

Reading and Writing in an Advanced ESP Class: Student Conferences and Teacher Observations¹

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Teaching L2 writing to an advanced class of graduate students poses a set of challenges that differ from those experienced in teaching undergraduate EAP (English for Academic Purposes) classes by virtue of the academic experience of the students, the sophistication of the writing that is required of them in their fields, and the difficulty of the texts they must work with. Teaching such a class in an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) setting and trying to integrate it with the students' programs of study pose even greater challenges. The following case study is based on observations I made while teaching a writing class for L2 seminary students in the spring of 1999 at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. During that semester I also scheduled several writing conferences with a student who was having difficulty with one of the class assignments. Through teaching the class and meeting individually with the student, I became aware of the effectiveness of teacher-student conferences and convinced of their importance in teaching L2 writing.

Writing conferences originated as an L1 pedagogical method, and were later imported by L2 educators. Their use has since become popular in L2 writing classes. While the literature on L1 writing conferences is considerable, few studies have been done on L2 conferences. In order to understand the purposes and functions of L2 writing conferences, it is necessary to turn first to L1 literature, beginning with the role of teacher-student conferences in the process approach to writing.

The Process Approach

Teacher-student conferences have been an integral part of L1 writing pedagogy since the "paradigm shift" of the late sixties and early seventies when process-centered approaches began to replace product-centered teaching methods in composition classrooms. The earlier methods had focused almost exclusively on the achievement of formal correctness in the finished composition according to specific rhetorical, stylistic and grammatical standards (Reid, 1993). In product-centered classes, the only responses to their writing that students received were comments written on their finished essays, which usually focused on formal aspects of their work.

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Process approaches, in contrast, shifted the pedagogical focus to students' engagement in the writing process: they were taught how to generate ideas, how to discover and create meaning and purpose in the act of writing, and how to reshape their essays through multiple drafts. Process writing thus replaced the preoccupation with an immutable final product, which views text as malleable and developmental, and it discarded the concept of writing as a linear activity in favor of an emphasis on its recursive character.

Susser (1994) describes process approaches as centered on *awareness* and *intervention*. The first aim is to awaken in the student an awareness of the evolutionary and exploratory nature of the writing process. Intervention during the writing process, which consists of providing the writer with external feedback, is equally important. Accordingly, teacher (and peer) comments on one or more preliminary drafts that the student is expected to revise are critical.

Although process approaches became widely used, not all of this intervention was necessarily successful. In a study of the written feedback of thirty-five L1 writing teachers on student drafts, Sommers (1996) found that most comments were unhelpful or even damaging; they focused on grammatical and stylistic trivialities, stressed the application of rules, were vague and "mean-spirited." Very few addressed specific issues or gave students adequate direction for making substantive revisions. Concern about these sorts of problems was one of the issues that prompted the advocacy of teacher-student conferences as a regular practice in writing pedagogy.

L1 Teacher-Student Writing Conferences

Proponents of conferencing (Harris, 1986; Rose, 1982; Murray, 1979; Knapp, 1976; and Duke, 1975) have not only viewed the use of L1 teacher-student conferences as a corrective for problems arising from written feedback, but have also argued that it enhances the intervention process in a number of important ways. According to these writing teachers, some problems with written feedback stem from the difficulties teachers have in writing comments on unformed essays in which the student writer has not yet determined what to say (Murray, 1979) or on those that have fundamental conceptual or interpretive problems. Face-to-face discussions can more easily address these complex issues and obviate the need for lengthy written comments that might or might not be comprehensible to the student (Knapp, 1976; Rose, 1982). In addition, conferencing can a) reduce or eliminate the problems teachers face when confronted with incomprehensible student essays, b) help teachers clarify their evaluations for themselves, and c) maintain interest and attention in teachers swamped with large numbers of essays to correct.

Conferences offer benefits to students as well. They can enable students to understand the reasons behind the evaluation process and promote the perception

of writing as ongoing communication between writer and reader. In writing conferences, students know they have the instructor's attention and are therefore more persuaded of the importance of their writing (Knapp, 1976). Conference settings can also enable teachers and students to discover together problems that had previously gone unnoticed by each. And students can be prodded into discovering more about what they want to say and understanding problems more fully (Rose, 1982).

L1 conferences have ranged from "spur-of-the-moment" interactions lasting a few minutes (Duke, 1975) to more structured half-hour sessions (Rose, 1982). In Roger Garrison's approach, individual structured essay conferences replace classroom sessions altogether (Simmons, 1984). Garrison's widely-used method features multiple brief (three- to seven-minute) conferences that follow a specified sequence. Each conference focuses on a single skill and has a single objective. The first conference focuses on prewriting, the next on organization. In the third conference, the instructor reads the first draft for organization; in the fourth, the first revision is read for grammar and punctuation. The process continues with additional conferences following a second and a third revision, before ending with the final draft.

Although other conferencing approaches may not follow such a prescribed sequence, most require a conference each time the student produces one of a series of drafts. Nevertheless, the success of a conference program is not guaranteed. In their important study, Jacobs and Karliner (1977) demonstrated that the effectiveness of the conference is not automatic, but depends to a great extent on the manner of teacher facilitation. In the first of the authors' two case studies, the instructor helped the student focus on problem areas in her essay, then assumed a "non-directive" stance and encouraged the student to articulate and explore what she wanted to say. In the second study, the instructor talked most of the time, suggesting and elaborating on strategies to improve the lack of focus in the essay, and interrupted the student's responses several times. Not surprisingly, the first conference resulted in a substantively revised, improved essay, whereas the second student demonstrated the lack of understanding his instructor had failed to notice in their conference by producing an even less coherent essay.

