Student Perceptions of Teacher's Use of Written Feedback and Face-To-Face

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Article Info	Abstract
	Teachers provide feedback to their students throughout the instructional sequence, specifically during formative assessments. This feedback can take many forms, including video, audio recordings, face-to-face conferences, and written comments. In research conducted on these four forms of feedback, most studies found that students preferred video, audio, or face-to-face feedback over written comments; however, these studies were almost always conducted at the university level. Middle School students' perceptions of different feedback methods were not addressed. This qualitative study used open-ended survey questions with two middle school English Language Arts classes (a total of 37 students) to investigate student perceptions of two modes of feedback—solely written comments and written comments accompanying a face-to-face conference. Each class received one form of feedback during the first instructional unit and then another form of feedback during the second unit. Students shared their perceptions about each form following each unit and their preferences after both units concluded. The study found that most students preferred face-to-face conferences with written comments to solely written feedback. The study's results indicated that a teacher should determine which skills/units would benefit most from face-to-face conferences, remind students to go back and review comments on their work before beginning a summative assignment to help them remember the face-to-face conference, and develop a positive classroom culture regarding face-to-face conferencing with the teacher.

Introduction

Teaching is a process that requires constant reflection on instructional strategies and their impact. Teachers providing students with feedback is an essential component of the formative assessment process (Brookhart, 2008; Mertler, 2016), but the reflective practitioner might be left wondering— "What is the most effective way to provide that feedback?" Feedback can be defined as simply a grade or whether students reached the classroom learning targets. For this study, the term "feedback" was used to describe constructive information provided to students about "how to achieve the targets and guidepost measures along the way" (Greenstein, 2010, p. 26). Brookhart (2008) elaborates on this understanding of feedback and why it is so powerful when she states: "The power of formative feedback lies in its double-barreled approach, simultaneously addressing cognitive and motivational factors. Good feedback gives students the information they need to understand where

they are in their learning and what to do next—the cognitive factor. Once they understand what to do and why, most students feel they have control over their learning—the motivational factor" (p. 2).

Teachers can employ multiple modes or methods when considering how to deliver student feedback. Studies have been conducted on the use of two more traditional methods of feedback—written feedback, where a teacher uses handwritten or text-based feedback to inform students of their progress (Borup et al., 2015; Goh & Walker, 2018; Jones et al., 2012; Knauf, 2016; Krych-Appelbaum & Musial, 2007), and face-to-face feedback, where teachers deliver feedback in-person to students individually or in small groups (Chalmers et al., 2018; Krych-Appelbaum & Musial, 2007; Isnawati et al., 2019). In these types of studies, researchers have found that face-to-face feedback led to dialogue and enhanced understanding of expectations by students while also allowing the feedback provider to identify better students' level of understanding or confusion (Chalmers et al., 2018; Krych-Appelbaum & Musial, 2007).

In studies conducted about audio feedback, researchers found that it promoted student engagement (Harper, 2009), increased the clarity of feedback, added an element of personalization (Knauf, 2016; Rawle et al., 2018), and saved instructors time (Knauf, 2016), but did not significantly add to a feeling of classroom community (Boyles, 2017). The research could include four possible feedback modes: written, face-to-face, video, and audio.

Brookhart (2008) suggests selecting the best mode for the message, but teachers may not always grasp students' perceptions of which mode that may be. Van der Leij, Adie, and Cumming (2017) explain that there is often a "mismatch" between teachers' feedback intentions and students' perceptions of that feedback from teachers (p. 1094). Greenstein (2010) explains that teachers need to give "frequent and substantive feedback to students about their progress, pointing out both strengths and areas that need improvement" (p. 19). Quality feedback takes time, and teachers must understand how students perceive different feedback modes to use their time effectively.

While, as stated previously, studies have been conducted on different feedback methods, there needs to be more studies at the K-12 level, specifically in middle school. This area of research has focused mainly on the higher education level. One study that the researchers reviewed was conducted with middle school students; the study only investigated students' reflections on written feedback, and the researchers did not investigate varying feedback forms (Goh & Walker, 2018). Another study at the K-12 level only researched teachers' perceptions of feedback, not students (Dessie & Sewagegn, 2019). Additionally, much of the research efforts at the higher education level have been aimed at new technologies such as digital video or audio feedback, compared with the far fewer studies aimed at face-to-face, in-person feedback. Most of the face-to-face feedback studies the researchers have uncovered did not investigate teacher-student feedback in a traditional class setting—they investigated peer-to-peer feedback (Krych-Appelbaum & Musial, 2007) or tutor-student feedback (Chalmers et al., 2018). One set of researchers investigated face-to-face feedback using teacher-student conferences in conjunction with written feedback at the higher education level; however, they focused on the outcomes of revised writing following feedback, not student perceptions of that feedback method (Isnawati et al., 2019).

Overall, this leaves a teacher unsure about which methods of delivering feedback would be best suited to middle school students when considering the perceptions of those middle school students.

As Dessie and Sewagegn (2019) found in their research, teachers perceive feedback to have great power to improve student learning; however, those same teachers may only sometimes be fully aware of best practices for delivering effective feedback (p. 63). One way to gauge the effectiveness of feedback is based on student perceptions. By researching students' perceptions of two feedback forms, the researchers of this study gathered more information about delivering effective feedback to students.

