linked to ideas of standards, it is also of great importance for formative work" (p. 507).

In contrast, Butler (2004) advocates "comments-only" marking (p. 37), based on his interpretations of Clarke (2001), who claims that "grades freeze [students] into 'ego-related' mode rather than 'task-related' mode" (as cited in Butler, 2004, p. 37). Based on a trial of the "comments-only" approach, Butler concludes that both teachers and students benefit from purely qualitative feedback, especially when coupled with self-reflection. In a British study of formative feedback, Brown and Glover (2006) found that among 83 tutors providing feedback on student assignments, the overwhelming majority of comments were content-focused and therefore "served to reinforce the summative nature of the assignments"; however, students wanted more skills-related feedback because such feedback fed forward to "future work" (p. 86). As a result of Brown and Glover's study, the Open University implemented several changes, including allowing students to request formative-only feedback, providing specimen answers with explanatory notes, and encouraging tutors to highlight strengths/weaknesses for future work (p. 89).

For assessment to be truly formative, it must not only "feed forward" to subsequent assessments and subsequent courses (Brown & Glover, 2006), but also

help the students build transferable metacognitive skills. In other words, students need to learn from their teachers not only as content experts, but also as evaluative experts. Sadler (1998) makes it clear that one of the essential traits of effective teachers is evaluative experience, and one of their prime responsibilities is to facilitate students' movement toward becoming independent learners and self-evaluators, so the teachers' evaluative experience must become transferable. Traditionally, teachers' evaluative experience has been regarded as inaccessible, a kind of "guild knowledge" reserved for the privileged few (p. 127). Sadler argues that this "exclusive reliance" on the teachers' tacit judgement is harmful to the learning process because it "legitimates the notion of [an existentially determined] standards baseline" and "keeps the concept of the standard relatively inaccessible to the learner" (p. 127). Two possible means of making qualitative assessment more transparent and accessible are to distribute exemplars and to provide descriptive statements of the standard. While some might argue that providing models encourages students to copy the example, Sadler argues that even the process of copying may teach students "something valuable" (p. 128). In certain disciplines, students are more likely to share peers' results; however, in many disciplines, such as the humanities, students work independently and their results are shown only to the teacher. Naturally, this means that students are not exposed to what constitutes excellent results on a given assessment, and cannot apply that knowledge to their own self-monitoring strategies.

Sadler (1998) echoes other researchers when he points out that "grades and marks do not deliver as much formative effectiveness as tailored comments" and may even be "counterproductive" (p. 77). Like other researchers, Sadler (1989) also perceives a "lack of general theory of feedback and formative assessment" (p. 119).

2.4 Student Perception

Sadler's seminal work in formative feedback (1989) was in part prompted by his "puzzling observation" that student performances on assessments do not

necessarily improve, even when the students are given "valid and reliable" feedback from teachers (p. 119). One obvious explanation for this lack of progress is a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the feedback provided. Dohrer (1991) reports that students perceive feedback as an opportunity to learn from their mistakes, but are typically unable to consider feedback holistically, focusing instead on individual comments. The way students approach feedback is often a reflection of how they perceive writing assignments in general. Struyven, Dochy and Janssens (2005) posit that student perceptions of assessment and feedback are influenced by different approaches to learning, but that the most important aspect of assessment as a learning tool is whether or not it is perceived as "fair." Deep learning is most likely to occur if assessments are perceived as authentic, reasonable and realistic. Although Struyven, Dochy and Janssens reported a student preference for multiple-choice tests, essays are significantly better at promoting deep learning, and students tend to agree that essays are more fair and better at "representing one's knowledge on the subject" (p. 329). Covic and Jones (2008) contend that writing allows students to develop language and construct knowledge, and therefore meaning, but the onus is on the instructor to present writing as a learning strategy, since students are more likely to see essay-writing as a task that must be completed, rather than an ongoing learning opportunity.

In a seminal inquiry into the effectiveness of feedback, Dohrer (1991) set out to examine "the effect of teachers' actual comments on students' writing" (p. 2). Dohrer's premise, that feedback can only be an effective learning tool if revision and interaction are encouraged, was borne out in his conclusions. Dohrer found that feedback must be based on an explicit agreement between teachers and students regarding the value of writing, and that feedback should be considered as separate from grading. The feedback itself, according to the students Dohrer interviewed, had to consist of a reasonable number of comments; an overload of comments was perceived as overwhelming and frustrating, and useful information got lost. Dohrer's study supported Sommer's contention (1982) that too many written comments

"distract students" (cited in Dohrer, p. 6). Fewer comments, expressed clearly and specifically reflective of the stated values, were perceived as more effective (see also Crisp, 2007).

Along the same lines, Poulos and Mahony (2008) conducted a series of focus group discussions in order to achieve a "deeper understanding of the meaning and significance of feedback for students and the interpretation of 'effective' from the students' perspective" (p. 144). Although Poulos and Mahony began with the same premise that so many contemporary researchers share – namely, that effective feedback contributes to the construction of learning and knowledge – the researchers found that students struggled with the notion of effective feedback, and like Chanock, contend that the onus is on the instructors to teach students how to use feedback effectively. Poulos and Mahony also found that the credibility of the instructor has a direct impact on the effectiveness of their feedback; students are more likely to consider feedback from a respected instructor than comments from a teacher who is not effective in the classroom.

Whether or not that feedback is indeed interpreted, and interpreted correctly, by students is obviously a concern. Wiltse (2002) begins with the premise that feedback is effective in promoting student learning and improvement, but that the feedback itself must be examined in terms of ease of interpretation and application. Based on his review of the literature, Wiltse hypothesizes that there is a positive correlation between how students feel about writing in general, their own writing skills, and their goals as writers and whether or not the students would use instructor feedback. His study, dealing specifically with American students in mass communication programs, narrowed the research to students for whom writing is presumably of greater importance than it is for students in other fields. Although Wiltse concludes that his results only partially support his hypothesis (p. 136), his findings are important both because his research focused on students who "face more writing situations" (p. 135), and because the findings supported previous research indicating student preference for task-oriented comments. Gibbs and Simpson (2002)

support this latter idea, stating specifically that "feedback has to be quite specific to be useful" (Condition 5), and that the feedback must focus on learning and on process, rather than on the students themselves (Condition 6). Furthermore, Gibbs and Simpson advocate timely feedback that is relevant to the assessment and the related criteria. Finally, as many other proponents of formative feedback, Gibbs and Simpson reiterate the importance of subsequent action on the part of the student, which they argue can be encouraged by the instructor through a variety of strategies (Conditions 10 & 11). Similarly, Hounsell (1995) advocates feedback that shows students how and why corrections must be made, and suggests that comments phrased as questions, rather than directions, will be better received and thus acted upon by students. Hounsell cautions, however, that tutors should not be discouraged if comments are disregarded by students, who, he says, may not all be engaged in the required "academic discourse" (p. 56).

As teachers, we may believe that our criteria, instructions, and written feedback are very clear, but the recipients of our messages may not read them as we intended, or apply them as we expect. Sadler (1998) identifies factors that may delay or distort results of studies on the effectiveness of feedback; the most influential of the factors, "temporal conditioning," refers to the notion that students are conditioned to ineffective or even "defective" feedback, as well as a wide variety in the nature, amount and depth of feedback provided by different teachers. Through temporal conditioning, Sadler claims, students learn "survival habits" (p. 77) which must be overcome in order to establish a more effective learning culture.

Even without "survival habits" to overcome, students require training to use feedback effectively; as Sadler points out, it cannot be assumed that "students… will know what to do with" feedback (p. 78). Price and O'Donovan (2006), among others, point out that "to realise their full potential in any assessment, students need to understand the assessment task, criteria and expected standards, and subsequently their feedback, so they can develop their learning and improve future performance" (p. 100). While few educators would disagree, many don't recognize gaps between

their intentions and their students understanding. Price and O'Donovan argue that "in practice, a description that is considered precise and clear by the author will be viewed very differently by recipient students" (p. 101); this reflects Sadler's notion of "fuzzy" criteria, and emphasizes the importance of interaction between teachers and students with regard to feedback, which, Price and O'Donovan point out, is "the most important part" of assessment, with the potential to affect "future learning and student achievement" (p. 106)

Many other researchers have discussed the problem of student misinterpretation or mishandling of feedback. In South Africa, Ellery (2008) conducted a study in which students were given only formative feedback, with no grade, on a first instance of an essay test. Students were allowed to rewrite, based on verbal and written feedback. Most naturally took the opportunity; while the class tended to perform better on the second essay, students did not demonstrate any real improvement in terms of self-assessment, even though they did find the feedback itself helpful. Ellery's interviews with students revealed that students were not used to judging their own work, or that of peers (p. 424). She concludes that despite the lecture time lost to a formative feedback and revision process, the gains in learners' abilities to self-assess make such a process essential. She claims that higher education must be concerned with "the development of independent, autonomous, lifelong learners" (p. 427); therefore, as educators, "we need to provide time for assessment-related learning practices" (p. 428).

Ultimately, most researchers conclude that task-specific feedback, rather than empty praise, can be an effective learning tool; Bardine, Bardine and Deegan (2000) and Nichol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) come to the same conclusion in their studies, reporting that students appreciated feedback that was clear, specific, and focused on areas of concern, and that only praised when warranted. More specifically, Lizzio and Wilson (2008) determined that developmental feedback that provided strategies to help students bridge the gap between their performance and the expected results was perceived by students as the most effective; this student perception

validates Lizzio and Wilson's contention that effective feedback "should contribute to knowledge of performance and the nature of the performance gap between actual and ideal performance" (p. 264).

In summary, recent literature makes four basic points:

- Feedback is a learning tool through which teachers communicate to students regarding gaps between student performance and desired or expected results.
- Feedback is an essential aspect of constructivist pedagogy, but approaches to assessment and feedback have lagged behind other aspects of pedagogy in the paradigm shift from the behaviourist model.
- Feedback can be constructive if revision and interaction are encouraged. Students perceive feedback as an opportunity to learn from their mistakes; however, this potential can only be realized if students are given the opportunity to implement that learning directly.
- Feedback is frequently ignored or misunderstood by students; interactivity in the feedback process, particularly in the context of rewriting written work based on instructor comments, encourages students to apply feedback more effectively.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION/OPERATIONALIZATION OF CONCEPTS

This study explores the consistency of feedback provided to students on written work, particularly literary essays, by English teachers in four Montreal-area English Cégeps.

Generally speaking, the criteria applied to marking the Ministerial Examination of College English are widely used in individual courses as a basis for assessment of student writing. These criteria are divided into three categories: comprehension and insight, organization of response, and expression.

Table 1

Ministerial Examination of College English Criteria

Criterion	Objectives to be Met
Comprehension and Insight	1. recognition of a main idea from the selected reading
	2. identification of techniques and/or devices as employed by the author
	3. evidence of critical or analytical interpretation of the selection
	4. references which demonstrate understanding of the reading
Organization of Response	1. statement of a thesis about the text
	2. structured development of the essay
	3. use of supporting detail
	4. unified paragraph structure
Expression	1. appropriate use of words
	2. varied and correct sentence structures
	3. correct grammar
	4. conventional spelling, punctuation, and mechanics

From the Gouvernement du Québec. (2011). Ministerial Examination of College English, Language of Instruction and Litterature (sic). Marking Guide.

According to the MELS objectives for English courses, as detailed in Table **1**, comprehension and insight consists of the ability to recognize the main idea of a given reading, identify the argumentative techniques or literary devices used by the author, interpret the text critically or analytically, and use references to demonstrate understanding (Gouvernement du Québec 2008). Organization includes the ability to state a thesis and create structured, unified paragraphs which use detail to support the thesis; expression includes correct and appropriate use of vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and punctuation (Gouvernement du Québec 2008). For the purposes of the Ministerial Examination of College English, these three criterion

categories are weighted equally, and a student must pass all three in order to pass the exam.

In order to facilitate the study, the MELS criteria, that is, comprehension/insight, organization, and expression, are assumed to be the constant standard for assessment of written work in the Cégep English classroom. Consistency, then, refers to how closely the feedback provided to the student reflects the details of the criteria and the equal weighting on the criteria, as well as how comparable feedback is between teachers in terms of the amount and the nature of the feedback provided by the individual teacher.

Students are eligible to write the Ministerial Examination of College English after completing the first three English courses.[4] As such, teachers often structure course assessments to reflect the criteria of the Exam, often basing their own marking rubrics on the Ministerial criteria. However, the feedback provided to students on written work does not necessarily reflect the three criterion categories consistently; in fact, previous exploratory study suggests that "most instructors [focus] their in-text feedback on errors or weaknesses in expression" even though the same instructors indicate consideration of all three categories in determining a grade (McDonnell 2006). Furthermore, because different teachers use different feedback styles and diacritical marks, students don't necessarily see patterns in the feedback they receive, and thus find it difficult to apply this feedback to their learning. Finally, in general,

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[4] All students must begin their Cégep English courses with 603-101, Introduction to College English. Most colleges allow students to take the remaining three courses in any order; the requirements for the Ministerial Examination of College English are based on the assumption that students will take 603-102, Literary Genres, and 603-103, Literary Themes, in their second and third semesters, leaving 603-HXX (B-block), typically English for the program, as their fourth and final course. The official eligibility requirements for the Ministerial Examination of College English are that students have successfully completed 603-101 and *either* 603-102 or 603-103, and are currently enrolled in their third course, the remaining 603-102 or 603-103. The B-block courses are not considered in determining a student's eligibility.

rewriting written assessments is not required, or is offered only as an optional phase of the assessment.

In order to determine how consistent feedback is within the English Cégep system, this study explores three key aspects of feedback provided to students: the amount of feedback provided, the nature of the feedback according to the defined criteria, and the relative importance of the three categories. In so doing, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How consistent is the feedback provided to students on written work in terms of the nature of the comments made?
2. How consistent is the amount of feedback provided?
3. How does the feedback reflect the stated instructional objectives, based on the MELS criteria?

CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

1. INTRODUCTION

As an exploratory study, the scope of this research is relatively limited. The sample represents approximately 10% of the larger population of English teachers in Anglophone Cegeps in Quebec, but with only 22 respondents, the results of the study can only be considered as indicating possible trends in the larger population. Below, the methods of recruiting respondents, collecting data, and coding that data are presented.

2. POPULATION

There are approximately 200 teachers in the English departments of the four colleges included in the study. The sample for this study consists of 23 voluntary respondents: 9 from College A, 6 each from College B and College C, and 1 from College D.

Since the sample is non-random, and participation was voluntary, care has been taken to address issues of bias in the analysis of the results and the subsequent discussion. Although the sample may represent a significant portion of the population, the results cannot be considered truly representative, as teachers for whom issues of feedback, constructivism, assessment and pedagogy generally are of little concern were naturally unlikely to participate.

3. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Four college English departments were approached to participate in this study (see APPENDIX A). All four colleges approved the study; one college

prohibited the use of any college name in any part of the report and imposed several other conditions, which, though detailed, were ultimately inconsequential to the actual study. On the other hand, this college's rigorous research committee process delayed the progress of the study; the responses from that department's respondents therefore were collected almost a year after their counterparts at the other three participating colleges.

Respondents were recruited through communication with the department coordinator at each college. In two cases, the researcher spoke directly to teachers within the departments to solicit participation, while in the other two colleges, the request was communicated through the coordinator. Interestingly, the participation rate did not seem to be affected by the method of recruitment, given that the two colleges with the lowest rate of participation were approached differently.

Respondents in the study have not been named in any reports generated. Each respondent was assigned a code through which the researcher can identify the respondent's college, but no further identifying information was required.

Respondents were informed of the nature of the study, the confidentiality of the study, and the nature of data handling and management, prior to signing a consent form (see APPENDIX B). Respondents were also informed upon completion of the study, and the results of the study distributed to the participating colleges. Data collected will be stored and kept for future reference in subsequent studies, as was explained to the respondents.

Descriptive data was collected through a questionnaire designed to elicit information about the respondents in terms of age, gender, education, years of experience, and current essay assessment practices (see APPENDIX C). No respondents were excluded based on responses to this questionnaire. Independent variables, such as previous teacher training, pedagogical orientation, and years of

experience within the English Cégep system were addressed through the questionnaire and are reflected in the analysis of collected data.

4.   RESEARCH METHODS

The primary source of data for the study was respondents' feedback on a sample student essay. Each respondent was provided with the same student essay, and instructed to provide feedback to the student in writing, and to assign a grade to the essay. The researcher then performed a content analysis of the feedback provided.

Since the focus of this study is to determine the consistency of feedback given by different teachers in different English departments, the primary task was to perform detailed content analysis of teacher feedback provided on a sample student essay. Self-reported surveys of teachers regarding feedback provided to students cannot be regarded as reliable, since respondents cannot judge how consistent their own feedback is relative to colleagues'. Surveys of students regarding feedback received might reveal a perceived level of consistency, but would not necessarily measure the consistency in the context of the ministerial criteria or the stated learning objectives of the assessment. Student surveys or other student-oriented research is also not appropriate simply because much of the previous research on feedback has focused on students; this study aims rather to examine feedback as an instructional strategy of the teachers.

The student essay chosen (see APPENDIX E) was written by a student in the researcher's Introduction to College English course; the student had previously given written permission to use his/her work anonymously for research. The original essay was handwritten, but was typed to further protect the student's anonymity (the typed version reproduces the original in all other aspects, including formatting and spelling). This essay was chosen because it was relatively strong yet had weaknesses in all three categories of criteria, that is, comprehension, organization and expression. The essay is a comparative analysis of two short stories, Kate Chopin's "The Story of

an Hour"[5] and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper,"[6] both of which are widely available, making it easier for respondents to refer to the literature as needed.[7]

Respondents were presented with a package which included the essay, and instructed to grade the essay, giving any comments or feedback the teacher would normally provide to a student in a mid-level Introduction to College English course. Respondents were asked to assign a grade out of ten or a percent grade. Respondents were further asked to assume that:

- The student was writing in response to the following instructions:

    Essay, 350-500 words (10%)

    The protagonists in "The Story of an Hour" and "The Yellow Wallpaper" face the same kind of conflict. In your essay, discuss the symbolic significance of the setting in both stories. How does the setting symbolize what the characters are facing? Is the symbolism of the setting ironic or direct?

- The student was provided with a suggested thesis statement;

- The student wrote the essay in class, with access to the texts and any notes the student may have made prior during class discussion;

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[5] Chopin, Kate. "The Story of an Hour". *Elements of Literature*. 3rd Canadian ed. Eds. Robert Scholes, Nancy R. Comley, Carl H. Klaus and David Staines. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2004. 69-70

[6] Perkins Gilman, Charlotte. "The Yellow Wallpaper" *The Heath Introduction to Fiction* 3rd ed. Ed. John J. Clayton. New York: D. C. Heath and Company, 1988. 224-237

[7] It should be noted that respondents were not explicitly asked to read the short stories.

- The texts were discussed in class, and the student was expected to have read the texts for that discussion;

- The essay question itself was not revealed prior to the class writing session;

- The student wrote the essay in the first third of the semester.

5. CONTENT ANALYSIS

This analysis measured not only the number of comments provided, but more importantly the nature of these comments, to determine if they are marginal words, marginal phrases, marginal abbreviations, diacritical marks, other indicators, or longer reflective notes. Comments from teachers were coded into three general categories, corresponding to the three general criteria (comprehension/insight, organization and expression).

Coding of the data was partly based on models suggested by previous studies. For instance, a recent British study of written feedback (Brown & Glover, 2006) classified comments into six primary categories:

- Comments which focused on comprehension/insight;

- Comments which focused on skills;

- Comments which encouraged further learning;

- Comments which focused on motivation;

- Comments which were essentially discouraging.

Brown and Glover further categorized comments according to the level of intervention:

- Indication of an error

- Correction of the error

- Explanation for correction (pp. 83-84)

Roberge (2008) divided comments into the same three criteria used in most English Cégep courses and reflected in the Ministerial Examination of College English. She further points out that any and all mark left by the teacher on the student's work must be considered:

> Written feedback is defined as a fragment of dialogue between the teacher and the student and this comment, underlining the strengths and weaknesses, appears on the student's work in areas typically reserved for comments: the margin, the header, the bottom of the page (Halté, 1984, as cited in Roberge, 2008). These comments, long or short, touch on form, organization of the text and comprehension/insight. What must be understood in this definition is that any mark on the student's work is a comment. (p. 2, my translation).

In fact, based on the data collected, as well as the intent of the study, the categories and sub-categories became:

- Focus of comment, in order to determine whether the equal weighting of criteria was reflected in the feedback:
  - Comments which focused on content

    Comments related to comprehension/insight, that is, the student's analysis and support.

  - Comments which focused on organization

    Comments related to essay organization, including comments about the thesis statement and paragraph structure.

  - Comments which focused on expression

    Comments related to use of language, including vocabulary, spelling, grammar and so on.

o Unexplained graphical indicators

In collecting the data, it became clear that this fourth category was necessary. Any graphics which were not clearly explained, either previously in the text or on a separate comment sheet with a legend, are considered unexplained. In the papers studied, these included circled words or phrases, underlined words or phrases, arrows, carats, and question marks. Because these graphics are unexplained, it is not possible to categorize them accurately in terms of focus; they must therefore be included as a separate item in this category.

- Nature of comment, that is, the manner in which the student was addressed through the feedback:

  o Comments which indicated an error

  These comments provide the student with a signpost that an error has been committed. For example, the teacher might indicate an error in vocabulary by writing "word choice" above the incorrect word.

  o Comments which corrected an error

  Rather than indicating the error, these comments provide the correction. For example, the teacher might correct a vocabulary error by writing the better word choice above the incorrect word.

  o Comments which explained an error

  These comments indicate an error to the student and provide an explanation. In this case, the teacher might indicate an error in vocabulary by writing why the incorrect word cannot be used.

  o Comments which asked the student a question

These comments suggest an error or a gap in the analysis by asking the student a question. For example, the teacher might write "what other word might work better here?" to suggest to the student that the original vocabulary choice is not ideal.

- Placement of comment:
    - Marginal comments

        These are comments written in the margins of the student's essay, including words, abbreviations and graphics, if these are clearly explained. Graphical comments are considered explained if the teacher has provided a legend of graphics and/or has indicated the meaning of the graphic on a previous comment. For example, if the teacher has underlined an error and indicated the nature of the error, subsequent errors which are underlined are considered explained. Marginal comments also include comments written in the top and bottom margins of the page.

    - In-text comments

        Like marginal comments, in-text comments may include explained words, abbreviations, and explained graphics. These comments are written in the text of the student essay, usually between lines.

In summary, the feedback provided by the 22 respondents was considered from five different angles: first, the focus of the comments in relation to the three criteria, that is, comprehension, organization, and expression; next, the nature of the feedback in terms of how comments were phrased; third, the amount of feedback provided relative to other respondents; then, how graphics and other symbols or abbreviations were used; and finally, in terms of what opportunities are given to the student to interpret and apply the feedback provided.

CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

1. INTRODUCTION

The results of the study demonstrate that there are indeed inconsistencies in the feedback given to students by individual teachers. These inconsistencies occur in various aspects of the feedback, as described in detail below. The results of the study were also considered in light of the information provided by respondents on the questionnaire, which provides some context for understanding these inconsistencies.

2. QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Effective feedback, specifically formative feedback, depends on effective teachers, who, according to Sadler (1998), manifest six essential traits: content knowledge, an attitude toward teaching, pedagogical skill, deep knowledge of the standards and criteria, evaluative experience, and "expertise in framing feedback" (p. 80-82). Respondents in the study were asked, through the questionnaire (see APPENDIX C), several questions designed to provide some context in terms of these traits.[8] Of the 23 respondents, more than half (52%) have been teaching at the Cégep level for more than ten years; a further 13% have been teaching at this level between six and ten years. In terms of education, 57% of respondents hold an MA in Literature. Another 4% hold an MA in Creative Writing, and 4% an MA in another discipline. The remaining respondents hold PhDs in Literature (13%), Education (9%) or other disciplines (13%).

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[8] Please note that while 23 questionnaires were collected, only 22 participants completed the second stage of the study, correcting the essay. All data referring to actual feedback, therefore, are based on a pool of 22, while all data referring to demographics, personal practice, experience and so on are based on the slightly larger pool of 23.

Respondents were asked about their teacher training as well as teaching experience. As indicated above (p. 21), teacher qualifications at the Cégep level are based on studies and experience in the discipline, as opposed to studies in education. While most Cégeps include teaching experience in job postings, these posting rarely include certification in teaching as a requirement for consideration for employment. A recent posting at one Anglophone college, for a teacher in the professional theatre department, included the following requirements:

- Bachelor's degree in Theatre Arts or equivalent
  Or
- A diploma from a recognized post secondary theatre program with extensive and specialized experience may be considered equivalent;
- Minimum of 3 years directly related experience in the profession;
- Demonstrated knowledge of the particular subject (s) to be taught;
- Ability to teach in other theatre areas an asset;
- Several years related teaching experience at the post-secondary level preferred;
- Excellent English communication skills essential. (John Abbott College)

Similarly, a recent posting at another college, for a teacher in Early Childhood Education, included the following requirements "related to the specific position":

- Master(s) degree in the discipline or equivalent (equivalent being: mixture of graduate courses, research and fieldwork in the discipline);
- Minimum of three (3) years of teaching experience;
- Minimum of two (2) years of industrial experience;
- Bilingualism an asset. (Vanier College, Job Posting T-1407)

For candidates in English, as well as several other pre-university program courses, the requirements are even simpler: a Master's degree "in the discipline or equivalent (equivalent being: mixture of graduate courses, research and fieldwork in the discipline)" and a "minimum of three (3) years of teaching experience" (Vanier College, Job Posting T-1405).

Based on the typical qualifications sought in teaching candidates for Cégep positions, one might assume most teachers working in the Cégep system, therefore, have been educated in their discipline, rather than in pedagogy. This assumption is borne out by the responses from the sample, though, again, it bears repeating that the sample is small. When asked about their "primary academic focus," only 9% indicated "education," while 87% indicated "literature" or "creative writing" (Figure **1**).
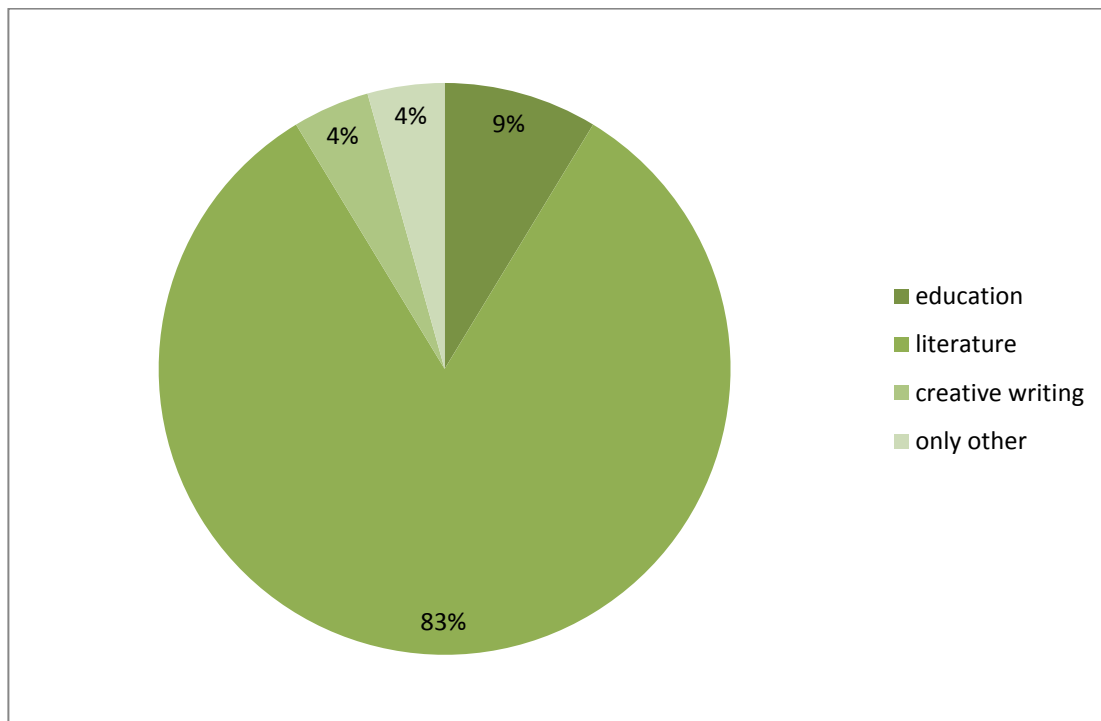

Figure 1. Academic Focus of Teachers

Given the assumption that most teachers would not have formal education in pedagogy, respondents were also asked about informal teacher training and any formal training begun after being hired as a teacher. Most respondents reported having attended workshops, typically at their institution's Pedagogical Development Day or in departmental sessions as well as the annual English Provincial Curriculum Committee conference. Several teachers also said they have taken one or more

Performa courses through the Master Teacher Program of the Université de Sherbooke, and a few have certificates in teaching composition or teaching English as a Second Language. Some teachers also mentioned informal or formal mentoring as a source of training, as well as independent reading and consultation with colleagues. There were a number of interesting responses from individual teachers as well, including one who writes a blog about education, and many teachers who identified, in retrospect, training opportunities in everything from being a camp counselor to being a peer tutor in high school.