According to these findings, allowing students to articulate their concerns, being alert to fundamental problems in understanding, and encouraging students to verbally explore their ideas by using non-directive responses are all critical to the success of the conference. Freedman and Katz (1987) note that the interaction patterns in a conference are a cross between classroom discourse and natural conversation, and that the most successful conferences exploit the advantages of this structure. Although the teacher still controls the conversational turn-taking, he/she can relinquish some of that control to allow the student to initiate new topics to a much greater extent and to hold the turn much longer than is usual in a classroom setting. Though still prompting the student with questions, the teacher can also give the student time to think by letting her/him pause as needed. A successful confer-

ence, therefore, can be more easily achieved when the instructor is non-directive, listens carefully, and takes a collaborative position. In Murray's (1979) words, rather than receiving instruction, the student should hear "the voice of a fellow craftsman having a conversation about a piece of work, writer to writer. . ." (p. 15).

L2 Teacher-Student Writing Conferences

Process approaches were first mentioned in ESL/EFL literature in 1976 by Zamel, who led the call in advocating their use in L2 writing pedagogy (Susser, 1994). Interest continued to develop in the late seventies, and process approaches began to appear in L2 writing textbooks in the eighties, over the sometimes-strenuous opposition of many traditionalists. The adoption of teacher-student writing conferences was not far behind. Initially, the wholesale adoption of L1 conferencing methods like Garrison's was advocated (Sokman, 1988). It may be assumed that, as time went on, writing teachers have found it necessary to modify these methods for L2 classrooms. How and to what extent L1 methods have been adapted, as L2 conferencing has gained popularity is hard to determine, since the literature on L2 writing conferences is so scanty. This question is discussed further below.

The usefulness of conferencing in the teaching of L2 writing can be inferred from the findings of several studies. In her critique of fifteen L2 writing teachers' written feedback, Zamel (1996) furnished numerous examples of miscorrection that stemmed from teachers' misunderstanding of or inability to comprehend a writer's meaning. Considering the fact that unintelligibility was cited in L1 literature as a problem that could be effectively addressed in teacher-student conferences, it seems evident that the need for conferencing would be even greater in L2 settings. Indeed, the issue of unintelligibility can cut both ways. In Ferris' (1995) study of the responses of 155 L2 students to teachers' written feedback, over 50% of the students indicated that they had experienced problems of some kind in understanding the feedback. Problems mentioned included inability to understand teachers' handwriting, inability to understand the terms and symbols used for grammar correction, difficulty understanding comments about content, and disagreement with teachers' viewpoints. If the teacher observations in the L1 literature are accurate, conferencing could presumably have an impact on these L2 student issues as well.

Nevertheless, as in Ferris' study, research has shown that L2 students' response to teacher feedback of various kinds is overwhelmingly positive, problems in comprehension notwithstanding. Saito's (1994) study of the feedback preferences of thirty-nine L2 writing students in Canada found that the students rated both written feedback and conferences quite highly, though conferences were rated slightly lower than some types of written feedback. (Peer feedback and self-correction ratings were considerably lower.) In their study comparing the responses to teacher feedback of 137 NES foreign language students and 110 ESL students, Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994) found that while both groups expressed a greater preference for

written comments over writing conferences, they rated the combination of written and oral feedback over both of the other methods, with ESL students expressing the greater preference.

Although conclusions are difficult to draw from only a few studies, the data seem to indicate a generally positive response to conferences among L2 learners if they are well integrated with more traditional means of teacher feedback. Nevertheless, student responses to conferences and their overall effectiveness can vary from person to person as Hyland's (1998) case study of two female L2 students demonstrates. However, whether the different reactions of the two were due to individual personality factors or to cultural background (one student was Japanese, the other was Thai) is not possible to determine from the available data.

One of the few studies that specifically focus on ESL teacher-student writing conferences is Goldstein and Conrad's (1990) examination of the discourse patterns of one teacher's writing conferences with three L2 students. Their findings are similar to the observations of Jacobs and Karliner (1977) on teacher facilitation in L1 conferences: students were more likely to attempt meaningful revisions and the revisions were more successful if they had been actively engaged in the discussions about their papers and had negotiated the revisions with their teachers. The study, however, leaves certain questions unanswered. The data do not explain, for example, the significant differences in the behavior of the three students in their conferences, i.e. why they chose to actively participate or not. Specifically, the reason for the marked passivity of one student—whether it was due to individual personality issues, gender, lack of comprehension, cultural influences or some other reason—was not determined.

