

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK IN ONLINE
DISCUSSION FORUMS IN INTEGRATED READING AND
WRITING COURSES

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
LMS	Learning Management System
RDG	Reading Improvement
IRW	Integrated Reading and Writing Course

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past 200 years there has been a continuous need for preparatory courses for students who do not meet college readiness standards (Boylan & Bonham, 1994; Casazza, 1999). Although the need for preparatory courses has been continuous, the same cannot be said for the needs of the students enrolled. For example, more students need non-academic support now than in previous years (Lotkowski, Robbin, & Noeth, 2004). To support students' transition into college, developmental education reading and writing courses have been developed to facilitate students' literacy development and better prepare them for college-level coursework. From the beginning of preparatory education until now, reading courses have always been present due to the ever-changing literacy expectations postsecondary courses demand from students. To support students facing the evolving literacy expectations, some instructors of developmental education reading courses have integrated reading and writing instruction, in which literacy and meaning making are the primary focus. In integrated reading and writing coursework, reading and writing are viewed as inseparable parts of literacy development (Tierney & Pearson, 1983). Moreover, helping students learn to generate meaning from texts is critical to developmental reading and writing instruction (Caverly, Salsburg Taylor, Dimino, & Lampi, 2016). One way students have learned to generate meaning from texts is through their interaction with their instructor in online platforms, which have increased the amount of student and instructor interactions. These platforms have helped students' progress in literacy development and meaning making.

Social Constructivism in Online Platforms

A theory supporting how students have generated meaning from texts is social constructivism. Social constructivism, as stated by Vygotsky (1978), stressed the role of social interaction in meaning making. The concept of social constructivism stresses the interactions influencing meaning making and the importance of examining the ways in which this social interaction is taking place in a classroom. As referenced above, students have improved meaning making through the use of online social platforms. With the incorporation of online platforms to enhance social interaction with their instructor and the context's specific literacy demands, one would assume there would be a multitude of research concerning these prevalent learning platforms. Although numerous higher education institutions have adopted web-based learning systems in their courses (Lee, Hsiao, & Purnomo, 2014) and many instructors incorporated online discussions in online, hybrid, and face-to-face courses (Kurthen & Smith, 2005), the documented support behind the use of these systems is just not there. The prevalence of online platforms for instruction and social interaction, and the lack of documented support becomes an issue when supporting student achievement and ultimately brings attention to the need for additional scholarship in this area.

Instructor Feedback

Some instructors have used online platforms to provide feedback to their students. Feedback, which is a form of social interaction, has occurred regularly in developmental reading and writing courses, and in some cases, it is the only form of interaction between the instructors and students. A strong body of research supports feedback as playing an intricate role in student learning (Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991;

Brinko, 1990; Clariana & Lee, 2001; Clariana, Wagner, & Rohrer-Murphy, 2000; Kulhavy, Yekovich, Dyer, 1976; Kulhavy & Stock, 1989; Kulik & Kulik, 1988; and Mory, 1992). According to Hattie's (1999) research, a synthesis of over 500 meta-analyses involving 450,000 effect sizes from 180,000 studies, and representing 20 to 30 million students, showed that not only does feedback play a role in learning, but Hattie considered it as one of the top ten influences on student achievement. Although feedback has been deemed important by researchers, little research has been done to investigate the effectiveness of feedback from the students' perspective. For example, researchers such as Hattie and Timperly (2007) surmised that although much has been done to evaluate the impact on learning and achievement from instructor feedback; little has been done to evaluate the actual effectiveness as perceived by the individual student. Therefore, few studies are available to determine the extent to which feedback positively and/or negatively affects students' subjective experiences regarding instructor feedback. Similarly, there is also little known about the approaches to feedback that students prefer or believe will help them grow as learners, especially in online course contexts.