Considering the large gap in research on students' perceptions of different types of feedback at the middle school level and the underwhelming amount of research on teacher-student face-to-face feedback, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore middle school students' perceptions of two traditional methods of feedback—solely written feedback and written feedback combined with a face-to-face conference—used by a teacher in a Midwestern middle school. This study would help fill a significant gap in current research about such a critical educational practice that middle school teachers employ daily to provide feedback. Given that feedback is such an integral aspect of teaching, this study could help teachers be more effective and efficient with their feedback by considering students' perceptions of different feedback methods. It could be helpful to K-12 teachers who feel pressure to be more effective in their instructional practices in today's world of high-stakes testing. Education is compulsory for students at this level, so while there are differences between elementary, middle, and high school students, the ideas and perceptions learned from the students in this study might lead to new understandings and further exploration at the K-12 level, which is quite different from the higher-level education, where students have elected to take courses. Additionally, not all students can access digital devices for which technology-based feedback (such as audio or video) is necessary. As a result, since this study investigated traditional modes of feedback, even a teacher from a school district without 1:1 technology can garner information to use in their teaching practices from the findings of this research.

Due to the lack of research on middle school students' perceptions of feedback, the following research questions were developed to fill the existing gap in knowledge:

- What are middle school students' perceptions of solely written feedback from a teacher and written feedback combined with a face-to-face conference with a teacher?
- What are the perceived affordances and constraints of each form of feedback as middle school students deem?
- What do middle school students state why they prefer one form of feedback or the other?

Literature Review

Teachers providing feedback can be situated within multiple theories; however, since this study is defined as constructive feedback aimed at helping students progress toward learning targets, Lev Vygotsky's zone of proximal development was discussed. Feedback is an important yet complex topic within the world of education, so it is necessary to consider its components and the various forms it can take. Finally, after

establishing feedback's role in the theory and the possible modes through which it can be delivered, a review of the current literature that exists on the various methods will help establish the current advantages and disadvantages that students perceive and attribute to various modes of feedback including level of detail, personalization and support, level of understanding, classroom climate and relationships, and motivation and self-confidence.

Lev Vygotsky (1978) developed what educational theorists known as the zone of proximal development (ZPD), the distance between a child's actual development based on their independent capabilities and the child's potential development based on capabilities with adult guidance. Essentially, it is the space between what a child can do independently and what they can do with guidance from an adult or more capable peer. Vygotsky claimed that "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that can operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and cooperation with his peers" (1978, p. 40). In this theoretical framework, we see the need for teacher-to-student feedback. He described how once the ZPD is determined, "We assist each child through demonstration, leading questions, and by introducing initial elements of the task's solution" (1987, p. 209). For a student to learn and grow, social interaction with their more capable teacher is essential. This interaction often takes the form of feedback in the classroom.

Methods of Feedback

In addition to the role of feedback in the theoretical framework of ZPD, leaders in the field also describe its place in formative assessment. Mertler (2017) states that a "very important purpose of assessment is to provide feedback to students" (p. 13), and according to Brookhart (2008), "Giving good feedback is one of the skills teachers need to master as part of formative assessment" (p. 2). This skill that teachers need to "master" has many aspects and layers. Feedback strategies can vary in timing, amount, mode, and audience, while feedback content can vary in focus, comparison, function, valence, clarity, and specificity (Brookhart, 2008, pp. 5-6). Considering the detailed concept of feedback, for this study, the review of related literature focuses on the methods, or as Brookhart calls them, the modes of feedback. Brookhart (2008) denotes that feedback modes include oral, written, and visual/demonstration. However, when looking at the related literature in the field, one can find research about four major categories of feedback modes.

One of those modes is the in-person or face-to-face conferring feedback. This feedback is delivered through conversation that includes interaction between the feedback provider and feedback receiver (typically, teacher and student) (Krych-Appelbaum & Musial, 2007). Another method is written or text feedback, which can be digital or handwritten. It is usually transcribed with a future reader (the student) in mind, but it does not allow for immediate interaction between teacher and student (Krych-Appelbaum & Musial, 2007). A third feedback method is oral or audio feedback, in which the instructor or provider shares verbal feedback using digital audio files that students can access (Knauf, 2016; Harper, 2009). A final mode of feedback uses video. A feedback provider can use a screencast or other video recording tool to use both visual components—pointing to specific areas of student work or demonstrating—and audio components—such as verbally providing comments (Jones et al., 2012). With these many choices, teachers must decide which methods will work best, including students'

perceptions of each mode.

Student Perceptions of Various Feedback Modes

Studies have been conducted on these various feedback methods at the undergraduate level. Each study typically investigated two modes of feedback at a time. When looking at the four types of feedback named above, there is one interactive type—in-person/face-to-face feedback—and three that can be described as one-way communication—text/written, audio/oral, and video feedback. Most of the studies chose to compare text/written feedback, likely due to it being the most traditional of the forms of feedback and one of the other three modes. Most studies found that students preferred whichever mode they were studying (either video, audio, or face-to-face) over the more traditional text/written mode. Any studies that reported differently are noted below.