Given the extremely varied backgrounds of ESL students compared to the relatively homogeneous background of L1 classes, it is not unreasonable to assume that cultural communication styles may affect the outcome of conferences. L2 writing teachers may need to employ communication patterns that differ from those used by their L1 counterparts in order to increase the effectiveness of their conferences. Some of the literature on peer tutoring of ESL students in university writing centers (Harris and Silva, 1993; Powers and Nelson, 1995) mention important differences in the communication patterns of L2 writing conferences: cultural behavior patterns (eye contact, physical space, etc.) differ. ESL students need more direction than do their L1 counterparts: although the non-directive approach desired in L1 conferences is not completely abandoned, it must be significantly altered. Writing center tutors find themselves in new roles of cultural informants and language "decoders" as their collaborator role is diminished. Problems in linguistic and conceptual understanding abound. ESL students have less understanding of and experience with the work and purpose of writing conferences than do L1 students, often regarding them simply as proofreading sessions and unwilling to make more than surface corrections to their papers.

The extent to which these differences noticed by writing center tutors influence L2 teacher-student writing conferences has not yet been explored. Nor have differences in successful and unsuccessful conference communication styles of L2 teachers been systematically studied. It is unlikely, for example, that ESL students would know how to respond to the type of egalitarian working relationship in L1 writing conferences that Murray (1979) advocates above. How ESL students can be better prepared to contribute meaningfully in writing conferences is another issue that calls for discussion. In addition to quantitative data collection, more qualitative case studies can be particularly helpful in this regard. In any case, much more research needs to be done on L2 teacher-student conferences in order to better understand their strengths and weaknesses and their overall effectiveness.

Another issue that has not been examined concerns the extent to which the issues and purposes of student conferences differ according to the level of student proficiency. The writing conference studies cited thus far, whether dealing with L1 or L2 writers, are all based upon observation and measurement of the writing processes of undergraduate students. How might all these findings apply when using conferencing as a teaching method in an advanced L2 writing class, specifically one in which the students are all working on postgraduate degrees? The writing requirements in graduate courses differ from those in undergraduate courses in important ways—specifically in the level of sophistication required of student papers as well as in the level of sophistication of the texts that students must consult in the writing of those papers. Is conferencing helpful in supplementing classroom learning? If so, how? What are the issues that arise in conferences with advanced EAP students?

The following case study is based on my observations of an advanced ESP writing class I taught in the spring of 1999. The study examines some of the issues that emerged from this class and the way they were reflected in a series of conferences with an individual student. It also describes my personal experience in using conferences to work with this student in determining the relevant issues in a particularly problematic paper and to enable her to revise it.

The Case Study

The Course

TESL 300 "Written Communication" was an advanced level writing class offered in the spring semester by the Candler School of Theology at Emory University between 1998 and 2000. Enrollment was determined by the results of a writing assessment test based on the Test of Written English that was given to all incoming international students: students whose scores did not reach the predetermined cut-off point of 4.5 were required to take the course in their first year of study. Other international students were also permitted to take the course if they wished. The course was given on a pass/fail basis only, and the students took it on top of their

regular course loads. The class met twice a week for 14 weeks; each class meeting lasted one hour and twenty minutes.

The students were enrolled in one of two degree programs: the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) program, which prepares candidates for the ordained ministry, and the Master of Theology (Th.M.) program, which is intended to be a gateway program for future Ph.D. studies. In the spring of 1999, the class consisted of fourteen students, five in the Th.M. program, eight in the M.Div. program, and one who was a special exchange student. However, at least half of the M.Div. students intended to apply to Th.M and Ph.D. programs after graduation, so the majority of the class needed to develop professional academic writing skills. Most students already had graduate or undergraduate degrees in theology from their own countries. Twelve of the students were Korean, one was a Russian of ethnic Korean descent, and one was Swedish. Four students were women. All were in their late twenties to late thirties.

Course Content and Structure

This class had several goals. First of all, the students were to work on refining their basic composition skill—constructing paragraphs, writing topic sentences and thesis statements, and so forth. Another important goal was to introduce or review with the students some of the basic conventions of academic writing, such as citation style, expectations for specific types of writing (reviews, comparison/contrast essays, etc.), avoiding plagiarism, summary writing, use of quotations, and paraphrasing. A few common grammar issues were also addressed briefly—sentence types, dependent clauses, use of verb tenses and maintenance of tense continuity. The most important goal, however, was to teach the students to analyze and use written academic texts appropriately in their essays, and construct consistent, logical arguments of their own in unified, focused papers.

I designed this class, constructed the syllabus, and developed handouts and most exercises. After consultation with administrators and faculty members, I also selected the readings that accompanied the writing assignments from a variety of theological texts. The class was developed on the basis of what Reid (1993) calls a combination curriculum, incorporating elements from both pattern-model-based and process-based curricula, together with a content-based syllabus. The pattern-model approach provided the overall structure of the course, the purpose of which was to give the students guided practice in writing the types of papers that are assigned in seminary classes. Because theological and religious studies are essentially humanities curricula, most of the writing that the students are required to do in seminary involves work with written scholarly sources.

The course was therefore structured around the composition of six two-page papers, five of which were to be written in response to selected readings and required conformity with different genres of academic writing. The six assignments

were 1) a four-paragraph essay on one of the following topics: a. "your decision to become a minister" b. "an important issue in your church," c. "a (theological or social) issue that interests you," d. "a ministry experience"; 2) a commentary on a short scripture passage and an accompanying reading which described an oral discussion of the text; 3) an article summary; 4) a reflection on a reading selection; 5) an article review; and 6) a comparison/contrast essay.