Feedback in Online Environments

Although feedback has been delivered in online platforms, researchers have not explored how online feedback affects student success or how instructor feedback is affected by the online platforms through which it is delivered. With the myriad of opportunities for social interaction online platforms create, researchers should conduct to ensure unforeseen perceptions of instructor feedback, dissimilar to ones in more common modes such as face-to-face, are not influencing the student success feedback is well-known for improving. For example, although there much research about online

education, the same cannot be said for the many online education features. According to Kinash, Brand, and Mathew (2012), the emergence of computer tablets with portability, abundant multimedia applications, and multiple routes for internet access, extend the use of e-learning applications; therefore, implying meaning making through social interaction can literally happen anywhere and anytime. With the ability for interaction to happen anytime and anywhere this could lead to different findings regarding the effects of feedback on student learning or student perceptions of feedback. For example, if a student were in a fully online course and communicated with their instructor solely through their Learning Management System (LMS) platform, their perceptions of feedback may be different than a student who saw their instructor weekly and received feedback in many different forms. Similarly, according to schema theory, each student has brought previous perceptions and preferences to the course, which then results in different perceptions of feedback in every situation each student experiences.

Student perceptions of feedback. Due to the limited research conducted on the effectiveness of online instructor feedback with regard to meaning making and student achievement, it becomes pertinent to query the students who have experienced this feedback first-hand. According to Astin (1982), students are in a good position to comment about programs of study and could, in return, help institutions improve their contribution to student development. Hill (1995) also reasoned that students are collectively more aware of problems in the classroom and have offered valuable input to instructors. Ultimately, by studying student perceptions of instructor feedback within areas such as online forums, it could inform integrated reading and writing instruction

within more specific contexts, contribute to student development, and even enhance classroom instructional methods.

Theoretical Framework

I viewed this study through the lenses of four key theories. These are discussed in pairs, below. In the next section, I will discuss sociocultural theory, the theory of discourse, schema theory, and the theory of a metaphor. I chose to discuss sociocultural and sociolinguistic theory in tandem to illuminate the importance of social interaction and context in relation to perception research. I also discuss as well as schema theory and the conceptual theory of a metaphor together to rationalize why each student should be asked about their perceptions and to provide a way to gather them.

Sociocultural Theory and Theory of Discourse

The primary theoretical perspectives I chose that influence the need for perception research within online discussion forums in this study are sociocultural theory, theory of discourse, schema theory, and the theory of a metaphor. This research adopts the theory of learning as a sociocultural, cognitive, and complex process (Bartlett, 1932; Gee, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). The first part of this framework stems from the original proposal made by Vygotsky (1978) that human behavior results from the integration of socially and culturally constructed forms of mediation into human activity. For this study, I use sociocultural theory as a lens through which readers can view human learning as a social process (Vygotsky, 1978).

Sociocultural theory, although separate, can be combined with the more recent view of Gee's (2000) sociolinguistic theory of discourse which stated:

a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and artifacts, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network (Gee, 1996, p. 131).

Gee suggested students build literacy skills and practice them within the communities in which they interact. Combining sociocultural theory and sociolinguistic theory it is suggested that student perceptions have much to do with the discourse community the feedback is presented in as well as the context in which it is taking place.

Schema Theory and Conceptual Theory of a Metaphor

Bartlett (1932) stated that schema theory is knowledge organized into compartmentalized units. Within these units of knowledge, or schemata, is previously stored information. Bartlett (1932) proposed that schemata, or previous knowledge, influence the perception or understanding each individual learner makes. Anderson (1977) added to schema theory research and suggested schema theory, in connection to reading, emphasized that literacy involves both the bottom-up processing of letters and symbols and the use of top down knowledge to construct a complete representation of the context of the text. Ultimately, schema theory suggested that each student, within a social setting, brings differential perceptions and preconceived ideas and interpretations that could influence the understanding and needs of knowledge or ideas in the classroom.

Considering each student brings different perceptions and preconceived ideas that could influence their understanding, a need surfaces to represent and gather these perceptions. One way to gather perceptions is with the use of metaphors. Because perceptions cannot be visibly seen or recorded, Armstrong (2008), stated “metaphorical

linguistic expressions (which can be studied) can provide a possible window to a person's conceptualizations" (p. 120). Metaphors are, in essence, a way for students to relate their perceptions to objects, emotions, or symbols to express more complex perceptions in clearer terms. Similarly, Erdoğan and Erdoğan (2013) stated metaphors are considered as the strongest device for an individual to comprehend and explain a hypothetical or an abstract, complex fact at a high level. This suggests that metaphors can play an important role in the transfer of intentional meaning from student to researcher. By incorporating an elicited metaphor into perception research, it is incorporating an extra layer of data to represent just how the situation and context affects each student.