Teachers were also asked about their experience at Cégep, both as a teacher and as a student. Only six of the respondents attended Cégep as a student, and one of these withdrew from college in the first semester. With one exception, the rest of the respondents did not attend Cégep because they were not Quebec residents during their studies; the final respondent reported being "too old" to have attended Cégep. In terms of teaching experience, as reported above, most respondents have been teaching at the Cégep level for six years or more. Approximately half the respondents reported that most or all of their teaching experience was at the Cégep level, although some of these have, like their counterparts, taught primary and secondary school, university courses, adult education courses, and language schools.

3. FOCUS OF COMMENTS

First, comments were assessed to determine whether or not feedback provided is consistent with the stated instructional objectives, based on the MELS criteria. In this analysis, comments were identified as follows:

- Comments which focused on comprehension/insight
- Comments which focused on organization
- Comments which focused on expression
- Unexplained graphical indicators

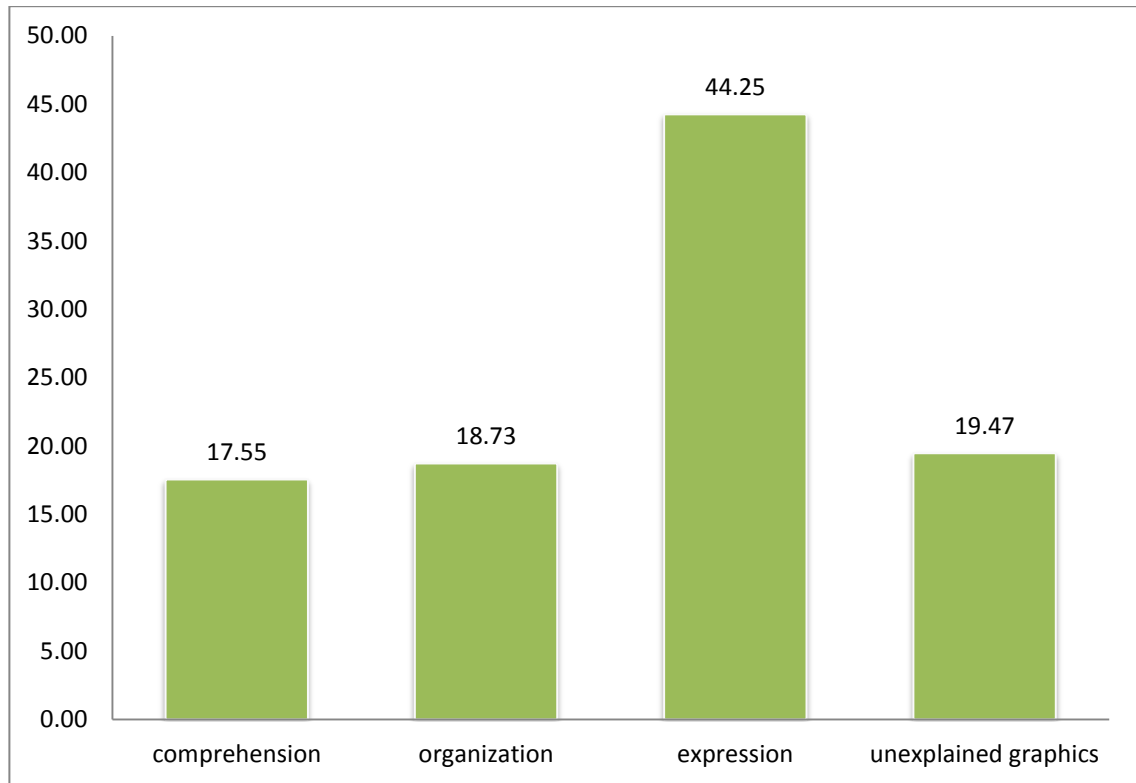The results of this analysis are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Feedback Consistency Across Criteria

The clear imbalance, in favour of comments related to expression, echoes the findings in this researcher's previous, smaller study. The apparent focus on expression is further emphasized when one considers that the unexplained graphics, which represent 19% of the comments provided, are typically meant to indicate errors in expression, although this meaning may not be clear to the student.

Again, because unexplained graphics cannot be validly categorized, they must be considered as a fourth subcategory of comment (see below, p. 63). If unexplained graphics are removed from considered and the analysis focusses exclusively on the

ratio between comprehension/insight, organization and expression, an imbalance is still revealed, as demonstrated in Figure 3.
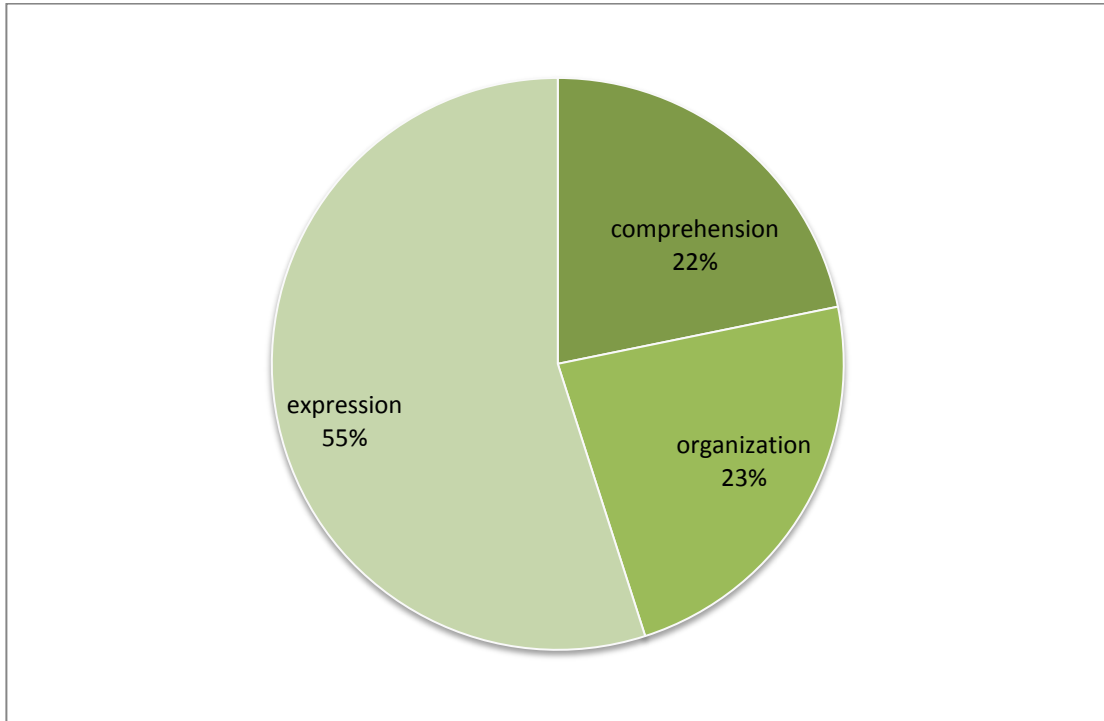

Figure 3. Ratio of Feedback Categories

There are three possible explanations for the apparent emphasis on expression. First, teachers pay close attention to errors and weaknesses in expression because the number of students who are writing in English as a second or third language naturally means that in general, expression is the area which requires the most attention by the largest number of students. A recent study by the *Conseil Supérieur de la Langue Française* (2011) shows that the percentage of students whose mother tongue is English enrolled at an Anglophone Cégep fluctuates between 52.4% and 55.4%, indicating that almost half the students enrolled in English-

language colleges are using English as a second, third or even fourth language (p. 8).[9] If the population of the typical English class reflects the overall enrolment of the college, it is a safe assumption on the part of the teacher that close to half the students will need remedial or at least comprehensive instruction in skills related to expression.

Alternatively, the abundance of comments, including unexplained graphics, related to expression may simply reflect the nature of the criteria; that is, while a single comment related to organization may refer to an entire paragraph, within that same paragraph, comments may refer to sentence construction, spelling, grammar and word choice. Finally, teachers may place an emphasis, consciously or not, on expression when assessing written work, while in-class discussion focusses instead on comprehension/insight, and pre-writing exercises focus on organization; in other words, the written work represents only part of the learning exercise, and therefore the feedback given reflects the compartmentalized nature of the assessment.

Regardless of why the emphasis appears to be on expression, the fact remains that as seen by the student, this imbalance implies an undervaluing of comprehension/insight and organization. For students who are strong in expression or overall, the implication is not likely detrimental; however, for weaker students, it becomes imperative to be clear, through the feedback, about where the performance gap lies and how it can be bridged. Consider the distribution of comments in the context of the grade given, as seen in Figure 4:

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[9] The same study suggests, however, that allophone (that is, students whose mother tongue is neither French nor English) enrolment is dropping; allophone enrolment accounted for 24% of the student population at English colleges in 1998 but has dropped to just under 19% as of 2009 (p. 9).
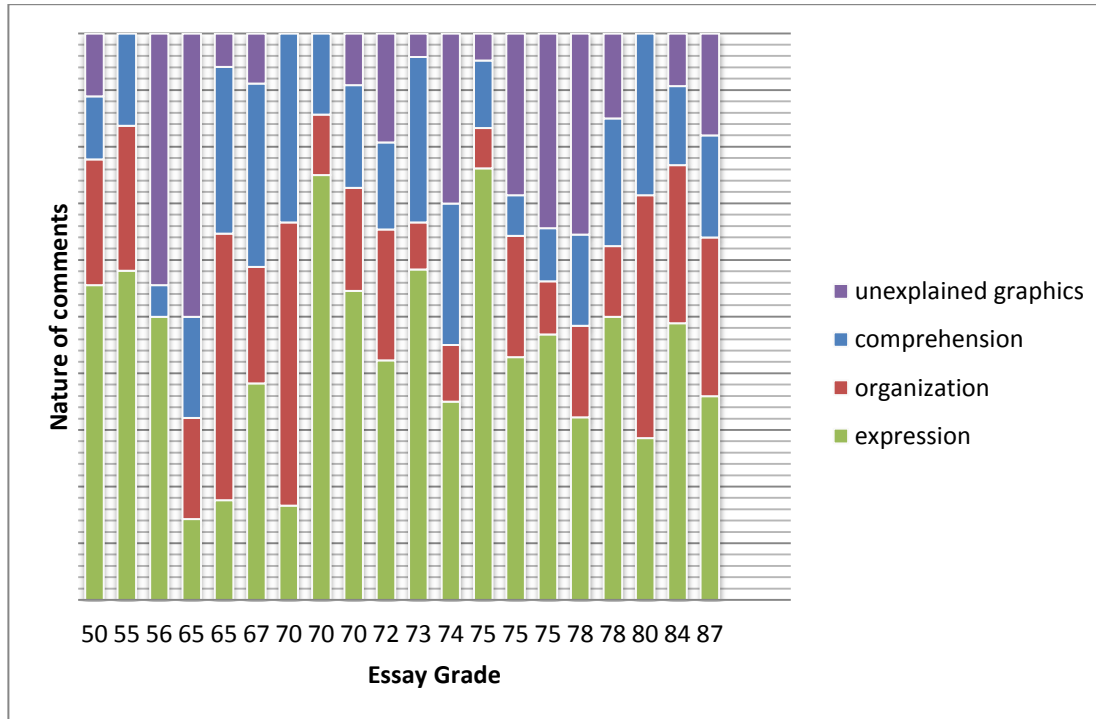
Figure 4. Distribution of Feedback Relative to Grade Assigned[10]

As seen in Figure 4, there is a certain consistency in the distribution of comments by nature (i.e., comprehension/insight, organization, expression, and unexplained graphics) across the range of grades awarded; interestingly, there appears to be a spike in comments related to organization in the low-passing grades. Disconcertingly, there is a significant dominance of unexplained graphics on papers which were given 56% and 65%; this is of particular concern for the student who gets back a paper with a failing grade, 56%, and very little clear feedback. Again, in the context of Sadler's "fuzzy" feedback, in such cases, the student will benefit from more, and more clearly explained, feedback.

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[10] Please note that in the Quebec Cégep system, the pass mark is 60%.