At the same time, a thematic content-based syllabus was followed by means of the assigned readings, which, in Reid's (1993) words, "[were] connected to the study of a specific audience...and subject matter that develop[ed] thinking, researching, and writing skills authentically"(p. 92). Every two weeks, the students were assigned a reading on which their writing assignment was based. The readings were relatively short, ranging in length from seven printed pages to one twenty-page, double-spaced manuscript.

As all readings and papers dealt exclusively with theological subjects, the class was in effect a "field-specific" ESP course. Moreover, I tried to provide even more cohesion by selecting readings that dealt with the theme of theology and culture, specifically non-Western cultures. Many of the readings were concerned with some aspect of liberation theology, a broad-based school of thought that originated in Latin America but is now the leading influence among theologians throughout the non-Western world. This theme was chosen because of its potential interest for the students and because most of them were already familiar with its basic concepts: liberation theology and its Korean counterpart, *minjung* theology, are taught in Korean seminaries. Furthermore, liberation theology is widely taught in US main-line seminaries, and students are expected to have at least a basic familiarity with its approach. Thus, students' pre-existing background schemata were utilized in the class.

There were good reasons for taking pains to choose a specialized topic for a class like this. As David Eskey (1993) emphasizes, writing is actually not an individual enterprise but takes place in a specific social context. Particularly in the case of academic writing, students' literary output is part of an initiatory process into a specific discourse community, or what Eskey calls a "literacy club"(pp. 225, 228-229). However, while being literate in and of itself may grant a novice entrance into the "club," it is only through shaping their writing according to the "club's" conventions and common concerns that students can become productive participants. Certainly, all my academically-minded students in the writing class wanted to become productive participants in their fields.

The class met once a week in a regular classroom where the students learned about and practiced various writing strategies and techniques related to the current writing assignment; the other weekly class meeting was held in the computer lab where they worked on writing and revising their papers. It was in this context that the process approach was most evident. Students sent me their drafts through Learn Link, an electronic network, where the class had a conference site. I wrote

extensive comments on the drafts and sent them back to the students' individual conference folders through the network. In my written comments, I tried to observe the guidelines in Zamel's and Sommers' articles on responding to student writing (Zamel 1996, Sommers 1996). That is to say, I tried to emphasize the larger writing issues in each student's essay and address its development as a whole, but I also wrote specific comments targeted at particular passages when necessary. The students revised the drafts in the computer lab, where I had a chance to conference briefly with several of them during the class period. They sent their revised drafts back through Learn Link, and I returned them again with further comments and a grade. Because time was limited, students generally wrote two drafts, although occasionally someone who needed more extensive help or who had produced a promising but incomplete second draft wrote three.

I did not originally plan for extra conference time outside of class with the students. However, I was won over to its importance while taking a course on teaching L2 writing at Georgia State University, which was held at the same time I was teaching the writing class. As a result, I arranged several times for outside conferences with students who were having particular difficulties. These conferences met with notable success. All but the first of the student conferences described later in this paper were outside conferences. In the meantime, I also decided to hold mini-conferences during class time, as some L2 conference proponents suggest (Reid 1993, pp. 223-224). The first of the student conferences discussed below was one of these. Although these mini-conferences helped me to keep tabs on the students' progress to a certain degree, they were not always sufficient to help students with significant difficulties, as the case study below illustrates.

Class Issues

A couple of critical issues emerged in the writing class as the semester progressed. They affected a number of students and were also reflected in the series of individual conferences discussed below.

The most important writing issue that developed in the class was insufficient understanding or misunderstanding of the readings that accompanied the writing assignments. The biggest problems with many essays stemmed from inadequate or misguided analysis of the readings. These problems occurred despite the fact that none of the readings were more difficult than were those in the students' regular classes and a couple of them were comparatively easy. I had depended on students to do the readings on their own and discuss them on the class conference site, so I did not spend much time discussing the content of the readings. However, very few students participated. I realized then that I had not dealt adequately with the issue of training students to read and analyze the texts that they were to respond to and that this was adversely affecting their writing. Despite their overall familiarity with the concepts of liberation theology, these students lacked the appropriate content

and formal schemata to approach the specific tasks successfully (Reid, 1993, p. 62).

I addressed this issue by introducing the students to a set of strategies they could use to analyze a text. For this exercise I used "Active Reading," (Lowe, 1998) an unpublished guide written for theology students by a Candler professor, which deals with deciphering difficult scholarly texts. The guide teaches students to identify the main problem in a given text, to identify and deconstruct its main arguments, and to organize one's critique. The students found parts of this approach helpful but needed more guidance than L1 students have reportedly done in applying it. As a result, I found myself becoming increasingly more directive in class and relying more on modeling to convey the concepts used in the guide.

I went over punctuation and proper use of quotations, citation style, plagiarism, and paraphrase writing in several class sessions. I generally used two approaches when addressing issues related to text usage: clarification (e.g. what plagiarism actually involves) and teaching techniques (how to write a paraphrase). Some problems persisted, however, and in the student conferences discussed below, I discovered the need to take an additional approach.

Student Conferences

The student conferences I have focused on for this project illustrate problems with issues similar to those that I attempted to address in class: understanding a written text and using outside sources in a paper. I describe these conferences in some detail to illustrate the problems that can arise in L2 graduate students' writing, which necessarily involves the use of more specialized texts and requires a higher level of sophistication in conceptualization and analysis than do undergraduate papers. In addition, the conferences illustrate the developmental nature of a teacher-assisted revision process, which in this case was particularly painstaking.