The Connection between Learning, Context, and the Student

Piecing together Vygotsky and Gee's claim that behavior is dependent on social and cultural construct and Bartlett and Anderson's schema theory that literacy comprehension is influenced by the individual students previously created schemata, it can be assumed that learning has much to do with the students and atmosphere in which they are learning. This conclusion suggests the need for studies of perception in more specific areas, such as online learning platforms, because success is in the hands of individual learners, their experience, and the sociocultural context with which feedback takes place.

Finally, as suggested above, collecting student perceptions through a metaphor will allow researchers to gain a better understanding of the scope of student perceptions of feedback. For example, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) stated:

Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in

defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor. (p. 3)

Lakoff and Johnson agreed that the concepts of how we relate to other people and the world (sociocultural theory and sociolinguistics theory) and our experiences (schema theory) are already in the language within the students, and metaphors are a way of extracting that language in a form that is explainable by more concrete objects and symbols.

Overview of the Study

A major goal of this study was to help advance research concerning student perceptions of instructor feedback within online discussion forums. More specifically, this study gathered undergraduate student perceptions of instructor feedback in online discussion forums in Integrated Reading and Writing (IRW), Developmental Education courses to uncover themes which could improve instructor feedback practices in this area. The research question that guided this study was: What are student perceptions of instructor feedback in online discussion forum posts in developmental IRW courses?

I implemented a qualitative case studies approach using semi-structured interviews and an extended elicited metaphor, which involved asking participants to create a metaphor for what they think instructor feedback is like and explain why they chose that metaphor. The aim was to identify student perceptions of instructor feedback on student posts about required course readings in online forums between the individual students and their instructor. I intended to provide information to fill gaps in feedback literature, specifically concerning students enrolled in online courses. Much research has

been done to solidify the fact that feedback is a major factor of student success in face-to-face and writing areas, but the same cannot be said for feedback given in an online platform. From a social constructivist lens, feedback is situated socially, and perception research from a non-online environment cannot be generalized to the online environment without accounting for that change in the social atmosphere. Therefore, studies specifically on perceptions within online areas need to be done to ensure students' needs are still being met.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of literature attends to three main purposes: (a) to investigate previous research on feedback as perceived by the individual student, (b) to assist in the progression of current frameworks surrounding feedback and the instructor, and (c) to help situate this study, theoretically and methodologically within the existing bodies of feedback research.

Role of Feedback in Education

Although there is research supporting that feedback is an important practice for improving achievement and instruction (Clariana, Wagner, & Murphy, 2000; Kulhavy & Stock, 1989; Mory, 1992; Panasuk & LeBaron, 1999), Delgado and Prieto (2003) claimed, “it is impossible to give an affirmative answer to the general question of whether feedback improves performance” (p. 8). Delgado and Prieto’s research implied there could be a disconnect between instructor understanding and student perception.

To combat this possible disconnect, research needs to be conducted on student perceptions of feedback and its intentions. Mory (1992) found feedback can promote learning if it is received mindfully, but simply providing feedback is not enough. To investigate how students individually perceive feedback, instructors can check in with students about feedback. According to Hattie and Timperly (2007), surprisingly few studies have systematically investigated the perception of feedback in classrooms. Although a great deal of evidence and research on feedback showing it as a powerful indicator for student achievement exists, (Hattie, 1999) it is apparent more work needs to be done to explore how feedback makes a difference to each student.

Current Perceptions of Feedback

In order to determine the value of feedback from the students' perspective, it is important to first look at the perceptions of feedback that students have previously deemed necessary for their personal achievement. Numerous studies have been conducted on various facets and types of feedback in education, such as quantitative ratings, descriptive comments, and letter grades in both physical written feedback, and online feedback domains.

In one qualitative case study, Chokwe (2015) investigated student and tutor perceptions of feedback on academic essays in an open and distance learning context. This case study approach was used on first year English second language students in open and distance learning contexts to investigate how they perceived the quality of feedback they receive on their written work. Chokwe found that all students reported they valued feedback because it helps avoid repeated mistakes. Some other perceptions were that students did not feel instructor feedback was clear or even legible due to the instructors' hand writing. Overall, this study concluded that feedback provided to students was not always sufficient and possibly denied them opportunities to learn effectively as they did not know their strengths and weaknesses.