One other consideration is the use of marking rubrics. Teachers who use a marking rubric as a supplement to their feedback might provide less direct feedback on the student work if they can rely on the rubric to complement that feedback. Respondents were asked whether or not they provide marking rubrics to students, and if so, whether these rubrics were the same for all assignments and levels, that is, introductory, post-introductory and discipline-specific courses:
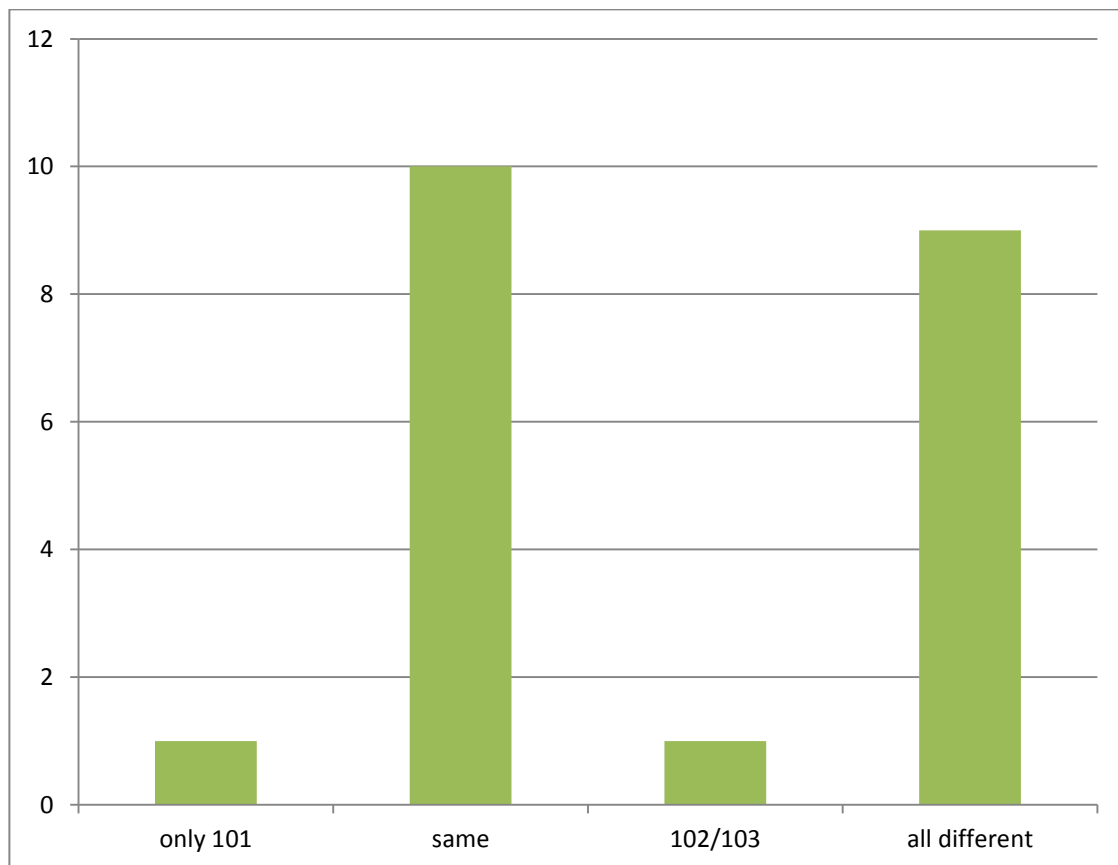

Figure 5. Use of Rubrics

An overwhelming 91% (that is, 20 of the 23 questionnaire respondents) reported that they did use some form of rubric; most of these reported that they used rubrics in all levels, with an almost-even split between those who used one rubric for all levels and those who used different rubrics for each level, as shown in Figure 5.

Respondents who use rubrics were also asked if they had designed the rubrics themselves, or if they used a rubric from another source. Most teachers reported that their rubrics were adapted from departmental or colleagues' rubrics or based on the Ministerial Examination of College English criteria (see above, p. 37). Respondents were then asked how familiar their students were with their rubrics, and what instructions or guidelines were given to students in interpreting and applying feedback. Many respondents reported that students were provided with the rubric as part of the course material at the beginning of the semester (see, for example, APPENDIX G), while others provided the rubric as part of the material for the individual assignments; presumably those who used different, specific rubrics for each assignment use the latter method of distribution, while those who use a uniform rubric for all assignments use the former. Certain teachers use the rubric specifically as part of the learning process; for instance, one teacher explained that students use the rubric "throughout their writing process. [The teacher gives] it out in stages, for example, when working with introductions they only get this section of the rubric. [These] rubrics are very specific." Among teachers who provide a rubric in one form or another prior to completion of an assignment, about half indicated that they review the rubric with students, while the rest made the rubric available without in-class discussion.

4. NATURE OF COMMENTS

The next question to be addressed was whether or not feedback provided to students on written work is consistent in terms of the nature of the comments made. As indicated above, the subcategories in this area are

- Comments which indicated an error
- Comments which corrected an error
- Comments which explained an error
- Comments which asked the student a question.

From the teacher's perspective, error indication may be the fastest method of providing feedback; however, it is likely the least effective in terms of learning. Hounsell (1995) advocates feedback that shows students how and why corrections must be made, and suggests that comments phrased as questions, rather than directions, will be better received and thus acted upon by students. Consider, for instance, the different comments from respondents to the student's statement "this story was written a very long time ago, so it is easy to imagine how society shaped women back then":

Figure 6. Examples of Nature of Comments

In Figure 6, the inconsistencies in the nature of feedback, that is, questioning feedback, corrective feedback, explanatory feedback or indicative feedback, are demonstrated. Examples 1 and 2 use a single word to indicate to the student that this statement needs consideration; the first example implies to the student that the only thing missing from the statement is a documented reference. The second example goes a little further in terms of identifying the performance gap, by suggesting to the student that the statement needs explanation. The third example also asks for an explanation, but explains why such an explanation is necessary; the ninth example is quite similar in intent, but asks the student a question instead of just explaining the problem. Examples 6 and 7 are remarkably different from the other examples: example 6 does not directly suggest that anything needs to be addressed in the student's work, but rather enters into a dialogue with the student about what was written. Example 7, on the other hand, tells the student exactly what is missing but does not leave any room for dialogue.

In the context of effective feedback, that is, feedback that fosters learning and creates an interaction between teacher and student and provides information to the student regarding the performance gap, examples 3 and 9 are the most effective.

The distribution of comments from all respondents according to form is indicated in Figure 7:
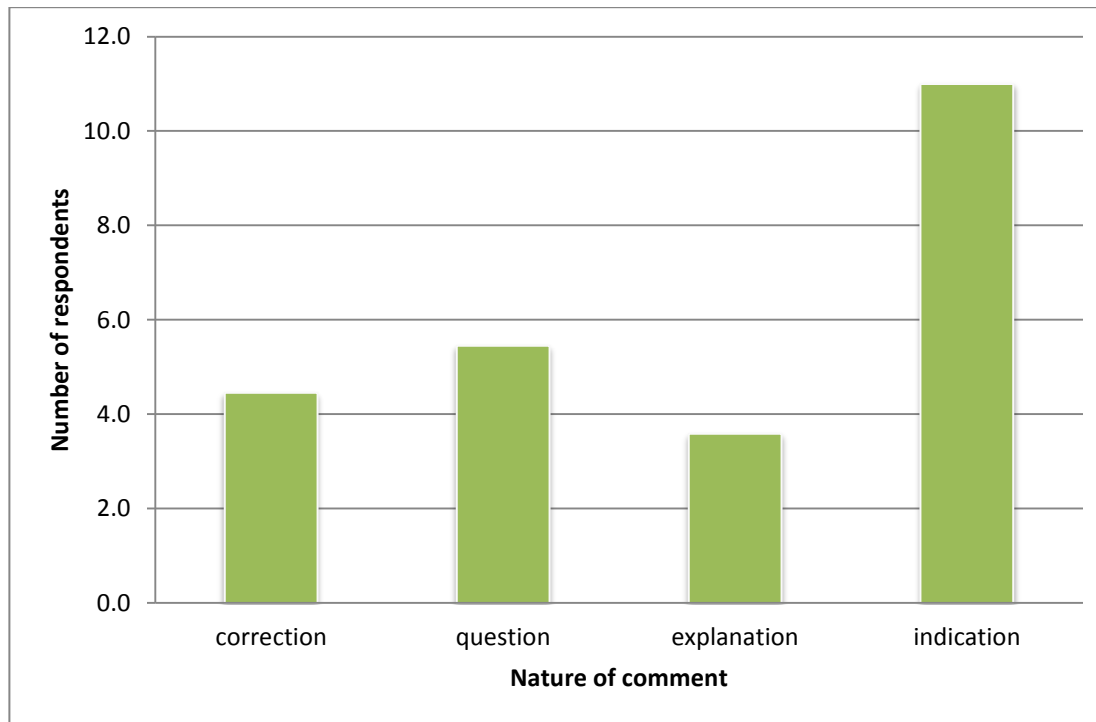
Figure 7. Nature of Comments

As indicated in Figure 7, almost half the feedback provided (45%) indicated an error, without providing an explanation or correction. This is at least partly explained by the fact that indicative comments include graphics and abbreviations, which are naturally excluded from questions, explanations and corrections. There may be some correlation between the predominance of indicative feedback and the high proportion of comments related to expression; it is natural to simply indicate a spelling error, rather than explain or question the error, whereas questions and explanations in feedback may be better suited to comments regarding comprehension and insight.

5. AMOUNT OF FEEDBACK PROVIDED

Another aspect explored was whether or not the amount of feedback provided is consistent. Here, comments were considered in terms of the actual number of

individual comments, including graphics, provided by each respondent, as well as in terms of the position of the feedback provided, that is, whether comments were marginal or in-text. The total number of comments provided ranged from none to 69. On average, teachers provided 36 comments, although it must be remembered that this figure includes graphics, explained or not. Typically, in-text comments were provided twice as often as marginal comments, again including graphics and abbreviations.

The placement of the comments is perhaps not problematic; however, the volume of feedback, or more specifically, the inconsistencies in the amount of feedback provided, does raise some questions. If, as suggested by Dohrer (1991), "an overload of comments [is] perceived as overwhelming and frustrating," then it is not enough to suggest that all teachers should try to give more feedback; instead, clearly, it becomes a matter of providing enough feedback to give the student authentic information about the performance gap, without overwhelming the student with so much feedback that the most useful information gets lost.

The inconsistencies in terms of the amount of feedback provided is most evident in final comments, which provide a general reflection of the essay as a whole and are typically written at the bottom of the last page of the student's paper. In the sample, some teachers wrote final comments on the back of the last page, on the facing page, or on a separate paper stapled to the student's essay. Nineteen respondents included final comments (see APPENDIX F). The number of words in these comments ranges from 12 words to 328 (the student essay itself is 593 words). On average, the final comments were 72 words.

In the shortest final comment, the teacher comments "No quotations! You float around between conflict, irony, symbol, conflict and setting" (sic). Although the comment is short, the teacher has managed to touch on significant problems in both comprehension and organization. Very few of the final comments addressed all three

criteria; while the longest one did indeed address comprehension, organization, and expression, it is certainly possible that the student would feel overwhelmed by such a lengthy final comment. On the other hand, a comment of 79 words also manages to address all three criteria, albeit in less detail:

> Your sentences are well structured and generally clear and concise. Well done! I would suggest some restructuring of your essay though. I think it would make more sense to devote an entire paragraph to each story. This would be clearer and give you more room to discuss the symbolism of the respective settings, which is the subject of your essay. Try to quote more from the stories, and be sure to include a Works Cited page with your rewrite.

The inconsistencies in terms of the amount of feedback provided confirms what was observed in the previous study (McDonnell 2006). The implications of the variability in how much feedback each teacher provides to the student are twofold: first, some teachers may not be giving their students enough feedback, at least in the context of feedback as a formative learning tool designed to help students bridge the performance gap. Secondly, other teachers may be providing so much feedback that their students are overwhelmed, and cannot find the information needed to bridge the gap.