In graduate level writing, the most serious problems may stem from inadequate understanding of texts and difficulty in determining the main question that needs to be addressed rather than from compositional structure or topic development. However, these problems may be masked by other surface errors in grammar, lexis, or organization, and they may not be readily apparent to a teacher at first glance. The process of identifying and satisfactorily addressing these issues can rarely be achieved through written teacher comments alone. Student-teacher conferences, on the other hand, provide a context in which teacher and student can work together to unearth the essay's fundamental problems and through which, because of the cooperative nature of conferences, students can more easily grasp what is wrong and determine how to change it.

The conferences described below not only depict the process whereby a student was able to revise a problematic piece of writing, but also demonstrate my own

trial-and-error process as I struggled to understand the real problems with the essay and describe the mistakes I made before succeeding in giving my student the necessary help.

The conferences focused on a writing assignment, which required the students to respond to three related questions based on a reading and a scripture passage. The reading, "The Healing of the Daughter of the Canaanite Woman" by Ernesto Cardenal (1978), was essentially the transcript of a discussion about the scripture text between a priest and his rural parishioners. The scripture text, Matthew 15: 21-28, is a well-known story from the New Testament in which Jesus initially spurns the plea of a Gentile woman to heal her daughter but ultimately heals the girl and praises the mother for her faith. The three questions are as follows:

1. **What is the meaning of this scripture text, as you understand it?**
2. **What are the interpretations [of the Matthew text] given by the people in the Cardenal reading and why do you think they give them?**
3. **How might this text be applied to your own cultural context?**

Most students devoted the bulk of their essays to answering the first question and gave the other two short shrift. One reason for this tendency, I later realized, was that they lacked the background information to fully understand the reading, which had not been discussed in class. In fact, some knowledge of the context was important in understanding the reading: it was no ordinary Bible study, but took place between an activist priest and a group of peasants in Nicaragua in the late 1970's on the eve of the Sandinista revolution. Another reason for the students' neglect of questions 2 and 3 is probably that although they had plenty of experience interpreting biblical passages, they had less experience in reading a text like Cardenal's. Examining various alternative interpretations of scripture by others from different socio-cultural backgrounds appeared to be unfamiliar territory. Consequently, the students chose to stick with what was familiar to their own cultural and theological backgrounds and so gave only cursory attention to the reading.

The Meetings

These collective problems were multiplied in Kyong-hee's* writing. She was a M.Div. student from Korea who had only been in the US for five months. When she submitted her first draft of the assigned essay on February 5, I was taken aback. She did not give a summary of the Matthew story, but plunged right into a contorted, intensive analysis of the text that took up most of her essay. She zeroed in on specific words in the text without explaining the reason for her focus. I also noticed that for some unexplained reason she wanted to compare the text to a similar story in the gospel of Mark, but did not follow

***A pseudonym.*

through with it. One of the main problems with Kyong-hee's jumbled arguments was that they did not seem to have any context. To use Flower's (1996) terminology, the paper was laced with writer-based, rather than reader-based prose. Its coded shorthand, while laden with meaning for the writer, was incomprehensible to other readers because of the lack of a shared context.

Because the essay was so obscure and tortuous, I hardly knew how to respond. I made a reflexive decision to encourage Kyong-hee because she had been struggling so hard in class, so I limited my comments to instructions to clarify one or two of the worst sections and hoped for the best. This turned out to be a mistake.

I talked to Kyong-hee in a "mini-conference" during the next class. I told her that I did not understand her focus on individual words in the text and suggested that she drop her idea of comparing the text with the Mark passage. She seemed to understand and take my comments to heart. I was still hopeful that a little clarification and grammar correction here and there could pull the essay into some sort of reasonable shape.

I was dismayed when I received Kyong-hee's second draft several days later. The problems had not been solved—they had mushroomed. Instead of dropping her idea of making a comparison with text from Mark, she had followed through with it, making the essay more incomprehensible than ever. When I examined the draft closely, I realized that in my earlier reading I had missed its most basic problems.

- 1. Task misrepresentation.** Kyong-hee seemed to have missed the point of the assignment entirely, which was to reflect on the "lesson" of the Matthew story as an ordinary reader. Instead she had turned the paper into an exegesis, a technical exercise in biblical studies in which a scripture text is analyzed intensively with the help of specialized commentaries.
- 2. Plagiarism.** In proceeding with her exegesis model, she had plagiarized arguments and entire sentences from some unacknowledged commentary.
- 3. Text misunderstanding.** She had completely misunderstood the assigned reading. She had not managed to pick up any clues about the context of the discussion—that it was a group of ordinary working people sharing their personal interpretations of a gospel story. Instead of reflecting on who the participants were and why they advanced their different interpretations of the Matthew story, she treated their opinions as if they were scholarly analyses, which she set out to systematically demolish.

her understanding of the passage. As I talked, I could see that she was slowly beginning to get the picture.