Carol Strobl (2015) completed an exploratory study of 38 participants who were 2nd year undergraduate students of Applied Language Studies at a higher education college in Belgium were asked to complete a complex writing task. In order to measure student perceptions of their learning gain, the author used an online intervention, which examined two variables: the student self-reported overall learning gain on a 5-point Likert scale and the student self-assessment scores from their written summaries. The

main goal of this study was to broaden the understanding of student attitudes with different types of feedback. The results indicated a satisfactory learning gain in summary writing after feedback and self-evaluation was complete. Although there was gain, the students reported low self-confidence in the self-assessment scores, which indicated insecurities about perceived progress. Although this study indicated students valued feedback and were receiving it, students suggested they were still unsure whether or not feedback helped their overall academic goals.

Similarly, Maier, Wolf, and Randler (2015) conducted a study by investigating the effects of a computer-assisted formative assessment intervention based on different feedback types; they conducted their research in an experimental field study in ten biology classrooms in six secondary schools in northern Bavaria, Germany. Two hundred and sixty-one students, who were randomly assigned to one of three treatment groups within the classroom to ensure high internal validity, participated. Although the variation in types of feedback was only a small portion of the formative tests, the researchers found the variations in key features of the formative assessment procedure, such as feedback, could exert influence on learning outcomes. The authors concluded from this finding that there may be feedback types, which are more effective, other than the elaborate feedback employed in this study.

Murphy and Cornell (2010) conducted a qualitative study, in which 18 first-year and 20 third-year undergraduate students participated in order to discover themes that best summarized the students' experiences of feedback on assessment; the authors discovered six main findings. The students were asked what they needed from feedback and they listed typed feedback, in opposition to hand-written feedback; feedback on

exams, marking what they got wrong; specific, structured and clear feedback; face-to-face feedback, more specifically one-on-one feedback in opposition to instructors having “open door hours”; a feedback chain, a suggestion for a system where students could access all of their feedback and grades to compare across modules and identify areas for improvement;, and technical help. Although the students interviewed created a long list of preferences, the authors found that the instructors of these course also had large course loads placed on them restricting their ability to what they could realistically provide and be achieved with the other pressures of their commitments.

In another qualitative study of 42 international students studying within an intensive English program at a large Midwestern U.S. university, Haupt and Bikowski (2014) developed a survey to assess perceptions on written feedback. This article focused on perceptions of both direct and indirect form-focused written feedback. Haupt and Bikowski (2014) described direct feedback as the marking of errors giving the students the correct form; whereas, indirect feedback involves the marking of errors, but does not involve giving students the correct form. The authors found that students perceived the feedback types that provided codes, comments, and or explanations as being more useful in text revision than other forms of feedback. The authors also suggested that findings from this study indicated variations existed among participants regarding preferences for a specific feedback type and students rated their preference of feedback differently based on their goals for using that feedback. With the success of many forms of feedback in both studies, it is clear that instructors must be aware of the qualities students value in their feedback.

In another exploratory mixed methods study by Getzlaf, Perry, Toffner, Lamarche, and Edwards (2009), the researchers looked at student perceptions of effective instructor feedback of 30 students enrolled in either a Master of Nursing or Master of Health Studies through an online university; the authors found five themes important to students when receiving feedback. The five themes were student involvement/individualization, gentle guidance, positive and constructive feedback, timeliness, and future orientation. Although these themes were discovered, the authors also suggested it was important to investigate strategies to make feedback a mutual process between instructor and student, supporting an effective feedback cycle.

Summary

Ultimately, these sources revealed the many different perceptions students have when receiving feedback and suggest that that all opportunities, contexts, and students require different variations of feedback. This also suggests the need for research on individual situations to ensure feedback continues to be successful and useful for the students.

Modes of Current Feedback Practices

Now that perceptions of feedback from actual students have been discussed, it is important to examine the current frameworks currently in use to provide feedback within postsecondary classrooms. Although feedback comes in many forms such as verbal, hand-written, and online, one of the most common modes used in postsecondary studies is through online platforms.