6. GRAPHICS AND CONSISTENCY

Finally, the issue of consistency in the graphics used to indicate errors was explored. In the previous study (McDonnell 2006), the researcher noted that different teachers used different symbols to indicate similar errors, thus possibly creating confusion for students. In the current study, teachers again used different symbols to indicate the same error. For example, to indicate a spelling error in the sentence "Without it, there would be noting interesting to read" (APPENDIX E), among the 16 respondents who noted the error, there are seven different notations, as seen in Figure **8**:
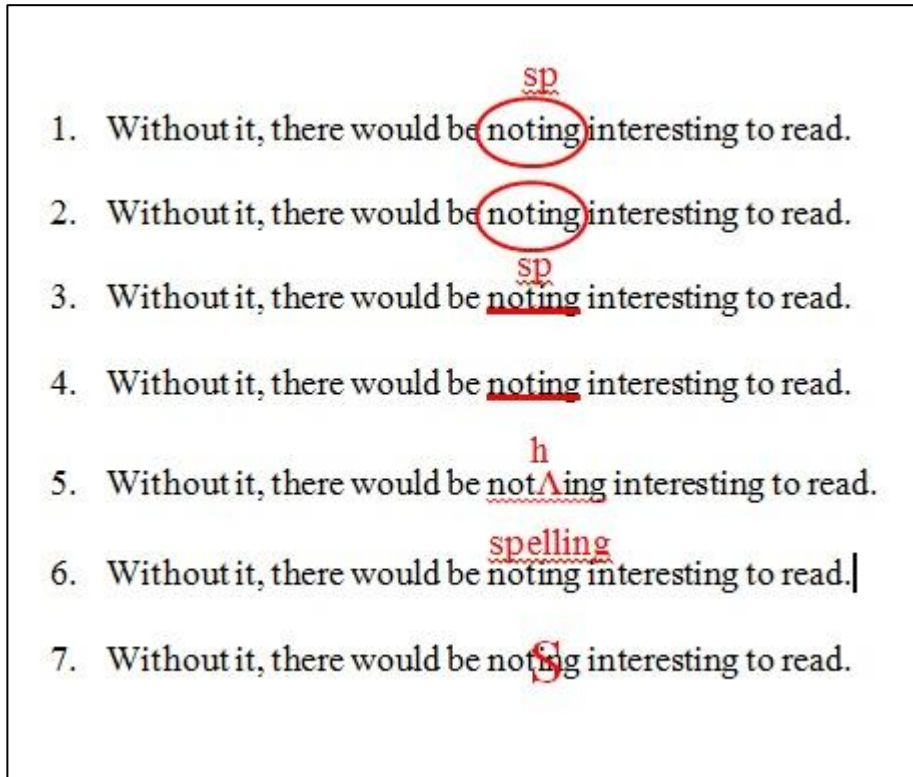
Figure 8. Indications of Spelling Error

Although seven of the teachers who indicated the spelling error used 'sp,' and one wrote 'spelling,' there are still eight teachers who did not indicate that the error was spelling; students therefore are alerted that there is an error, but are not directed in terms of how to recognize or correct the error. In fact, the teacher who used a large S to indicate the error, presumably intending to indicate spelling, used a very similar symbol ( ) to indicate another error, possibly in paragraphing, later in the essay. For a basic error such as spelling, students might be relied upon to interpret the feedback correctly, even if previous teachers used different notation. For a more complex error, such as a dangling or misplaced modifier, students may not know what the error is, nor how to correct it, especially if they are writing in English as a second language, or have not previously been taught about the error. In the sample essay, the student makes such an error at the bottom of the first page, which reads

"By connecting both stories, it is obvious that both Mrs. Mallard and the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" feel dominated by the men in their lives" (APPENDIX E). Once again, there were several ways to indicate the same error, as seen in Figure 9**Error! Reference source not found.**:

Figure 9. Indications of Dangling Modifier

While three of the examples in Figure 9 indicate the nature of the error, that is, a dangling modifier (examples 2, 3 and 6), the rest only indicate that something is amiss, without specifying the nature of the error. On the other hand, in example 5, the teacher uses the method advocated by Hounsell (1995), who suggests that comments be phrased as questions, rather than directions, in order to promote learning.

Using 'DM' (example 6) or 'w.w.' (example 4) is presumably shorthand employed by the teacher, and it is assumed that students have access to a list of correction symbols, either provided by the teacher or included in a grammar text used in the course. If students are given such a list, the unexplained graphics and other shorthand provided as feedback on student writing are explained separately, and the onus is on the student to refer to the legend for interpretation. However, it cannot be assumed that such a list is indeed provided. In the questionnaire, teachers were asked whether or not they provide a list of correction symbols. Eleven of the teachers surveyed said they did not provide a list of correction symbols; however, of these, only four did not qualify their response, while the rest explained that they discuss the symbols in class or otherwise provide some guidance for students to aid interpretation. The remaining teachers, who said they did provide a list of symbols, used a variety of methods to convey the information. Several teachers provide their list in the printed course text (teachers often compile readings, exercises and other course material into a course text, which is printed in-house, and sold exclusively in the campus bookstore). One respondent explained that as well as the page of symbols, the course text included two pages of numbered comments, approximately 35 statements, so as well as graphical indicators, this teacher uses a numerical indicator for frequently-used comments. Others provide an on-line document, which students can access through the course pages on the institution's course management server, or use the symbols proscribed in the course grammar text, and explain to students any variations unique to the instructor.

7. FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP

In terms of instructions or guidelines given to students regarding feedback, the teachers' responses again reveal what appears to be an inconsistency, especially when considered in the context of Price and O'Donovan's argument (2006), that while "students need to understand the assessment task, criteria and expected standards, and subsequently their feedback," many teachers don't realize that the instructions and guidelines they perceive as "precise and clear […] will be viewed very differently by recipient students" (pp. 100-101). Particularly since there are few departmentally- or institutionally-imposed rubrics, corrections symbols, or feedback templates, teachers must recognize that, as Sadler points out, it cannot be assumed that "students… will know what to do with" their feedback (p. 78), which may not reflect the style and symbols used in previous classes with different instructors. Thus, while many respondents reported that they instruct students to "pay close attention to the feedback on their essay," and that "evidence of them applying [the] feedback [will be] rewarded," the underlying assumption still seems to be that students do not require any special training in how to interpret or apply feedback. Most teachers did state that students are welcome to consult them regarding feedback, of course, but rather disconcertingly, several respondents did not even answer the question because they did not understand it (the question was "What instructions do you give to students regarding feedback?"), presumably because they do not feel that instructions are required, and that students will naturally or instinctively know what to do with their feedback.

As pointed out in the literature review above, feedback is frequently misunderstood by students, and the respondents self-reported methods of providing instructions for how to use feedback, that is, relying on students to intuitively understand feedback from different teachers and to seek help if they do not, may explain why so many teachers experience the frustration of having the feedback "ignored." If students don't actually understand the feedback, and perhaps not even

recognize that misunderstanding, they cannot be expected to apply that feedback effectively. Furthermore, as indicated by several studies mentioned above, interactivity in the feedback process, particularly in the context of rewriting written work based on instructor comments, encourages students to apply feedback more effectively. Feedback can be constructive if revision and interaction are encouraged. Students perceive feedback as an opportunity to learn from their mistakes; however, this potential can only be realized if students are given the opportunity to implement that learning directly, and perhaps the most effective opportunity is rewriting work on which the instructor has provided feedback.

Most teachers assign three essays in the 15-week semester; typically the last of these is the final assessment which measures the students' mastery of the competencies for the course. In an introductory level English course, this final assessment is typically a 750-word analytical essay, while post-introductory final assessments are 1,000-word essays or research papers. As indicated in Figure 10, most respondents reported that some rewrites were permitted and often encouraged, and that feedback was given, or made available, on pre-writing stages, particularly outline and draft work.
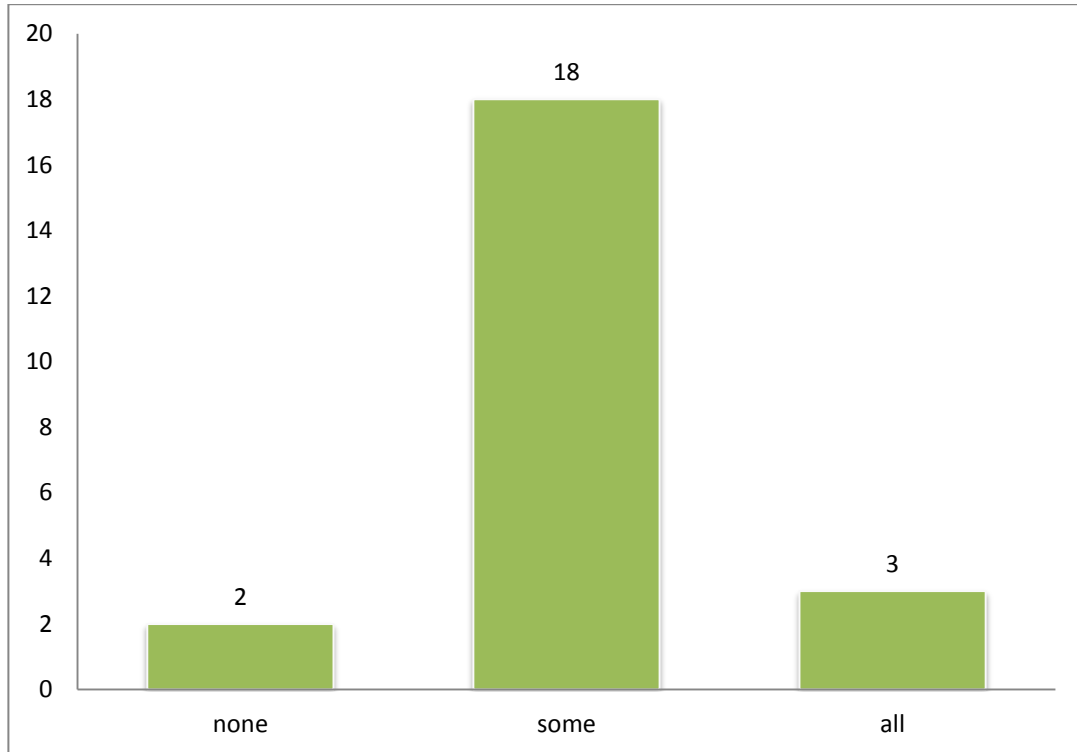
Figure 10. Essay Rewrites Permitted

Since most teachers naturally collect and evaluate the final essay at the end of the semester, it is perhaps unsurprising that when asked how many written assignments were allowed to be rewritten, the majority of respondents, 78%, said that some, but not all, essays could be rewritten.

More importantly in terms of the application of feedback is the question of whether rewrites are optional or mandatory. If students are permitted but not compelled to rewrite, many will choose not to rewrite, for a variety of reasons, including the low priority of General Studies coursework. Once again, teachers may become frustrated when carefully-considered feedback provided on a previous assignment is not reflected in subsequent work; however, if students are not compelled to apply feedback immediately, they are not likely to imprint the lessons of

the feedback. As seen in Figure 11, only 36% of respondents said that rewrites were mandatory; 59% said that rewrites were recommended or optional:
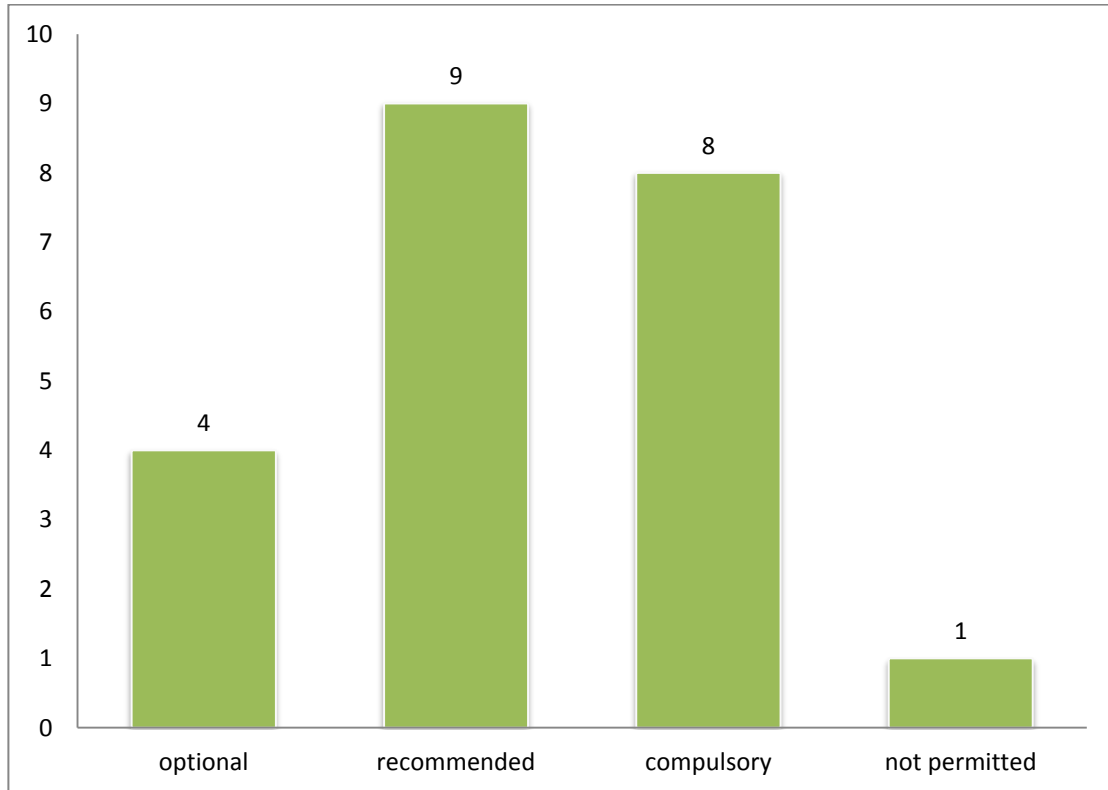
Figure 11. Nature of Rewrites

For feedback to be a learning tool, it must somehow be made relevant to the student, and applying feedback through rewrites is perhaps the most direct method of achieving this relevance; however, as indicated in Figure 11, few students are actually required to rewrite work, using teacher feedback. Sadler (1998) argues that chief among a teacher's responsibilities is training students to become independent learners, so that "teacher-supplied feedback [can] give way to self-assessment" (p. 82). Indeed, one of the key premises upon which Sadler bases his research (1989) is that students can only improve if they "develop the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work" (p. 119). Students must be taught how to interpret and apply

feedback, and cannot be relied upon to do so without teacher intervention. Respondents were therefore asked whether or not "students [were] required and/or permitted to discuss the process," either with the teacher or with "an on-campus learning centre or tutor?" (APPENDIX C). Most respondents reported that students are welcome and often encouraged to meet with the teacher or to consult with the institution's writing centre during the process, although only five teachers said that students were required to meet to discuss their work as part of the rewrite process (another two respondents reported that students in specific circumstances were obliged to consult with them prior to rewriting). The rest of those who said that rewrites were permitted, fifteen in all, said that students were permitted and sometimes encouraged to get help, whether from the teacher or the college writing centre. Some teachers were also open to peer tutors, although at least one teacher discouraged tutoring "because plagiarism [is a] risk."