Level of Detail

In Borup, West, and Thomas's (2015) mixed methods study comparing the impact of text and video feedback, interviews with undergraduate students revealed that they found the feedback videos more elaborate and detailed. Jones, Georghiades, and Gunson (2012) found similar results in their mixed methods study of screen capture digital video feedback. Their interviews with undergraduate students resulted in similar comments about the increased level of detail in the video format. While Jones, Georghiades, and Gunson's (2012) study found that students preferred video feedback over text feedback because the text feedback lacked detail and effectiveness, Borup, West, and Thomas's (2015) end-of-course surveys found that students preferred text feedback despite advantages that they shared were characteristic of the video feedback. Students found the text feedback more concise and edited, which they preferred over a detailed video. This was one of the only studies for which student perceptions showed an overall preference for text/written feedback. Similar to student perceptions of video feedback in Jones, Georghiades, and Gunson's (2012) study, in Rawle, Thuna, Zhao, and Kaler's (2018) study of teaching assistant and university student perspectives of audio feedback, students reported that the audio feedback had greater depth and felt richer compared to the written feedback they typically receive from instructors.

Personalization and Support

Besides the level of detail, previous studies found that students perceived certain feedback modes as more personalized and supportive. Borup, West, and Thomas's (2015) study found that students described video feedback as more supportive than text feedback. Jones, Georghiades, and Gunson's (2012) study, as well as Perkoski's (2017) quantitative, quasi-experimental study on the use of video screencast feedback compared to text-based feedback at the undergraduate level, reported similar findings—students found a more personalized experience in the use of video feedback. Studies on video feedback were not the only ones that shared students reporting a more personal experience than text feedback. Knauf's (2016) mixed methods study on audio feedback at the university level reported that audio feedback was more personalized than written feedback. This study also shared that students perceived benefits for both types of feedback, with a split of students preferring

each type of feedback. Likewise, students perceived that the audio feedback they received was more personal and had a comforting tone when compared with written feedback in Rawle, Thuna, Zhao, and Kaler's (2018) study.

Level of Understanding

Levels of understanding were also discussed in various studies about modes of feedback. Borup, West, and Thomas (2015) found that students perceived video feedback as more understandable and capable of reducing the likelihood of misunderstanding the feedback. Jones, Georghiades, and Gunson (2012) shared similar results, stating that students felt that video feedback helped avoid misunderstandings and was easier to understand, in part due to being able to hear the instructor's tone of voice. Perkoski's (2017) study added to this body of research, explaining that students perceived that they understood the details and subject matter better.

In addition, Rawle, Thuna, Zhao, and Kaler's (2018) study of audio feedback led students to indicate that the audio feedback was clearer and easier to understand than written feedback. However, that came with one limitation—students reported that it was not always readily apparent which part of their written assignment the audio feedback referred to, which limited the increased level of understanding they reported. Harper's (2009) mixed methods research investigated the impact of feedback in digital audio mp3 files compared to text-based comments in a word processing document for undergraduate students. While this study did not reveal students' perceptions of increased understanding, the study did report improved student learning and understanding when using audio feedback compared to text-based feedback.

Chalmers, Mowat, and Chapman (2018) utilized a qualitative, exploratory case study design to investigate perceptions of face-to-face feedback being given by tutors to undergraduate students. In that study, students reported that they perceived a benefit in the face-to-face feedback sessions because they could seek clarification and increase their understanding. For Krych-Appelbaum and Musial's (2007) mixed methods research on undergraduate students' perceptions of the value of communicating face-to-face with a peer about their writing, their closed and open questions revealed that students perceived a benefit in interactively talking about their writing; they rated it higher than other techniques. Krych-Appelbaum and Musial suggested this might be because students can indicate their current level of understanding and obtain immediate feedback from their peers. In contrast, written feedback does not have those same affordances. Isnawati, Sulistyo, Widiati, and Sruati's (2019) quasi-experimental study seems to support the above student perceptions of face-to-face conferences because these researchers found that providing written feedback with a face-to-face conference can facilitate more effective student revisions of essays because students can make better sense of the written feedback from the instructor.

Classroom Climate and Relationships

Harper (2009) shared that students receiving audio feedback reported they had more positive perceptions of classroom climate than those receiving written feedback. Knauf (2016) found that students perceived a

strengthened personal relationship between instructor and student due to audio feedback. On the other hand, Boyles (2017) concentrated her quantitative, quasi-experimental research on the role of audio feedback on perceived classroom community for undergraduate students and found that there was not a statistically significant difference in students' perceptions of classroom community between those who received written feedback and those who received audio feedback.

Chalmers, Mowat, and Chapman (2018) reported various student perceptions of face-to-face and written feedback. Some students felt anxiety before their face-to-face feedback session, but most felt positive afterward due to the dialogue and discussion. At the same time, they found that the power relationship between the tutor and student may limit the dialogue and discussion, which would point to a negative climate caused by face-to-face feedback. One student in the study used the word "cold" to describe written feedback (p. 40), which points to feelings of a negative climate caused by written feedback.

Motivation and Self-Confidence

Reviewing the related literature also showed that different feedback modes impacted students' motivation and feelings of self-confidence. For video feedback, Perkoski's (2017) closed questions about student motivation showed significant differences between the group receiving video feedback and the group receiving text-based feedback, with the video feedback reporting higher motivation. Similarly, for audio feedback, Harper's (2009) results revealed that students receiving audio feedback had more significant gains in perceived competence, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation than those receiving written feedback.