Utilizing an online medium to act as a platform for assessment, instructors can now provide timely and frequent feedback for all students within the classroom, which in

return enhances the frequency and ease of communication between instructor and student. Despite the unquestionable importance of feedback and consistent research on its effectiveness in education and the student achievement, evidence in the literature proposed that students do not accumulate much formative feedback (Bailey, 2009; Chanock, 2000; Winter & Dye, 2004). This suggests that there needs to be some ways in which instructors can provide formative or summative feedback for their students.

Because researchers have indicated students do not accumulate much formative or summative feedback; many universities have utilized electronic platforms, also known as learning management systems (LMS) such as TRACS, Blackboard, and D2L, to provide access to feedback and interaction with their instructor literally anywhere and anytime. These (LMS) have enabled the effective delivery, management and administration of online, hybrid or face to face courses, as well as provide more opportunities for instructor and student interaction. For example, Hatzia Apostolou and Paraskakis, (2010) suggested learning environments, such as LMS, are increasingly utilized by higher education institutions since they have the potential to greatly enhance the learning experience of both on-campus students and those studying at a distance.

LMS provide social interaction to those on and off campus and also have increased the opportunities to give and receive feedback intermittently throughout the duration of the course, due to the course having resources online which students can be accessed in or out of class. This opportunity for formative feedback constitutes an influential aspect of learning and should, therefore, be integrated into the students' online management system. Since, however, student engagement with feedback is considered

central to their learning, innovative ways of composing and communicating formative feedback through LMS should be explored (Hatzia Apostolou & Paraskakis, 2010).

One way these LMS platforms are improving the frequency of formative feedback is through areas such as “discussion forums.” These discussion forums are open forums in the class as ways to communicate to their peers, or the instructor. Although forum discussion boards can be seen by all the students, if requested, settings can allow for only specific interactions between instructor and student. For this particular study, all forum posts can be seen by peers but are not required to be interacted with by anyone besides the instructor. Although forum discussion boards for feedback purposes are a common function of LMS platforms; little to no research has been documented as to how students perceived instructor feedback within these specific online platform sections.

Gaps in the Research on Feedback

With little to no research conducted on the LMS platforms or areas within them such as discussion boards, it becomes pertinent to reiterate the value of feedback and why there needs to be a continuation of research on them. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) suggested instructor feedback served as a form of formative or summative assessment, designed to improve and accelerate learning. Simply stated, instructor feedback provided students with information that either confirms what they already know or changes their existing knowledge and beliefs (Mory, 2004).

In one study of 100 students in a third-year comparative Industrial Relations unit within an Australian University, Iris Vardi (2009) examined the relationship between teacher written feedback and change in the disciplinary writing of students in their final year of undergraduate study. When looking at the feedback given throughout the

semester and the analysis of the relationship between different types of feedback and the changes that occurred, it was discovered that different types of feedback were directly related to the changes that occurred in the students' subsequent rewrites. The analysis showed certain types of feedback were a stronger influence in relation to change than other feedback and that the change was further influenced by the balance between the individual points of feedback and the degree in which they reinforced each other.

Although many types and effects of feedback have shown success and are deemed preferential by students, little has been done to look at the shift in achievement of feedback after being converted from a face-to-face medium to an online, LMS medium. By looking at the documented student achievements and their perceptions of feedback of the different deliveries of it, it is apparent each medium has its own variables and influences that affect student achievement. Gikandi, Morrow, and Davis (2011) state that online and blended versions of education have become a common setting for education in the 21st century but little has been done to keep up with the progression and perceptions students may have with these changes. Although many educators and students have reasonable experience with computers in classrooms in more traditional settings, e-learning, or online education, is predicted to overtake classroom-based instruction as the primary method of delivery in both educational and service-oriented industries (Grant-Davie & Cook, 2005). Therefore, I suggest there is a need to look further into the use of LMS platforms and how that is or is not affecting student perceptions of instructor feedback and its potential influence on student achievement.

Ultimately, the aforementioned conclusion that individual student perceptions are important to consider due to varied preferences in feedback styles and the existing gap in

the literature, results in the need for student perceptions of feedback in specific contexts. In order to study student perceptions of feedback practices, researchers should examine online discussion forums in detail because each student brings different preconceived ideas and preferences, and each context presents different variables influencing the presentation of the feedback.