In summary, from the sample analyzed, several areas of inconsistency in terms of feedback provided to students on written work were revealed; first, there was an imbalance of comments in terms of the three criteria, that is comprehension, organization and expression. There was also an inconsistency in terms of the nature of the feedback given, that is, in how comments were phrased. Finally, there was an inconsistency in terms of both the amount of feedback provided and the graphics and symbols used by individual teachers to indicate errors in expression.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

1. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The intent of this study was to explore how consistent English teachers at four English colleges in Montreal are in terms of the feedback they provide on students' written work. Based on the results, it seems that while there is consistency among teachers in certain aspects of their feedback and evaluation of students' written work, there remain some areas in which an effort must be made to make feedback a more valuable learning tool for students. The first inconsistency, the imbalance of comments which implies an undervaluing of comprehension and organization in favour of expression, is perhaps ultimately the least problematic, since this imbalance may simply reflect the nature of the student population and the nature of the assessment format. The inconsistencies in terms of the nature of comments, that is, how feedback is phrased, is again not particularly worrisome; students are exposed to many teaching styles and are not likely to be confused by one teacher asking questions through feedback while another teacher simply indicates errors. There does exist some room for pedagogical development in this area, since research suggests that students learn more from feedback which engages them, through questions, for example, than from feedback which merely corrects them (Hounsell 1997).

The biggest inconsistencies lay in the amount of feedback provided and the graphics and symbols used to indicate errors. Here, there is indeed the problem of creating confusion for students, who spend one semester with a teacher who tells them to watch their fused sentences, then move on to another teacher who berates them for comma splices, not realizing that both teachers are referring to the same kind of error. In terms of how much feedback is provided, respondents ranged from no

comments on the student paper at all to final comments that represented more than half the length of the student's essay.

2. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The most important limitation of this exploratory study is the sample size. Although approximately 10% of the entire population of teachers of English in Anglophone Cégeps participated in the study, this proportion was not reflected at individual colleges. Subsequent studies would ideally include more respondents from all colleges.

Another factor which may have influenced the results was the choice of assessment for which respondents were asked to provide feedback. Some respondents indicated that they do not use comparative essays as assessments in their own courses, and therefore found it difficult to assess the sample. Furthermore, although the reference texts chosen, "The Story of an Hour" and "The Yellow Wallpaper," are both widely available and frequently anthologized, the texts were not included in the participants' package, nor were respondents explicitly instructed to read the stories prior to reading the student's essay. As such, respondents may have been commenting on the student work without a deep understanding of the reference texts. As well, the respondents were asked to assume that "the texts were discussed in class" (APPENDIX D), but were at a disadvantage because they were not privy to the actual class discussions, and therefore had to make assumptions regarding what the student had been taught regarding both comprehension/insight and organization. For instance, although direct quotes from the text being analyzed are a standard requirement in Cégep English courses, the student did not use any quotes in the sample essay. Some respondents noted the lack of quotes in their feedback, while others did not mention it in their feedback to the student, but "presumed that students were told not to use quotes" (respondent notes). Other respondents mentioned that the essay question itself was not clear, and therefore they found it difficult to judge how well the student

had addressed the question. A suggestion for subsequent studies is to use a sample essay, or collection of essays, taken from the Ministerial Examination of College English. Since the exam is "designed to confirm that students have mastered the competencies" (Marking Guide, p. 1), it can be considered a common assessment, the nature and criteria of which should be more universally understood and accepted.

Finally, the scope of this study is deliberately limited to English courses at Anglophone colleges. However, several Cégeps are investing time and money into interdisciplinary literacy programs; subsequent research would do well to investigate how students in different disciplines interpret and apply feedback, and how the feedback practices of teachers in different disciplines – not to mention programs, colleges and languages – influence student learning.

3. DISCUSSION

As teachers, we hope to instill in our students an appreciation for learning; as researchers, we hope to contribute to our colleagues and our own understanding of pedagogy. Studies such as this one aim to provoke discussion, not just in English departments of English Cegeps, but in all institutions, to the benefit of our profession, and, ultimately, our students. As colleges and teachers move forward in their understanding of constructivist pedagogy, competency-based education and the value of interdisciplinary literacy, it is imperative that discussions take place concerning how, when, and why to provide effective feedback, and what role consistency has to play in making that feedback an effective learning tool.

If consistency in feedback is desirable, and judging by the various studies summarized above, it is, then one possibility is to institute departmental standards in the form of common rubrics and comment systems. In fact, in some colleges, there are discussions underway on how to evaluate literacy across the disciplines, and such common rubrics and systems might be useful tools for college-wide consistency.

Only one of the four college English departments which participated in this study currently use a departmental grading rubric, and in that case, the rubric is only required for that department's common final exam for the introductory level course. Interestingly, respondents from that college responded more positively when asked if they would consider using a common rubric, although even these teachers were somewhat reserved and did not fully endorse the idea of a common rubric. Teachers from the other three colleges were evenly divided in their response to the question. Teachers who rejected the notion felt that a common rubric would be "too limiting" or "restrictive," and would not reflect the individual teachers' teaching methods, criteria, and variety of assignments. Teachers who were open, with reservation, to the idea of a common rubric, emphasized that a shared system would only be possible with the understanding that individual teachers could adapt the rubric to specific assignments, or choose to use it or not, depending on the assignment in question. Most importantly, teachers felt it was crucial that a common rubric be open to discussion among the entire department, so that it was a communal creation rather than an imposed standard that did not fit their needs or criteria.

While the idea of a common or standard rubric may seem to be a natural means of ensuring consistency in grading, it also impedes teachers, who are accustomed to an autonomous grading process. Only one teacher felt that grading at the college level was not sufficiently autonomous; the rest characterized the grading process as "very autonomous," and many were clearly happy with this independence. At the same time, many teachers referred to informal and formal departmental consultation as an invaluable resource; some reported that they consulted with colleagues on "borderline" or "difficult" cases. Other teachers mentioned a variety of departmental resources, including individual mentors, grading workshops, norming sessions, and follow-up in the case of widely divergent pass/fail results. Some teachers seemed to feel that grading was essentially autonomous as long as teachers were all operating within the framework of the Ministerial competencies, while others reported that "grades vary greatly among teachers."

This study suggests that even when teachers are likely to evaluate similar work consistently in terms of numerical grade, the feedback given to students is not entirely consistent. Subsequent studies to examine this feedback from the student perspective may help departments determine if these inconsistencies do in fact impact student learning, and if so, the best course of action to take. Focus groups of teachers, in which participants could share feedback and marking practices, would also provide much-needed insight into the topic, and perhaps initiate further departmental measures to help members provide the best feedback for their students. Cross-disciplinary studies could go some way to build consistency across colleges, and emphasize a pandisciplinary appreciation of literacy. In the meantime, departments may consider offering workshops and norming sessions not only to address grading, but also to establish some common practices in feedback.

Whether or not consistency is possible or desirable, the results of this study underscore the importance of training students in the interpretation and application of feedback. As teachers, we devote a lot of energy to providing what we hope are carefully considered, valuable comments on each essay we correct. Even if teachers and departments cannot find consensus in terms of a common rubric or list of correction symbols, it behooves individual teachers to show their students how to use the feedback provided. Formative assessments, particularly in the form of scaffolded writing assignments with feedback offered at different stages, would provide teachers with an opportunity to demonstrate their feedback practices with no immediate penalty given to students who do not yet understand individual teachers' correcting symbols or assessment expectations.

Since beginning this research, the researcher has changed several aspects of her own assessment. Students are given a list of correction symbols, with examples, in their course text, including variations students may have encountered used by other teachers, as well as several blank lines for students to make note of symbols or abbreviations that may have been overlooked. In terms of feedback and formative

assessments, a scaffolded process teaches students how to organize an analytical essay, and how to use feedback more effectively. For the first essay of the semester, students are expected to work in groups to prepare a thesis statement, and subsequently an outline, using a template. They seek feedback from their peers first, then submit their work to the teacher for comments. This work is returned to students with no grade, but with comments, based on which students proceed to write a draft of their essay. This draft is also returned with no grade, but with more feedback from the teacher. At this stage, students are required to meet with the teacher individually to discuss the feedback. This individual meeting is perhaps the most important step in terms of training students how to use feedback more effectively; during this meeting, students can ask questions to clarify the feedback provided, and offer strategies for how to address the feedback. After this meeting, students write the corrected version of their paper, and are finally given a grade, as suggested in Sadler's list of effective feedback practices (1998). The grading rubric includes a mark for application of the feedback provided in previous stages of the process.

Students are also instructed to use the feedback, the correction symbols and marking rubric to identify their 'personal Big 3.' This exercise, in which students attempt to recognize error patterns in their writing – so, for instance, one student's 'Big 3' may be spelling, comma splicing and integration of quotes, while a different student's list might be logical organization, sentence fragmenting and correct use of literary terms. In subsequent essay assignments, students are asked to refer back to their 'Big 3' to anticipate areas that will need attention.

As students progress through the course, the scaffolding is gradually pared back. Students are not required to meet with the teacher after the second essay of the semester (although many do of their own initiative), and no draft is submitted for feedback for the final essay of the term. When students submit their final essay on the last day of class, they are told they will not get feedback unless requested; in May 2012, approximately 1/3 of students enrolled in the course asked for feedback on the

final essay, suggesting that at least some students have learned to appreciate feedback as a learning tool, and not just a checklist of what to fix for a better mark.

Anecdotally, almost every teacher has heard retiring colleagues remark that they won't miss all the correcting. Perhaps one way to cope is to stop thinking of it as "correcting" and start thinking of it as "assessment," a valuable part of the learning partnership. Every semester, English teachers spend hours reading and responding to student writing. While this exploratory study might not alleviate the amount of marking, perhaps it will remind us of the value of our work, and provoke a discussion of how to make our hours of commenting worthwhile. It is heartbreaking to spend so much time and mental energy providing feedback on papers, only to watch students check the grade then discard the paper with hardly a glance at our comments. If we can find ways to instill in our students an appreciation of the feedback, perhaps we will find it a little easier to pick up that red pen once again.

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APPENDIX A.

PROPOSAL to COLLEGES

Research Proposal: Summary Sheet

Master Teacher Program, May, 2006

Submitted to Ethics Review Boards in Local Cegeps

Attachments include: Research Proposal, Appendices, and MTP Ethics Guidelines
for Educational Research

Name Maggie McDonnell Date: March 5, 2010

1. <u>ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH PROJECT</u>

1.1 Location(s) of Study

Montreal, QC

- Champlain College (St-Lambert)
- Dawson College
- John Abbott College
- Vanier College

1.2 Title of Research Project

Consistent Feedback for a Constructivist Pedagogy: A Study of Feedback on
Written Assessments in Cegep English Courses

1.3 Statement of Purpose

This study proposes to examine the nature of feedback provided to students on written work, particularly literary essays, by English teachers in four Montreal-area English Cegeps.

Given the ministerial emphasis on communication skills in general and essay-writing and revision in particular, teachers must place their emphasis on helping students develop these skills. Beyond simply correcting superficial mechanical errors and grading papers, teachers need to find ways to encourage deeper learning and transferable skills. Research has shown that one instructional strategy, providing timely and pertinent feedback, helps students learn and retain new concepts, and build on prior knowledge. Feedback can also provide students with metacognitive skills; timely and relevant feedback on an essay can not only draw attention to areas of strength or weakness, but also, ideally, allow the students to develop their self-assessment and editing skills.

Not all feedback is created equally. In a preliminary study conducted in 2006, this researcher discovered that not only was there a significant variation in the amount of feedback given on the same student essay by a sample of ten teachers, but that the nature of the feedback given was also significantly inconsistent between teachers. Further research into this disparity should provide a clear picture of how different teachers and different college English departments approach feedback, and how English departments can act to achieve some level of consistency. Consistent feedback that touches on a range of aspects of student writing should provide students with better metacognitive skills, and allow these students to build on prior knowledge rather than reinventing the wheel in each successive English course.

Several studies on effective feedback have examined the nature of effective feedback and student perception of this feedback; some studies have also examined teacher approaches to providing feedback. However, there seems to

be a dearth of research examining the impact of inconsistencies in feedback between teachers within a department, between different departments within a college, or between different colleges within the English Cegep system. Furthermore, given the relatively small Cegep system, very little research has focused on the effectiveness and consistency of feedback on student writing at the college level, or how that feedback reflects the ministerial objectives as designated in the English Exit Exam criteria.

This study will examine the amount of feedback provided, determine the nature of the feedback according to the defined criteria, and examine relative importance of the three categories, in order to determine how consistent, pertinent and applicable feedback is. In so doing, the study will answer the following questions:

1. Is the feedback provided to students on written work consistent in terms of the nature of the comments made?
2. Is the amount of feedback provided consistent?
3. Is the feedback provided consistent with the stated instructional objectives, based on the MELS criteria?

1.4 Type of Research Design (e.g. content analysis, questionnaires, interviews, experiment, observation, use of available statistics)

Evaluation of pedagogical practice through content analysis and a questionnaire.

1.5 Description of Population and Sample

There are approximately 200 teachers in the English departments of the four colleges included in the study (Champlain College St-Lambert, Dawson College, John Abbott College and Vanier College).

The sample will be non-random, as it relies on voluntary participation. The researcher anticipates 10% participation, i.e., approximately 20 participants, in the study.

Participants in the study will be anonymous. Each participant will be assigned a code through which the researcher can identify the participant's college, but no further identifying information will be required.

1.6 Method of Recruitment of Participants

Participants will be recruited through the English departments of each college. The researcher is prepared to present the project, prior to collecting data, to the different English departments. Results will be distributed to the participating colleges upon completion of the project.

1.7 Remuneration, if applicable

 n/a

1.8 Verbal and Written Explanation to be Given to the Participants (attached as an appendix)

1.9 Role of the Participants (including activities to be done and time required)

Each participant will be asked to mark and provide feedback on a student essay, and to complete a short questionnaire. The researcher estimates that these activities should take no more than one hour, on average.

1.10 Evaluation of the Potential Benefits and Risks

Since the sample is non-random, and participation is voluntary, care must be taken to address issues of bias in the analysis of the results. Although the sample may represent a significant portion of the population, the results cannot be considered truly representative, as teachers for whom issues of

feedback, constructivism, assessment and pedagogy generally are of little concern are naturally unlikely to participate.