Summary

Feedback has been established as an essential component of the instructional sequence, specifically within formative assessment (Brookhart, 2008; Mertler, 2017). To help students grow in learning, the zone of proximal development must be considered, as how feedback from a teacher or more experienced peer will help students to make that growth. With the importance of effective feedback in mind, one must consider how to deliver that feedback most effectively.

When turning to the existing literature in the field, one can find substantial research about video or audio feedback being compared with text feedback; however, there needs to be more research about face-to-face, in-person feedback. Research that has been conducted has found that the video, audio, and face-to-face forms of feedback are often preferred by students instead of written, text-based feedback for a variety of reasons, including an increased level of detail, increased personalization and support, increased level of understanding, more positive classroom climate and relationships, and improved motivation and self-confidence. However, there are some discrepancies in the findings across the studies, and as mentioned previously, not many conclusions have been drawn about students' perceptions of face-to-face feedback. Additionally, all of these studies in which researchers studied students' perceptions by comparing two feedback methods were conducted at the undergraduate level instead of the K-12 level.

Methodology

Introduction and Research Questions

This study investigated middle students' perceptions of two forms of feedback to answer the following research questions:

- What are middle school students' perceptions of solely written feedback from a teacher and written feedback combined with a face-to-face conference with a teacher?
- What are the perceived affordances and constraints of each form of feedback as middle school students deem?
- What do middle school students state about why they prefer one form of feedback or another?

This study used a basic qualitative research approach. To effectively answer the research questions and explore students' perceptions of the two feedback methods, the open-ended nature of the basic qualitative research design was fitting for the study.

The research was conducted at the researcher's Midwestern, suburban middle school. The school's population of 356 comprises 68.0% white students, 3.7% black students, 12.9% Hispanic students, 9.8% Asian students, and 5.3% students reporting two or more races (Illinois State Board of Education, 2019). Two 6th grade English Language Arts classes, taught by the same teacher to ensure consistent styles and approaches to the two feedback methods, participated in the study for 37 participants. This number of participants was selected to ensure a wide range of perspectives and to account for a limitation of the study. Since the two feedback methods will not be delivered concurrently, students may have primacy or recency biases toward one type or the other. As a result, two classes were used so each class could receive a different feedback method first. While convenience sampling was used, the sampling can also be described as purposeful. For this type of study, middle school students had not yet been given a voice to detail their perceptions of different types of feedback.

Surveys using open-ended questions were used to explore participants' perceptions of both types of feedback. These surveys were designed by the researcher, who modified questions used by Harper (2009) in his study of undergraduate students' perceptions of audio feedback and who created questions to address two of the domains Perkoski (2017) identified (perception of knowledge acquisition/learning and perception of motivation) in his study of undergraduate students' perceptions of multimedia feedback.

The first type of survey consisted of two open-ended questions administered following the summative assessment, where students could use the feedback they received. These two questions asked students to explain their likes and dislikes for the mode of feedback used. This survey was repeated for the next unit once students had the opportunity to use the feedback (that was delivered using the other method) on the summative assessment. The second type of survey consisted of four open-ended questions where students were asked to explain their preferences. These questions allowed students to explain their perceptions and reasons about which method helped them learn better, which made it easier to meet their teacher's expectations, which motivated them to make changes for the summative assessment, and which they would recommend teachers use.

For this study, the term "feedback" is defined as constructive information provided to students about "how to achieve the targets and guidepost measures along the way" (Greenstein, 2010, p. 26). "Written feedback" is text-based comments and questions (digital or handwritten). "Face-to-face conferences" are short, in-person meetings between the teacher and student in which the teacher verbally delivers comments and questions. These conferences can take place in one-on-one or small-group settings.

The term "assessments" describes any work produced by students that allows a teacher to evaluate each student's progress toward a learning target or standard, including identifying areas for improvement. "Formative" and "summative" assessments may mirror each other and assess students' abilities in the same skill. However, the purposes of these two assessments differ. The purpose of a "formative" assessment is not to determine a student's grade; instead, it is a tool that will allow students to receive feedback about their progress toward meeting a learning goal and teachers to modify instruction to meet the needs of learners. Formative assessments occur amid an instructional sequence. A "summative" assessment evaluates a student's ability to meet a learning goal, which typically results in a grade. Summative assessments usually occur at the end of an instructional sequence.

For the study, the researchers identified two units of study that immediately follow one another in the instructional sequence. During the first unit, in which students wrote a summary of a chapter of a fictional novel, Class A received face-to-face feedback in conjunction with written feedback, while Class B received solely written feedback. For the second unit, in which students wrote a short literary analysis essay about a character in a fictional novel, feedback methods were switched.

Following the formative assessment, the researchers delivered feedback using the assigned method to students during the first unit. After receiving feedback, students completed the summative assessment for the unit. Following this instructional sequence, students received and completed the first survey type, which included two open-ended questions about the feedback method used. The same procedures were followed during the second unit, but the feedback was delivered to students using the other assigned method this time. Following the summative assessment, students completed the same survey type used in the first unit to answer the two open-ended questions about the other feedback method. Following both units, students answered four two-part questions on the second type of survey instrument. This survey, designed to compare feedback modes and determine preferences, asked students to select a feedback method in response to four questions and explain their preferences.