This entire interchange and the eventual illumination it produced would have been impossible outside the conference format. The immediacy and spontaneity of the interchange was crucial in enabling Kyong-hee to achieve the breakthroughs she did. The conference format also allowed for a necessary digression—changing the focus of discussion from the paper to the reading itself, and moving from a focus on specific errors to a reconceptualization of the entire essay. Finally, the conference meeting provided me with a rich resource of contextual cues that aided me in communicating with my student. Kyong-hee's affect, body language, and paralinguistic clues all helped me to determine whether she understood my questions or if she was dissatisfied or overloaded, and gave me the opportunity to switch approaches in midstream, as it were, to achieve more effective communication.

When I received Kyong-hee's third draft, I was pleasantly surprised and greatly relieved. The form still left much to be desired, and there were still obscure passages. However, she had completely refocused her essay, which made an enormous difference. Abandoning her exegesis model, she had scrapped nearly all of her previous draft and thrown out all her arguments based on her plagiarized source and all comparisons to the gospel of Mark. Instead, she simply related the Matthew story and her understanding of it in a straightforward way, and as a result much of the tortuous coded language disappeared.

At our next meeting, I focused on all her improvements and explained to her why her essay was so much better. She was pleased and replied that she had tried to rethink the whole assignment based on our conversation about the purpose of this writing task.

Later, I went over her essay in more detail. I looked on this as a sort of "clean-up" operation after the main problems had been dealt with. I was now able to deal with the second tier of problems that also affected the general comprehensibility of the essay.

Our last meeting focused on content-related problems at the sentence level as well as logical inconsistencies I had noticed. In the past, I had returned her papers with detailed comments explaining why specific passages were unclear and asking her to correct them along the lines I had suggested; however, in the majority of instances, she either did not make any changes or revised incorrectly. This time, when I explained a problem verbally, she usually picked up on it at once and was able to provide an acceptable revision on her own. When we finished working on the draft together, the result was significantly superior to her previous preliminary drafts.

I received Kyong-hee's final draft on April 15. Before I corrected it, I noticed that she had made improvements in nearly all the areas we had discussed in our final conference. In its final form, her essay not only showed focus, cohesion and coherence, it also had thoughtfulness and a certain heartfelt appeal that the original draft had lacked. This piece of writing had come a long way.

Final Reflections

In some ways, the problems that Kyong-hee faced in this essay were also the problems of the entire writing class. Like the other students, Kyong-hee had trouble writing her paper because of an inadequate understanding of both the text to which she was supposed to respond and the task requirements. In this case, the difficulty did not involve the deciphering of a difficult scholarly text—which had been the subject of several class meetings. The Cardenal reading was more like a narrative, but it involved a close reading of the words of the participants in order to understand their different interpretations of the biblical story, their motivations and the implications of what they said. It was a different form of reading, and apparently a different form of writing, from what the students were used to. They knew what to do when faced with a scripture passage; they did not know what to do with a discussion about a scripture passage in which multiple views were expressed—perhaps because in their culture interpretations are handed down by ecclesiastical and theological authorities and are not often independently explored by students and lay people. The writing problems in this class, then, clearly involved deeper issues than mechanics, grammar, and form. In Kyong-hee's case, it was only when we explored these issues that the real changes took place in her writing.

The experience with this class and the conferences with Kyong-hee taught me a few things about basing writing assignments on readings. The first was the importance of ensuring that students had the necessary background and formal schemata to undertake the assignments successfully. As the course progressed, I made new attempts to do this by incorporating more discussions of the readings in class, as well as by introducing reading strategies like Lowe's "Active Reading."

Closely related to this issue was the necessity of making sure that the students understood the task requirements and kept on task. In this writing class I was unsure of how best to do this because I usually did not realize there was a problem until I received the students' first drafts. When a paper revealed fundamental problems rooted in task misrepresentation, as in Kyong-hee's case, I was faced with a dilemma. Because the students were taking the writing class as an overload and were overwhelmed with work in their other classes, I felt reluctant to require a student to rewrite the entire paper after she/he had put so much time into the first draft. In Kyong-hee's case, though, my indecision and half-hearted encouragement did not help her get a grip on her paper. It was only when she reworked the entire essay that she was able to make a clear improvement. Fortunately, she was motivated enough to do the additional work and see the process through.

Some of Kyong-hee's other problems, like plagiarism, also had deeper causes. She was confused about the notion of using one's own reasoning and one's own words to describe, evaluate, and interpret. Again, I suspect that cultural factors played a role here. My explanations to her about plagiarism during our second conference were in some ways an extension of my discussion in the class meeting about the proper use of quotations and paraphrases. Both dealt with the issue of distinguishing between using external sources as support for one's original arguments, on one hand, and slavishly imitating authorities, on the other. When Kyong-hee grasped the concept of using her own words, the plagiarism problem disappeared. Yet she had not adequately understood the classroom discussion, and I doubt she would have been able to come to such an understanding had she not been able to articulate her questions in a conference setting.

Through teaching this writing class I became more aware of how valuable conferencing can be, especially when students manifest serious problems in their writing. However, although at times I served as "coach" and "diagnostician"—two of Harris's (1996) identified roles for a teacher in a conference—in my discussions with Kyong-hee, in general I was more directive than L1 educators recommend. Although at other times I had served as listener and counselor for Kyong-hee, in these conferences I functioned more as a guide and an informant, as Powers and Nelson's (1995) writing center tutors found they needed to be with their ESL students. At the time, I felt that, rather than engaging in a more egalitarian collaborative relationship, Kyong-hee more urgently needed a guiding hand to help her become familiar with the conventions and expectations of the academic/theological discourse community.