The results of this content analysis should give a clear picture of how consistent English teachers at the four English colleges in Montreal are in terms of the feedback they provide on students' written work. Based on this analysis, English departments in the four colleges may choose to interact more frequently in an effort to establish an intercollegial framework for assessment and formative feedback. Further study within the English Cegep system may subsequently explore the use of formative feedback in other General Education faculties, such as Humanities, as well as program faculties. The ultimate aim of this study, and any subsequent research, must be to establish a foundation of material upon which to build knowledge, for ourselves as educators within a constructivist paradigm, and for our students, as life-long, independent learners.

1.11 Methods of Data Collection

Descriptive data will be collected through a questionnaire designed to elicit information about the participants in terms of education, years of experience, and essay assessment practices.

The primary source of data for the study will be participants' feedback on a sample student essay. Each participant will be provided with the same student essay, and will be instructed to provide feedback to the student in writing, and to assign a grade to the essay. The researcher will then perform a content analysis of the feedback provided.

1.12 Instrumentation (interview questions, questionnaires, experimental design, etc.) (attached as an appendix)

1.13 Expectations of the College to Provide Materials and/or Services

None

2. <u>ADDRESSING POTENTIAL ETHICAL CONCERNS</u>

2.1 Informed consent (attached as an appendix)

2.2 Privacy and confidentiality

As noted, participants will be assigned a code which will be used only to identify the participant by college. Participants will not be required to submit any further identification.

2.3 Deception, if applicable

n/a

2.4 Post-study explanation and/or debriefing, if appropriate

n/a

2.5 Responsible dissemination of results of study

Results of the study will be disseminated to the participating colleges. The results may also be disseminated more widely, to journals or other relevant destinations.

2.6 Anticipated secondary use of the data

Results of the study may lead to further studies. The researcher does not anticipate subsequent secondary use of the raw data, but will store the raw data (see below) so that it may be consulted for validity of the results in future studies.

2.7 Management of storage and disposal of collected data

Throughout the project, data gathered will be kept by the researcher, personal computers will be used to store data analysis, and private passwords will be used to access the data. No one will have access to the raw data other than the researcher. The raw data will be stored indefinitely by the researcher. Consent forms will be stored separately from the raw data and only the researcher will have access to the consent forms.

APPENDIX B.
CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in the project being conducted by Maggie McDonnell from Vanier College, supervised by Dr. Yvon Geoffroy, as part of the Performa Master Teacher program (Universite de Sherbrooke).

I understand the purpose of the project is to explore consistency in written feedback provided by teachers to students. I understand this project is a partial requirement for Ms McDonnell's completion of a M.Ed.

I understand that the researcher, Maggie McDonnell, will be submitting a written report in which the participants' names will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. I understand that participants will not be identified by any personal characteristics but that the results will be sorted according to participating colleges.

I understand that my participation in this project will require about two hours of my time. I also understand that I must return my completed questionnaire and sample essay in the envelope provided no later than March 5th 2010.

I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary and will involve providing feedback on a sample essay, provided by the researcher, and completing a four-page questionnaire regarding my education and teaching experience. I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time.

I understand that my name will not be revealed in any reports or presentations.

I understand that there are no further purposes of the project about which I have not been informed.

I understand that throughout the project, data gathered will be kept by the researcher, personal computers will be used to store data analysis, and private passwords will be used to access the data. I understand that no one will have access to the raw data other than the researcher. I understand that the raw data will be stored indefinitely by the researcher. I understand that this consent form will be stored separately from the raw data and that only the researcher will have access to the consent forms.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I,_____, AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROJECT UNDER THE CONDITIONS DESCRIBED ABOVE.

NAME: (please print) _____

SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

APPENDIX C.
QUESTIONNAIRE

The following information will be considered to provide some context for the research project.

Academic Background

1. What have you studied at the post-secondary level? Please select all that apply.

   Education ☐   Literature ☐   Creative Writing ☐

   Other (please specify):

2. What was your primary academic focus? Please select one.

   Education ☐   Literature ☐   Creative Writing ☐

   Other (please specify):

3. What degrees do you hold? Please select all that apply.

Education   B.Ed. ☐   M.Ed. ☐   Other (please specify): _____

Literature   BA ☐   MA ☐   Other (please specify): _____

Creative Writing   BA ☐   MA ☐   Other (please specify): _____

Other   BA ☐   MA ☐   Other (please specify): _____

4. What kind of informal teacher training have you had (i.e., workshops, independent reading, etc.)? Please elaborate.

5. Did you go through the CEGEP system as a student? Please elaborate.

Professional Background

6. How many years have you been teaching at the CEGEP level? Please select one.

☐ Less than one year   ☐ 6-10

☐ 1-5   ☐ More than ten years

7. Has your teaching experience been primarily at the CEGEP level? Please elaborate.

8. Which other levels have you taught? Please select all that apply.

☐ Pre-K

                ☐ University (undergrad)

☐ K-6

                ☐ University (graduate/post-grad)

☐ Secondary

9. To what extent is grading an autonomous process at the CEGEP level, in your experience (i.e., teachers are expected to evaluate student learning and assign grades without guidance or interference from anyone outside the classroom)? Please elaborate.

10. To what extent is grading as an autonomous process at the other levels, in your experience? Please elaborate.

Essay Assessment

Please assume that all questions pertain specifically to an introductory English course (603-101) unless otherwise specified. Where space is provided, please explain your answers. You may use the back of this sheet as needed.

11. How many essays do you typically assign to a class over one semester? Please select one.

☐ 1   ☐ 3   ☐ 5

☐ 2   ☐ 4   ☐ more than 5

12. How many of these essays may be rewritten? Please select one.

☐ None   ☐ Some   ☐ All

13. Are rewrites optional, recommended, compulsory or not permitted? Please select one.

☐ Optional   ☐ Compulsory

☐ Recommended   ☐ Not permitted

14. How many stages of an essay are submitted to you for feedback? Please select one.

☐ Only the final essay

☐ One draft + final   ☐ All stages

☐ Outline + final   ☐ Student decides

15. Do you provide a list of correction symbols? Please elaborate.

16. What instructions do you give to students regarding feedback?

17. In the case of rewritten assignments, are students required and/or permitted to discuss the process with you? With an on-campus learning centre or tutor? Please elaborate.

18. Do you typically use a rubric or marking grid when correcting an essay?

If you answered 'No,' please go to question 23.

19. Did you design the rubric yourself? Please elaborate.

20. If not, where did you find the rubric? Please select all that apply.

☐ Adapted from a colleague   ☐ Internet source

☐ Teaching manual   ☐ Other (please specify)

21. Do you use rubrics in all courses, including post-Intro? Please select one.

☐ No, only 101   ☐ Yes, different rubric for 102/103

☐ Yes, the same rubric for all levels   ☐ Yes, different rubrics for all levels

22. How familiar are students with your rubric(s)? How is the rubric made available to them? Please elaborate.

23. Would you consider using a departmental grading rubric? Why or why not? Under what circumstances? Please elaborate.

24. Have you participated in the marking of the provincial English Exit Test? If so, approximately how many times have you marked the test? If not, why not?

LAST QUESTION!

25. How do you help your students prepare for the English Exit Test? Please elaborate.

Thank you!

APPENDIX D.

INSTRUCTIONS

Thank you for participating in this project. Your contribution is very much appreciated. Teachers from four college English departments are participating in this study, in order to examine the consistency of feedback on student writing at the college level, and how that feedback reflects the ministerial objectives as designated in the English Exit Exam criteria. The study will attempt to answer these questions:

- Is the feedback provided to students on written work consistent in terms of the nature of the comments made?

- Is the amount of feedback provided consistent?

- Is the feedback provided consistent with the stated instructional objectives, based on the MELS criteria?

The analysis of the collected data will be presented in a written report which will be presented to the Master Teacher Program as partial fulfillment of the researcher's M.Ed. project.

This package should include:

1. One *Individual Participant Consent* form

2. One student essay entitled *The Truth About Women*

3. One four-page questionnaire

4. One envelope addressed to Maggie McDonnell.

Instructions

2. Please read and complete the *Individual Participant Consent* form.

3. Please complete the accompanying questionnaire.

4. Please grade the essay *The Truth About Women*, and give any comments or feedback that you would normally provide to a student in a mid-level Introduction to College English course. You can assign a grade out of ten or a percent grade.

You can assume the following:

- The student is writing in response to the following instructions:

Essay, 350-500 words (10%)

The protagonists in "The Story of an Hour" and "The Yellow Wallpaper" face the same kind of conflict. In your essay, discuss the symbolic significance of the setting in both stories. How does the setting symbolize what the characters are facing? Is the symbolism of the setting ironic or direct?

Suggested thesis statement:

The setting in both [name of story] and [second story] is [ironically/directly] symbolic of the protagonists' [type of conflict] struggle.

OR

While the setting in [name of story] is directly symbolic of the protagonist's [type of conflict] struggle, the setting in [second story] is ironically symbolic of the same struggle.

- The student is writing the essay in class, with access to the texts and any notes the student may have made prior during class discussion.

- The texts were discussed in class, and the student was expected to have read the texts for that discussion.

- The essay question itself was not revealed prior to the class writing session.

- The student is writing the essay in the first third of the semester.

5. Place the marked essay and the completed questionnaire in the envelope, and return it to me via internal mail.

Thank you!

APPENDIX E.

STUDENT ESSAY

THE TRUTH ABOUT WOMEN

To be able to write a good story, the writer has to come up with a conflict. Without it, there would be noting interesting to read. Once the conflict is found, it is important to situate the reader with the help of a good setting. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story "The Yellow Wallpaper", the setting is ironically symbolic of the protagonist's struggle against society. Moreover, the setting in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" is also ironically symbolic of the same struggle.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" and "The Story of an Hour" both have the same conflict, which is protagonist against society. Both stories also resemble one another in different ways. In "The Story of an Hour", Mrs. Mallard finds out that her husband is dead. Her first reaction is to start crying. Then, she starts thinking of her life, without her husband. She realises how happy she feels about this. Moreover, she feels free. She doesn't have to be someone's wife anymore. She doesn't have to pretend to be someone else anymore. This story was written a very long time ago, so it is easy to imagine how society shaped women back then. They had to be perfect wives, take care of their husbands and stay home. At the time, men were known to have a certain power over women and had the right to control every one of their actions. This brings us to "The Yellow Wallpaper", where the narrator describes her life in a very monotone way. She feels like the world is closing up on her and she doesn't know what to do about it. She feels like her husband is keeping her away from everything and she does not understand why. By connecting both stories, it is obvious that both Mrs. Mallard and the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" feel dominated by the men in their lives. In other words, society plays a big role in both stories.

"The Story of an Hour" has an ironically symbolic setting. More specifically, it is a dramatic irony because when Mrs. Mallard realises that she will have a better life now that her husband is dead, she looks through her big window and notices that the storm has cleared out and that the sun is coming out. In other words, that represents what was happening with her life. This story is also ironic because when Mrs. Mallard sees her husband walk into the house, she dies. Doctors say she died of "joy" but the readers know that in fact, she dies because all her dreams came crashing down when she saw her husband. In comparison, the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" also looks through her window, but she sees the complete opposite. Everything seems ugly and destroyed and hopeless to rebuild. This symbolizes the narrator's perception of her own life. Once again, it is an example of a dramatic irony. Both stories describe women looking out of a window but they both see things differently, which goes to show how much a simple setting can change a whole story.

In conclusion, "The Story of an Hour" and "The Yellow Wallpaper" manage to be different and similar at the same time. In the end of each one of the stories, the main character ends up dying because of the man in her life. They both have different settings and conflicts but come down to the same point. All in all, the conflict and the setting can change a lot in a story and that's what makes every writing so interesting to read.'

APPENDIX F.

FEEDBACK FROM TEACHERS

Example	Mark
Well written – just remember about commas: "if in doubt, leave them out" Otherwise a very enjoyable read. But – I wonder – has your main point somehow got lost? (at *) [indicates two points in the student's text] [29 words; addresses expression and organization]	80
Your sentences are well structured and generally clear and concise. Well done! I would suggest some restructuring of your essay though. I think it would make more sense to devote an entire paragraph to each story. This would be clearer and give you more room to discuss the symbolism of the respective settings, which is the subject of your essay. Try to quote more from the stories, and be sure to include a Works Cited page with your rewrite. [79 words; addresses all criteria]	78
The essay begins with a clear thesis and shows an understanding of the important issues in the stories. To improve, focus on being more specific with your evidence and explanations – remember that your reader might not agree with you. The explanations of conflict in body paragraph 1 are stronger than the explanations of symbolism in body paragraph 2. [58 words; addresses organization]	70
Good essay. Fine grasp of conflict as a device. Maybe discuss society a bit more in "Wallpaper." [17 words; addresses comprehension/insight]	75
Some good work here. Your expression is good and your arguments are clearly-presented (sic). Some things to focus on for the revision: 1. In paragraph one, you identify the conflict as protagonist against society, but then move into a discussion that seems to focus on the conflict between the women and	74

their husbands. For greater clarity, you could begin your paragraph by explaining how these relationship (sic) reflect the societal expectations of the time.

2. In terms of structure… consider restructuring your essay so that a) your discussion of "The Yellow Wallpaper" does not feel secondary, and b) so you can draw stronger links between the symbolism of the setting and the conflict, as your thesis statement suggests you are going to do.