After collecting the data using the open-ended survey instruments, the researchers used memoing to annotate key ideas and begin to identify initial themes. Then, they used coding to organize the survey responses into different themes. After identifying many codes, they consolidated the codes into larger "umbrellas" to identify and describe the various overarching perceptions about the methods of feedback of students across the two classes.

By having two classes of students share their perceptions of the feedback methods, the researchers increased the

reliability of this study. The research design entailed one class of students receiving one type of feedback first and the other class receiving a different type of feedback first; then, the types of feedback switched. Data was collected about students' perceptions of the two different types of feedback using two different instructional units of study. As a result, this increased the reliability of this study because the researchers were better equipped to determine if the data they collected would match the data that would be collected if the same techniques were used (Mills, 2018, p. 160).

Since this was an action research study, the study's validity was determined based on whether or not the planned intervention answered the research problem (Mills, 2018, p. 153). To consider this a valid study, the data collected and analyzed needed a better understanding of student perceptions of the two feedback modes.

This study aimed to gather middle school students' perceptions of two different teacher feedback methods: feedback using only written comments and feedback that included some written comments and a face-to-face conference with the teacher. To collect this data, two middle school English Language Arts classes completed three surveys: after receiving a face-to-face conference with comments for feedback, after receiving only written comments for feedback, and after the study comparing the two types of feedback. Overall, there were 37 student participants between the two classes. One class consisted of 16 participants, which resulted in 100% participation in all three surveys. The other class consisted of 21 participants, which resulted in 100% participation in 2 of the 3 surveys. For the survey following face-to-face feedback, one survey was left blank by a participant, which resulted in a 95% return on that survey.

After collecting the survey responses, the researchers engaged in reading/memoing to digest the responses by annotating key ideas. After multiple re-readings, the researchers began classification/coding to organize the data into themes, sorting student responses by key ideas they identified in their survey responses. Additionally, the researchers analyzed the data from the final survey to ascertain how students perceived the two types of feedback and which type they preferred regarding improved learning, meeting teachers' expectations, motivation, and making recommendations.

Results

Overall Student Perceptions

The first research question aimed to investigate student perceptions of the two types of feedback in general, asking the question: "What are middle school students' perceptions of solely written feedback from a teacher and written feedback combined with a face-to-face conference with a teacher?" When engaging in memoing and classification, the researchers saw the recurring theme that students perceived that feedback, in general, is designed to help them determine what they did wrong, what they could fix, and how they could improve for next time. When asked what they liked about a specific type of feedback, multiple students focused on how the feedback helped them in general rather than specific characteristics of the type of feedback. Many students were like Mya, stating, "I like how we can get feedback on what we can do better or how to get a better grade next time to help us in the future." This was her answer on what she liked about face-to-face feedback. When looking

at the data for survey responses about what students liked about face-to-face feedback, 43.2% of students discussed how the feedback helped them improve, fix mistakes, or do better for next time. Half of those students included specific characteristics about the type of feedback that helped them. However, half only focused on how it helped them improve (see Figure 1). On the other hand, in their responses about what they liked about only written comments, 21.6% of students discussed how they liked that the written comments helped them improve, fix mistakes, or do better for next time (see Figure 1). Among this population of students, there appears to be a greater perception that face-to-face feedback's role is to help students improve their skills compared to feedback that is solely written comments.
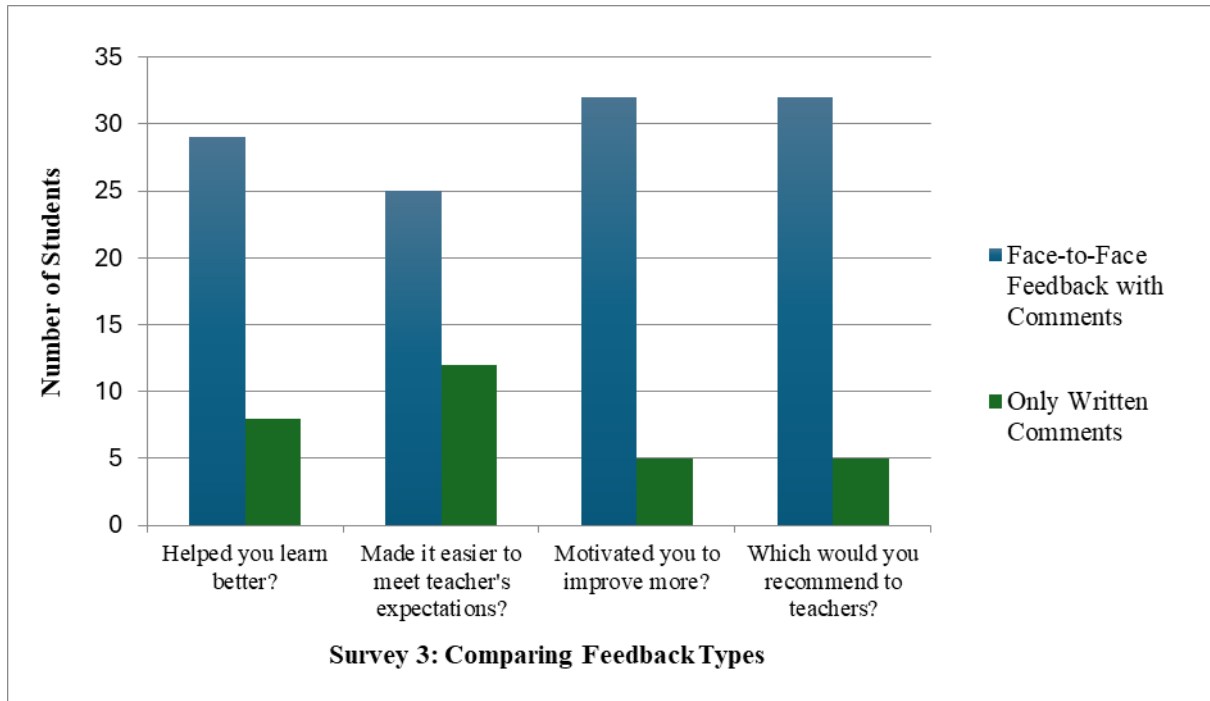