By the same token, as the semester proceeded, I became more directive with the class as a whole. I modeled more, gave more guidelines, and challenged student's logic and interpretations of texts to a greater extent. I did not want to appropriate the originality of their thinking processes; in fact, I hoped that what I was teaching them would eventually enhance their capacity for creative thinking. However, I came to believe that, as academic writers, these students needed to go through a stage in which—contrary to prevailing L1 wisdom—they did try to "please me" by shaping their writing according to "what I wanted" instead of simply going off in their own directions. What would save this process from becoming a mechanical exercise, I concluded, was to explain to the students *why* I wanted what I did and how it related to the conventions and purposes of academic writing. I hoped that by doing so I would help my students better understand the expectations of the professors in their other classes and ultimately those of their chosen discourse communities as a whole.

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Appendix A

Essay Assignment Reading

The Healing of the Daughter of the Canaanite Woman
(Matthew 15: 21-28)

"Jesus left there and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon."

I said that this meant that Jesus left Israel and went abroad. The gospel does not tell us why. We may think he was fleeing. We know that he was being persecuted. There must have been some reason why he had to leave the country. He goes to a neighboring country (as we go to Costa Rica). But earlier the gospel had told about the death of John the Baptist and it said that when Jesus heard the news he went away in a boat, to a place apart, although many people followed him there. Now we find him among the pagans.

"And a Canaanite woman who lived in that region came to Jesus crying: 'Lord, Son of David, have pity on me! My daughter has an evil spirit and suffers terribly.' But Jesus gave her no answer. Then his disciples begged him: 'Pay heed to her, for she comes crying after us.' Then Jesus said: 'God has sent me only to the lost sheep of the nation of Israel.' But the woman approached and knelt down before him saying, 'Lord, help me!' And Jesus said to her: 'It is not right to take bread from children and give it to puppies.'"

JULIO: "He behaved very badly."

MANUEL: "He was too burned up."

ELVIS: "It seems to me that when the woman made that plea to Jesus, he

didn't like it. He rejected it. Why? Who knows?"

LAUREANO: "She must have been a rich old woman."

JORGE, a young Chilean who was visiting us and who had fled from his country soon after the military coup: "She must have been an oppressor. The children must have been the children of Israel, the oppressed, and she probably belonged to the oppressors, which is why he calls them dogs."

I said that the region of Tyre and Sidon, which was also called Phoenicia, was the nation with the best developed commerce in antiquity. The Bible says that its merchants were princes. It was a very rich nation and therefore very oppressive. The gospel doesn't say that the Phoenician woman was exactly a rich old woman, but it calls her "Canaanite," and to Jews "Canaanite" was the same as saying "pagan" and "pagan" was the same as saying "oppressor." The Jews also called pagans "dogs" while the Chosen People were called "children of God."

OSCAR: "There the woman is, humiliated, right? She's humbled. She knelt down to him besides. She might belong to a people of exploiters, but she got down on her knees begging his pardon. Because she says to him: 'Yes, Lord.'"

JORGE, the Chilean: "I don't think the woman herself was an oppressor. She may have belonged to a nation of oppressors. But she also needed Christ, because she had a sick daughter."

I said: "She believed in him as a Messiah, but she knows that he is the Messiah of another people, and she addresses him with the Jewish Messianic title 'Son of David.' He explains that he has been sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

FRANCISCO: "And the woman wasn't a lost sheep?"

CHEPE: "She wasn't from Israel."

QUIQUE, the Puerto Rican student: "It gives the impression that Jesus' movement was a nationalist movement. It wasn't internationalist. Only for one nation."

Another said: "Selfish?"

I said: "I believe the lost sheep were only those of Israel, which had been chosen for freedom and had gone astray, that is, it had fallen into the injustices and oppressions of the other peoples. The Messiah had been promised to Israel, to free it so that, by means of that freedom, all the other peoples would be free. Jesus was always conscious that his personal mission was limited only to Israel, but after the resurrection he charged the apostles to announce the Good News to all the peoples of the earth."

OSCAR: "That woman was too pushy. Their hour hadn't come."

Another of the boys said: "But she has a sick daughter and she can't wait."

And another: "That business about the bread is a comparison. It's the love that he's teaching here to his group. And then when she came to interrupt him so that he'd perform a miracle for other people, she was taking away what he was giving to his own people to give it to other people. And besides they had the devil there. What could you expect? The girl was sick; wasn't she possessed? Didn't she have an evil spirit? Illness was serious business!"

I said that those people possessed of the devil, or people "with an evil spirit" as the gospel says, were usually cases of psychic illnesses, which in those times were considered to be of the devil. And maybe they are of the devil. Or, according to many modern scientists, they are produced by selfishness, which is similar.

QUIQUE: "I also think that Jesus wanted to give his disciples (and he was traveling only with them, because he was apparently in flight) an example of what would later be their work: to distribute that bread among all who had faith, without regard to their nationality. And I believe that now there are many people outside the church who don't seem to believe in God, but they're struggling to give the people justice, which is like saying God. And these are like those foreigners who supposedly couldn't have faith, because they weren't of the Chosen People, according to the laws of that time. These are the foreigners, the Communists who are receiving the bread."