[123 words; addresses comprehension/insight and organization]

Needs a smoother integration of the conflict (dominating men) and the settings (externalizations of the women's inner mood). Both elements are there but seem to be dealt with too separately. Of the two stories, I like a little better your treatment of "The Story of an Hour." [47 words; addresses comprehension/insight]	73
There is not very much of substance in your essay, even though your thesis is okay and the essay is mostly on topic. Unfortunately, the fact that you have not backed up your readings of the stories with proof (quotations) means that you fail the assignment. Literary essays are arguments, so they require proofs from the text in order to be complete. [62 words; addresses organization]	55
While showing a clear understanding of the two texts, this essay is insufficiently structured and developed. The basic premise of the essay, that both texts are ironically symbolic in their choice of setting, is not adequately justified throughout the course of the essay. The introductory paragraph would benefit from a clearer indication of the supporting points to be argued in the body of the paper; if the paper is to offer a strict comparison, this comparison must be structured clearly around three supporting points that advance the thesis. For example, if the argument is that both texts reveal an ironic use of setting, you must decide which elements of setting are ironic and how they advance your chosen conflict in the texts. This focus on clearly articulated elements of setting is largely absent from the paper. The first paragraph devolves into plot summary, when it should be	67

taking up the specific question of irony in relation to the conflict you've articulated (individual vs. society). The second paragraph shows an unfortunate misunderstanding of literary terminology: dramatic irony, when the spectator or reader knows more than a character or actor knows, is inadequately explained. There are no quotations to support your claims in the paper, which leaves you resorting to sweeping generalizations about the text or society at large to substantiate your arguments. A closer reliance on the text would strengthen the essay. Finally, in terms of expression, emphasis should be placed on avoiding unspecific language and on choosing correct prepositions, as well as reviewing proper MLA quotation punctuation. Make sure that every antecedent is clear; avoid using words like "this" in the place of more specific language, e.g. "this conflict," "this use of irony." The paper shows a good concern for structure, with its introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion, and it also shows a clear understanding of the problems at work in the two texts. More attention to clearly announcing and developing your argument will strengthen your upcoming paper. [328 words; addresses all criteria]	
No quotations! You float around between conflict, irony, symbol, conflict and setting. [12 words; addresses comprehension/insight and organization]	65
Good work overall! If you would like to work on your small sentence errors and your use of evidence and examples in a rewrite, please make an appointment to see me. [31 words; addresses expression and organization]	84
You have some good ideas, but you need to support them with evidence from the text. Also, you could go into more depth regarding the themes of the story, instead of remaining on the level of the literary devices. [39 words; addresses comprehension/insight]	75
While your essay shows some evidence of having read and understood "The Story of an Hour," there is little evidence that you have read "The Yellow Wallpaper" as carefully.	50

Many of your claims (especially in your introduction and conclusion) were too general and did not show proof of having looked at these stories in an analytical way. Don't forget that your essay should be organized in such a way that you build up your claims in order to prove your thesis. You made some connections to your thesis, but overall, your essay lacked depth. Including quotes from the stories would have helped to develop your analysis further. In the future, plan your essay out carefully ahead of time in order to make sure that you understand your texts clearly and write your essay purposefully. Finally, make sure that you use terms, such as dramatic irony, correctly. [146 words; addresses organization]	
This is generally a well-written paper. However, you do not address your thesis until paragraph 3 and this represents a considerable weakness in your text. What you write about conflict is good but there is much less about irony. [39 words; addresses organization and comprehension/insight]	72
While you understand the premise of "Story of an Hour," you don't seem to understand "Yellow Wallpaper." Comparisons are not always clear. How does "Yellow Wallpaper" demonstrate dramatic irony? Make an appointment to see me. [35 words; addresses comprehension/insight]	56

Your essay begins with a promising argument, linking conflict with setting in both stories. The first body ¶ is also promising in showing how both protagonists are engaged in a conflict. You need to provide enough evidence from the text for your reader to better understand this conflict (vs. society). It is not clear from the few details that you've provided about setting why their (sic) is a conflict. Your analysis of irony in "The Story of an Hour" is effective and persuasive, but a more detailed analysis of "The Yellow Wallpaper" example is needed to show a comparison with the 1st story – this would, perhaps, allow you to make a stronger point about the comparison. So your essay gets a mixed review. – work in the future on more focused and detailed development of your arguments. [135 words; addresses comprehension/insight]	78
Overall, your work is careful and sensibly organized. Your discussion of Chopin is handled more effectively than your discussion of Gilman. Your comments on Gilman are over-generalized. More specific details and examples from the text are needed. Also, don't forget: direct quotations are a requirement of any literary essay. [49 words; addresses organization and comprehension]	75
Nicely edited text. Now get to work on helping the reader grasp what's in your head. [16 words; addresses expression]	Nm
The thesis is about conflict with society being symbolized by the settings, yet the idea is not fully developed. The conflict + the symbolism are discussed in separate paragraphs, but no real link is forged between the two. However, for a first essay, in-class, this is quite good. [48 words; addresses organization]	65

APPENDIX G.
MARKING RUBRIC

Essay topic: _____   Name: _____

	Excellent (80-100%)	Good (60-80%)	Needs significant improvement (below 60%)
Structure	The outline: • provides clear structure • demonstrates links between thesis and supporting ideas • demonstrates links between textual examples and supporting ideas	The outline: • provides basic structure • demonstrates most links between thesis and supporting ideas • demonstrates some links between textual examples and supporting ideas	The outline: • provides no structure • demonstrates few links between thesis and supporting ideas • does not include textual examples • not submitted
	The introduction: • provides all necessary background information, such as title(s) and author(s) • avoids cliché structures such as "since the dawn of time" • includes a strong, clearly stated thesis statement • includes a clear indication of argument or approach • makes specific mention of literary terms to be explored • is a complete paragraph.	The introduction: • provides most necessary background information, such as title(s) or author(s) • avoids cliché structures such as "since the dawn of time" • includes a somewhat clear thesis statement • includes some indication of argument or approach • is a complete paragraph.	The introduction: • does not provide necessary background information, such as title(s) or author(s) • uses cliché structures such as "since the dawn of time" • includes a vague or ambiguous thesis statement • includes no indication of argument or approach • makes no mention of literary terms to be explored • is not a complete paragraph.
	The development paragraphs: • begin with clear topic sentences • are unified (can stand alone and relate to single idea, expressed by the topic sentence; all information is relevant) • are coherent (the order of ideas makes sense) • are balanced (each paragraph is approximately the same length and provides the same depth of analysis) • conclude with a general wrap-up demonstrating the connection between the points developed and the main thesis. Transitions are smooth and elegant.	The development paragraphs: • begin with slightly ambiguous topic sentences • are mostly unified (can stand alone and relate to single idea, expressed by the topic sentence; most information is relevant) • are coherent (the order of ideas makes sense) • are balanced (each paragraph is approximately the same length and provides the same depth of analysis). Transitions are a little choppy, perhaps placed at the end of the paragraph rather than the beginning of the next paragraph.	The development paragraphs: • are not unified (do not clearly relate to single idea, expressed by the topic sentence; most information is not clearly relevant) • are not coherent (the order of ideas does not make sense) • are unbalanced (paragraphs are not the same length and don't provide the same depth of analysis). No transitions.
	The conclusion: • conclusively wraps up argument • shows careful consideration of import findings • does not simply restate the thesis • does not introduce new ideas • is a complete paragraph.	The conclusion: • wraps up argument generally • shows some consideration of import findings • rewords the thesis without really relating to development • may introduce new ideas as "food for thought" • is a complete paragraph.	The conclusion: • is not relevant to development • simply restates the thesis • introduces new ideas • is not a complete paragraph.

	Excellent (80-100%)	Good (60-80%)	Needs significant improvement (below 60%)
Comprehension/insight	The content of the analysis: • is clearly built around the thesis as the main idea • clearly considers the text and film from the authorial point of view • does not refer to readers' or audiences' expectations, tastes, preferences, etc. • makes clear connections between examples and supporting points • makes clear connections between supporting points and thesis • uses literary terms and other terminology correctly.	The content of the analysis: • is generally built around the thesis as the main idea • almost always considers the text and film from the authorial point of view • rarely refers to readers' or audiences' expectations, tastes, preferences, etc. • attempts to connect examples and supporting points • attempts to connect supporting points and thesis • uses most literary terms and other terminology correctly.	The content of the analysis: • is not related to the thesis • considers the text and film from the reader/audience point of view • frequently refers to readers' or audiences' expectations, tastes, preferences, etc. • uses no specific textual examples • makes no connections between supporting points and thesis • uses literary terms and other terminology incorrectly.
	References: • are used for support, not padding • are relevant • are generally a few key words rather than several lines • are well integrated into main text • are clearly explained without using clumsy structures such as "this quote shows" • do not simply repeat information provided in the main text • are correctly and consistently documented using MLA style.	References: • are used for support, not padding • are usually relevant • are occasionally too long • are not smoothly integrated into main text • are explained without using clumsy structures such as "this quote shows" • do not simply repeat information provided in the main text • are generally correctly and consistently documented using MLA style.	References: • are used for padding • are not relevant • are several lines • are not integrated into main text • are explained using clumsy structures such as "this quote shows" • simply repeat information provided in the main text • are not documented using MLA style • are not used.
Language	The tone: • is appropriate for academic essay, avoiding slang and cliché • avoids personal pronouns and references to the act of analysis • uses varied and sophisticated vocabulary	The tone: • is generally academic, only occasionally relying on cliché or informal language • usually avoids personal pronouns and references to the act of analysis • uses safe but generally correct vocabulary.	The tone: • is informal, using cliché or slang • is frequently elementary or juvenile • makes frequent use of personal pronouns • refers to the act of analysis. • Vocabulary is frequently used incorrectly, may demonstrate unsophisticated translation.
	The sentences: • are varied (simple, complex, compound, etc.) • avoid shifting, fusing, splicing and fragmenting.	The sentences: • are correct but not very varied • are sometimes disrupted by shifting, fusing, splicing and fragmenting.	The sentences: • are frequently incorrect • are all simple (S+V+O) • demonstrate significant problems with shifting, fusing, splicing and fragmenting.
	Revision (language): • has eliminated all errors in grammar, spelling and syntax • has eliminated all careless errors such as typos.	Revision (language): • has eliminated most errors in grammar, spelling and syntax • has eliminated most careless errors such as typos.	Revision (language): • has not eliminated errors in grammar, spelling and syntax • has not eliminated careless errors such as typos. No evidence of revision.
Draft	Revision (content & structure): • has clearly addressed feedback given on original draft • indicates careful reflection on the original draft beyond the feedback provided	Revision (content & structure): • has generally addressed feedback given on original draft	Revision (content & structure): • has not addressed feedback given on original draft • is limited to grammar, spelling and syntax No evidence of revision.

APPENDIX H.

SAMPLE CORRECTION SYMBOLS

Correction Symbols

Symbol	What it means	Symbol	What it means
^	Missing word(s)	Logic?	Faulty logic/confused thinking [also DNF]
↔	Reverse order	Mod.	Modifier error
"	Quotation marks needed	More	Elaborate or develop further
# or num.	Shift in number	Num	Spell out number
✓	Good point or observation	OW	One word
,	Comma needed	Plur.	Plural
/	Two words	Prep	Preposition missing or incorrect
? or unclear	Meaning or word unclear	Pron.	Wrong pronoun case
'	Apostrophe	Red.	Redundant
‖	Faulty parallelism	Ref.	Reference vague/unclear
¶	New paragraph	Rep.	Repetitive - this information has already been provided
¶	No new paragraph	ROS	Run-on sentence
Ab.	No abbreviation, or incorrect abbreviation	Shift	Incorrect shift in pronoun, verb tense, or otherwise
Adj.	Incorrect adjective form	Sing.	Singular
Adv.	Adverb form used incorrectly	Source?	Documentation of source material missing or unclear
Art.	Article missing or used incorrectly	Sp.	Spelling—check dictionary
Awk.	Awkward phrase or sentence construction	Specify	Be more specific
Cap.	Capitalization error	SVA	Subject-verb agreement error
Cite	Citation missing or incomplete	Tense	Error in verb tense
Cliché	Worn-out expression	Thesis?	Thesis sentence unclear or missing
Conj.	Conjunction needed	Topic?	Topic sentence unclear or missing
Construction	Re-phrase—confusing, awkward or mixed-up sentence construction	Trans?	Transition required or awkward
CS	Comma splice	Unity	Paragraph unity—too many points in a single paragraph
DM	Dangling modifier	Unsophisticated, soph.	Word or phrase is not acceptable at college level
DNF	Does not follow [also Logic]	V. Form	Wrong verb form
Expl.	Explain	Vague	Meaning is vague
Form	Wrong verb form	WC	Consider different word choice
Frag.	Sentence fragment	WF	word form (adj., adv., noun, verb)
Idiom	Incorrect use of a figure of speech	Word	Remove word
Jargon	Avoid specialized language, unless you explain meaning	WW	Wrong word

APPENDIX I.
MINISTERIAL EXAMINATION OF COLLEGE ENGLISH WRITING GUIDE

MINISTERIAL EXAMINATION OF COLLEGE ENGLISH LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION AND LITERATURE

16 MAY 2012

The task: Write an essay of <u>at least</u> 750 words based on <u>a main idea</u> in ONE of the three readings. Interpret <u>the reading</u> and discuss the ways in which <u>the author</u> develops the main idea in the text <u>as a whole</u>. Do not simply summarize the main points of the reading or write an essay that does not analyze the text itself. Be certain to write the required number of words.

READING 1:   A short story

                    "Laundry Day" by Fran Kimmel

Write an essay that develops a thesis statement about a main idea in Kimmel's story. In your interpretation and analysis of the author's text, be sure to explain her use of techniques and devices.* Make appropriate references to the reading.

READING 2:   An essay

                    "On Risk" by Tim Cahill

Write an essay that develops a thesis statement about a main idea in Cahill's text. In your interpretation and analysis of the author's work, be sure to explain his use of techniques and devices.* Make appropriate references to the reading.

READING 3:   A short story

"Oubliette" by David Long

Write an essay that develops a thesis statement about a main idea in Long's story. In your interpretation and analysis of the author's text, be sure to explain his use of techniques and devices.* Make appropriate references to the reading.

* Techniques and devices may include the following: allusion, analogy, appeal to authority, cause and effect, characterization, comparison, contrast, definition, description, dialogue, diction, empirical evidence, enumeration, example, flashback, foreshadowing, imagery, irony, level of language, metaphor, narration, narrative point of view, refutation of opposing views, repetition, rhetorical questions, setting, symbolism, and tone. You may discuss other techniques and devices as well.