Figure 1. Student Responses to Survey Comparing Feedback Types

In the final survey, students were asked which form of feedback they perceived helped them learn better, made it easier for them to meet teachers' expectations, motivated them to improve more, and they would recommend to teachers. Most students perceived that face-to-face feedback with comments helped them learn better, with 78.4% of respondents selecting face-to-face feedback with comments over receiving written comments only. This response was similar for the remaining three categories as well. When asked which feedback motivated them to improve more, 86.5% of participants chose face-to-face feedback with comments.

Likewise, 86.5% of students chose face-to-face feedback with comments when asked which method of feedback they would recommend that teachers use. Students' perception of which form of feedback made it easier for them to meet their teacher's expectations had the most even split between the two types: 67.6% of students selected face-to-face feedback with comments (see Figure 1). Overall, the data that has been collected from this group of students pointed to the idea that students perceive face-to-face feedback with comments to be the preferred method of feedback.

Students' Perceptions of Affordances and Constraints

To investigate the answers to the questions, "What are the perceived affordances and constraints of each form of feedback as deemed by middle school students?" and "What are the reasons stated by middle school students as to why they prefer one form of feedback or the other?" student responses for all three surveys were classified and coded into recurring themes. When doing so, students' responses about their likes, dislikes, and reasons for their preferences could be sorted into major headings: affordances and constraints for face-to-face feedback with comments and affordances and constraints for written comments only. However, it was noted that when analyzing the content of students' answers, students' responses included more information about what they liked about the types of feedback (affordances) than what they disliked about the types of feedback (constraints).

In the first two surveys, where students were asked to share what they liked and disliked about the types of feedback, 55.6% of students did not list anything they disliked for face-to-face feedback with comments, and 37.8% of students did not list anything they disliked for feedback in the form of written comments only. In contrast, only 2.7% of student responses did not list anything they liked about either type of feedback on the same two surveys. The following themes emerged from the analysis (see Table 1).

Table 1. Themes Found in Greater than 10% of Participants' Responses (% of Participants)

	Affordances	Constraints
Face-to-FaceFeedback with Comments	Easier to Understand (54.1%)	
	Personal Connection (40.5%)	Negative Feelings (13.5%)
	Following Up for Clarification (37.8%)	Too Much Time (10.8%)
	More Detailed (29.7%)	Inability to Remember Conversation (1(
	Straightforward and Exact (16.2%)	
Written Comments Only	Efficiency and Immediacy (32.4%)	
	Return to and Review Feedback (29.7%)	Less Clarity (21.6%)
	Points to Feedback's Exact Location (29.7%)	No Follow Up for Clarification (18.9%)
	Confidential (10.8%)	No Explanation (10.8%)
	Easier to Understand (10.8%)	

Affordances of Feedback in Face-to-Face Conferences with Comments

Easier to Understand. When analyzing the responses collected regarding face-to-face feedback, an overwhelming theme emerged: students found the feedback easier to understand when the teacher delivered the feedback in a face-to-face conference. Twenty different students (54.1% of respondents) accounted for 43 different responses about how the face-to-face feedback helped them understand the feedback better across the different surveys. For example, one student, Maddie, described, "What I liked about being [face-to-face] with my teacher during conferences is that she helped me understand what I can improve on. When she explained to me what I could improve on, she said it in a way where I could understand it without me getting confused." Another student, George, explained, "The face-to-face made it easier because if you did not understand something that the teacher wrote in a written

comment, the teacher could make it easier to understand while she is talking to us."

Following Up for Clarification. Going hand-in-hand with students' perception that the feedback was easier to understand in a face-to-face conference, students found that they could follow up with questions and seek clarification in a face-to-face conference. In their survey responses, 37.8% of students reported that they appreciated the ability to ask questions or clarify points of confusion with the teacher during a conference. Jackson reported, "It also helps me understand the comments she put because if she puts a comment I do not understand, I can ask when we have a conference." This was a common statement among students—that written comments might be a bit unclear to them, so they liked the immediate ability to ask a question to clarify the comment's meaning to help them be more successful.