MANUEL: "That the others aren't receiving, the ones he was bringing it for. Because notice, Jesus was bringing his bread for his people, Israel, but he's had to flee from Israel. There they reject him. But outside his country a woman proclaims him Messiah, Son of David."

OSCAR: "It seems then as though the dogs deserved the bread more than the children, right?"

I said that Mark tells us expressly that Jesus had wanted to be incognito abroad. And I read Mark 7: 24: "Jesus went from there to the region of Tyre and Sidon. He entered a house and he did not want anyone there to know him; but he could not hide. And soon the mother of a girl heard about him..." Mark had earlier said that Jesus had been getting a lot of attention and that many people had come to see him, among them foreigners from Tyre and Sidon.

BOSCO: "It's clear he was now in flight."

JORGE, the Chilean: "But we also see that he didn't want to do any work there. He was like in exile and he didn't want to do anything. He wasn't supposed to do anything there."

"But she said to him: 'Yes, Lord, but even dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the tables of their masters.'"

IVAN: "She humbled herself because she believed."

OSCAR: "The woman humbled herself because she knew that he hadn't been sent to that nation, that is, to the dogs. But now the people of Israel scorned him. And she had to humble herself to see if she could get what they scorned."

MANUEL: "But she accepts that they are dogs, doesn't she? Well, of course, because he had been sent to another nation, and she knew that God took them for dogs. That was her faith: that they are pagans that the others are the children, and that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel."

OSCAR spoke again: "The children scorn the bread. Then the woman thinks that maybe they wouldn't get just the crumbs but the whole loaf. And she was humbled because she wanted the loaf for herself."

"Then Jesus said to her: 'Woman, how great is your faith! Let it be done as you wish.' And from that very moment her daughter was cured."

JULIO RAMON: "The girl stopped making trouble. The devil left her."

OSCAR: "He said 'how great is your faith' because he was scolding her. He was harsh with her, then, and yet there she was, humbled. And then he accepted her into the Jewish people. He gave her the children's bread. She needed Jesus because that girl was making life impossible for them in that house."

I said: "You have to keep in mind that Jesus didn't call the pagans 'dogs,' as the Jews called them, but 'puppies,' and that is a rather affectionate expression. He might also have said it a bit jokingly to the woman, with a smile on his lips. On another occasion, when Jesus praised the faith of a Roman centurion, in Capernaum, he said that later many foreigners would come from the East and the West to sit down at the banquet of the kingdom of heaven. There are no longer dogs, only children; we are all brothers and sisters. And the bread of Jesus Christ is for all to share, even Communists.

QUIQUE: "As I see it, there are two Jesuses here: the mortal Jesus who devoted himself only to the Jews because he was a Jew, and the resurrected Jesus, who's for everybody, who's international."

From E. Cardenal (1978). The gospel in Solentiname (Vol. 1). Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, pp. 209-215.

Appendix B

Draft 1: First page

Matthew purpose in the text

The interpretation of the text Matthew 15:21-28, I think, necessary depends on the comparasim with the Mark text because it is common that Matthew has made use of a second form of the tradition and has conflated it with Mark. Therefore, my interpretation of the text will depends on the literature commentary with that of Mark. In order to do this, it is necessary to critic and to compare my suggestion with people in the textbook. These attempts, I think, will be helpful to acquire the meaning of the text as well as application it in the our present context.

In the interpretation of the text, the words such as "Came out(V,22)", "Lord, Son of David (V,22)", and "Knelt(v25) , which Matthew used, are significant because these words, which are used a little bit different way in Mark, I think, are clues to find the purpose of Matthew to record this text. Therefore, it is necessary to analysis and compare these words with that of Mark.

First, I want to analysis and compare the word "Came out (v, 22) with the words " fled", which is used by Jorge in the essay. Jorge's understanding of this word is that Jesus had fled from his country soon after the military cope because he was the oppressed of . But Matthew did not use that like the meaning. That is, Matthew did not use the word "came out" from out of country, as if Jesus had remained within the northern boundary, but out of her house because Matthew would not have Jesus violate Jewish custom by entering a house in a heathen city. Matthew revises Mark's picture.

Draft 4: First page

The Interpretation of Matthew 15:21-28

The article " The Healing of the Daughter of the Canaanite Woman" can be considered as a possible model for interpretation of the Bible, in which we can see people' s various approaching methods and insights of the Bible. In this sense, the article " The Healing of the Daughter of the Canaanite Woman" can be regarded as particular interpretations of the text Matthew 15: 21-28 by some people in the article, who have each different opinions of the text. Then, why the people in the article perform interpretation with different insights of the text? The reason, I think, lies in the people's different cultural and religious backgrounds; that is, the people interpret the text with their own cultural and religious frameworks and languages. In this sense, I think that the interpretation of the text is dependent on the interpreter and his own cultural and religious backgrounds. Therefore, my interpreta-

tion is also dependent upon my cultural and religious backgrounds. In addition, I think that it is natural that the application of my interpretation is also subject to my own cultural and religious context, in which I have grown. I think that it is necessary that because people in the article have all particular cultural or religious, I have to respect their own positions of the text, but I want to discuss my interpretation with the people in the article in regard to the text Matthew 15: 21-28.