Personal Connection. While students appreciated the ability to understand the feedback better using a face-to-face conference, there was also a human connection aspect that was noted by 40.5% of students. Students wrote of how it felt more "genuine" or "personal" to get feedback in a face-to-face conference. They appreciated receiving feedback this way because it was told to them "nicely" and "face-to-face" with a "real person." For example, Elena wrote, "When my teacher talks to me in person, it seems much more genuine, and I feel that it motivates me more because she is having her conversation with me."

More Detailed. When considering the content of the face-to-face conferences, 29.7% of students described them as having greater detail and information. A student, Bob, liked how the teacher could "give you examples" to explain the feedback more. Caydie explained that when receiving face-to-face feedback, the teacher "explains the details of what we did well and what we should try and change, and that helps me because she digs in, and it makes sense to me." Using the phrase "digs in" is common in our classroom; it means that you explain things with greater detail rather than just sticking to a surface-level explanation.

Straightforward and Exact. Similar to other themes like face-to-face feedback being easier to understand or more detailed, 16.2% of students perceived this feedback as more straightforward and exact. Students described the feedback as "direct," "straightforward," and "exact." One student, Fransisca, described, "This helped me learn better because she can point exactly where I messed up and need more improvement on or how I can fix up my mistake."

Constraints of Feedback in Face-to-Face Conferences with Comments

Negative Feelings. While many students positively perceived face-to-face conferences, 13.5% attributed negative feelings to this feedback method. These students negatively described the process of conferencing face-to-face with a teacher due to feeling "scared," feeling "uncomfortable" if they are shy, feeling like they are getting "into trouble," or disliking that it was not "private" if they are part of a

group conference.

Too Much Time. Some students perceived the time it took to have a face-to-face conference with a teacher as a constraint; 10.8% of students listed this as something they disliked about this feedback method. For example, Marv wrote, "I did not like that we met at the side table because that eats away your time to work on [maybe] 4 things that might be [due] tomorrow." When face-to-face conferences occur, students engage in independent work, applying a skill they have been practicing. Students expressed concern that meeting with the teacher to receive feedback limits their work time to complete their independent assignments.

Inability to Remember or Review the Conversation. Another constraint of the face-to-face conferences to deliver feedback, as perceived by the middle school students, is that you cannot go back and review the conversation, so you may need to remember what was said. 10.8% of participants listed this as a concern about this type of feedback. Elyse's description matched some of her classmates' thoughts when she wrote, "I disliked that I could not look back at our conversation like our comments."

Affordances of Feedback in Written Comments Only

Efficiency and Immediacy. When considering what they liked about receiving only written comments on their work, 32.4% of students perceived it as a more efficient and immediate form of feedback. For example, Walt explained, "I like this method because it tells what you need, but it does not waste time to get working." Students liked that when receiving this type of feedback, they felt that it did not interfere with their work time and that they could immediately begin working on their next assignment, using that feedback to guide them. This is in contrast to a constraint felt by some students for face-to-face feedback.

Return to and Review Feedback. Another perceived affordance of the written comments by 29.7% of students was that they could go back to the comments and review them again to avoid forgetting any feedback. Students described their fear of forgetting the feedback. Harper explained, "I could look back on it anytime and did not have to worry about forgetting anything important I need to improve." This ability to review the feedback contrasts with the constraint some students perceived with face-to-face conferences.

Points to Feedback's Exact Location. Similar to face-to-face feedback, 29.7% of students found benefits to feedback in the form of written comments because the feedback was exact and clear to locate. In face-to-face feedback, the teacher physically or verbally pointed out the exact location and was direct, which differed from the feedback in written comments. The written comments on Google Docs would be visually next to or highlight exactly where the teacher provided the feedback. One student, Jackie, said she "liked it because it highlighted what we did wrong or did right. [Also, I] like it because [the teacher] can correct/replace [what's] wrong, and it would show that she did it on my

computer." Students perceived that this form of feedback made it very clear where in their writing they could improve or where they did quality work.

Confidential. Confidentiality was another affordance of written comments only for feedback, according to middle school students; 10.8% of respondents said they liked how the written comments were private and no other students could hear the feedback they were given. Caydie's comments represented others' ideas when she wrote, "Something I liked about this method was that it was private. So other people cannot know what you did on that assignment."

Easier to Understand. Although more students perceived the face-to-face conferences as a form of feedback that was easier to understand, 10.8% of students perceived that the written comments were easier to understand. These students were very direct in their descriptions, stating that the comments "made sense" to them or that it was "easier to understand."

Constraints of Feedback in Written Comments Only

Less Clarity. When considering the constraints of written comments only, multiple students' responses (21.6%) revealed that they found written comments less clear. For example, Thomas described, "Sometimes I do not have a clear understanding when getting comments rather than a conversation." Students seemed to find that the comments lacked detail or that they may have misunderstood what the teacher was trying to say.

No Follow-up for Clarification. Another concern that 18.9% of students expressed was that they perceived a decreased ability to follow up with their teacher with questions or to seek clarification. Natalie explained, "I disliked that I could not ask any questions to clarify anything about the feedback [the teacher] said." Student responses revealed that they felt it was not as convenient or that the teacher was not as accessible to ask questions to clarify the feedback they received in the form of written comments.

No Explanation. Similarly, 10.8% of students perceived needing a thorough explanation of the comments. For example, Elyse's survey response about written comments stated, "I dislike this feedback method because I do not get the full explanation of corrections or suggestions. When I get to talk about it I get the full description I need." Students' responses revealed that they wanted an explanation or description of the comments to help them interpret what they meant.

Discussion and Conclusion

The perceived benefits of face-to-face feedback that the middle school students described in this study reinforced what has been found in previous research conducted at the university level. In Chalmers, Mowat, and Chapman's (2018) case study, undergraduate students also perceived a benefit that they were able to seek

clarification and increase their level of understanding in a face-to-face meeting, which were two of the most frequently reported benefits of the face-to-face feedback as perceived by the middle school students in this study. Similarly, Isnawati, Sulistyo, Widiati, and Sruati's (2019) study found that a face-to-face conference accompanying written comments helped university students understand the written feedback from the instructor better, which the responses from middle school students in this study supported. The middle school students also reported that the face-to-face conversations helped them better understand the written comments the teacher made.

While previous studies have reported how students perceived that face-to-face feedback provided them with greater understanding and the ability to ask questions or clarify comments, other themes found in this research study were not reported for face-to-face feedback. However, previous studies on student perceptions of video and audio-based feedback compared with written/text-based feedback have explored other themes revealed through this study. For example, the level of detail of feedback has been explored in studies about video audio and text feedback. The results of this study support the conclusion that other studies, such as Jones, Georghiades, and Gunson's (2012) study of video versus text feedback or Rawle, Thuna, Zhao, and Kaler's (2018) study of audio versus written feedback, have found: that university students perceive that other methods of feedback (video, audio, and face-to-face) provide greater depth and detail. Likewise, the same holds for middle school students' perceptions of the personal connection that face-to-face feedback provides. While 40.5% of middle school students reported in this study that a benefit of the face-to-face feedback was a human connection with the teacher, no students reported any perceived connection in the written comments. This supports previous findings such as Rawle, Thuna, Zhao, and Kaler's (2018) study, which found audio feedback to be more personal and comforting, or Borup, West, and Thomas's (2015) study, which found that video feedback was more supportive than text feedback.

Finally, in this study, 86.5% of middle school students perceived that face-to-face feedback with comments motivated them to improve more than the feedback in the form of written comments only. This supports previous research conducted at the undergraduate level for audio and video feedback. Perkoski's (2017) study found that students reported higher levels of motivation after receiving video feedback than written feedback; Harper's (2009) results revealed the same for audio feedback compared to written feedback.

While the results of this study generally support the findings of previous related research, there are some exceptions. Although 54.1% of the middle school students surveyed shared their perception that face-to-face feedback was easier to understand than written comments, which reinforces the previous research, 10.8% of students stated the opposite: the written comments were easier to understand. This implies that it might be best for teachers to ensure that the content of their face-to-face conference can also be found in the accompanying comments to provide the best experience for both contrasting perceptions.

Most middle school students in this study perceived face-to-face feedback as a better method of delivering feedback; however, the teacher should take the constraints reported by students. For example, some students' negative feelings regarding face-to-face conferences should be addressed. Students stating that they felt like they

were in trouble points to a need to develop a classroom culture that associates meeting with the teacher with an opportunity rather than a punishment. Similarly, students who shared their worry that they would be unable to remember the conversation they had with the teacher suggest revisiting the accompanying written comments before engaging in the next assignment on the same skill. Suppose the teacher allows students to re-engage with the written comments later. In that case, it should hopefully reactivate students' memories of the face-to-face conference they had with the teacher on the previous day(s).

Overall, the findings in this study point to the fact that the use of face-to-face conferences with accompanying written comments could be the "best of both worlds," as perceived by middle school students. One of the students surveyed, Elena, thoughtfully examined the benefits of using both methods. Her comments stated, "The feedback method I chose was face-to-face with combined written notes because it makes meeting my teachers' expectations easier than the other method. I can look at the written notes if I forget what my teacher says. I also like it when she tells us in person because it seems more genuine and better to listen to than just written notes. Combined, it makes it better because if we forget what she says, we can look back at the notes she gave us on paper."

When beginning this study, it was not clear whether or not students would perceive benefits from the face-to-face conference. This begs the question: Is conducting face-to-face conferences with middle school students worthwhile and advisable? However, this study revealed that students perceived the face-to-face conferences as largely beneficial. Additionally, the study results showed that more students found drawbacks when using only written comments instead of face-to-face conferences with written comments. This suggests that whenever possible and useful (and after developing a positive classroom culture), face-to-face conferences with written comments to provide feedback to middle school ELA students can be worthwhile and advisable.

In conclusion, this study showed that most students preferred face-to-face feedback with some written comments to feedback in the form of only written comments (86.5% of participants would recommend teachers use face-to-face feedback). Secondly, the findings revealed that students were concerned about remembering feedback conversations. Finally, other students reported that they felt like they were in trouble when they had to have a face-to-face conference with the teacher.

This study recommends that future research address students' feelings and opinions when using different feedback methods. Additionally, more studies should be conducted on the types of skills and assessments in the curriculum and aligning those with proper feedback styles. Furthermore, research should address the extent to which feedback is constructive, robust, clear,

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