Purpose for the Study

The intent of the proposed study was to examine undergraduate students' perceptions of instructor feedback on online discussion forums in developmental Integrated Reading and Writing (IRW) courses at the university under study. Accordingly, the research question guiding this study was: What are students' perceptions of instructor feedback in online discussion forum posts in developmental IRW courses? Although the course was listed in its' university catalog as a reading improvement class, it was taught as an integrated reading and writing course.

I implemented a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews and an extended elicited metaphor to look at students' perceptions of instructor feedback specifically in online discussion forum posts. I collected data on five undergraduate students who are over the age of 18 and have contributed to at least one online forum. The aim was to identify student perceptions of instructor feedback on their written posts about course readings in online forums strictly between the individual students and their instructor. Through this triangulation of data from a metaphor with an extension and a face-to-face interview, I intended to uncover central themes that could influence future instruction and research in a direction that could lead to best practices and advancement

within developmental literacy and the feedback given to students in developmental literacy courses.

III. METHODS

The research study I conducted used a qualitative case studies approach to learn about student perceptions of instructor feedback, specifically through online discussion forums in an integrated reading and writing course at a public university in the South Central United States. Qualitative researchers, as Stake (2010) described, seek inferred knowledge to understand phenomena, and similar to educators, should be open to understanding student minds, perceptions, and prior knowledge to improve achievement. In order to reach a deep understanding of educational processes, there must be a research process that is open and willing to look past objective observation. Kacem and Krumer-Nevo (2010) suggested qualitative inquiry practices can provide opportunities to observe and document subjective encounters of the different realities of participants and researchers. For this reason, a qualitative approach was used to look deeper into the realities of what students actually perceive when receiving feedback within online discussion forums.

Research Design

In this qualitative study, two separate collection techniques, requesting three separate measures of data for triangulation were used. The first round of information was collected through an online survey administered using Qualtrics software. The survey consisted of instructions to provide a metaphor with extension; a multiple choice prompting students to describe instructor feedback; demographic items, such as age, gender, and ethnicity; and a prompt to schedule their semi-structured interview.

This approach was useful to understand students' perceptions of instructor feedback because it allows students to relate their feelings into everyday objects and

phrases. The elicited metaphor protocol for data collection was adapted from Paulson and Armstrong (2011). The authors provided instructions on the definition of a metaphor and how to create a metaphor with direction for an extension as well. I adapted the protocol to study students' perceptions of instructor feedback, specifically within online discussion forums. The specific metaphor prompt used in the adapted protocol was:

“Teachers’ feedback, to me, on my online discussion posts in my RDG course is like: _____.”

After students created the metaphor, I asked them to complete an extension to explain their reasoning for generating that specific metaphor. The specific extension prompt was:

“Because: _____.”

Although the creation of metaphors was a good way to gain insight on student perspectives, metaphor scholars have raised questions about the validity of metaphors due to researcher interpretation (Armstrong, 2015). To account for the possibility of wrongful interpretation, along with the elicited metaphor, each student who completed the survey also completed an extension. Armstrong (2015) proposed that metaphors containing an extension are useful because they allow the researcher to understand each participant’s “own rationale behind their linkage of the target and source” (p. 121). This extension, or justification behind each student’s’ metaphor, was used as a second part the triangulation of data for metaphor each participant. For the full elicited metaphor prompt plus instructions see Appendix G.

Approximately two weeks after completing the online survey with the elicited metaphor protocol, students were asked to complete a semi-structured interview

containing questions about feedback as well as portions adapted from Armstrong's (2015) Retrospective Metaphor Interview (RMI) and from the Burke's (1987) Reading Interview (BRI).

Although the elicited metaphor with extension was a good frame for the perceptions students may be feeling, Armstrong (2015) suggested the inclusion of one last additional layer of data collection may provide a richer data set accounting for the perceptions and the enactment of those perceptions in practice. Therefore, I used a face-to-face, semi-structured interview to probe deeper into the participants' perceptions and gain a better understanding of each participant.

To begin the interview, I chose to use the question, "how do you view yourself as a reader?" to learn more about the students' beliefs and self-perceptions as readers. This question was taken from the Burke Reading Interview (BRI) (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987) to learn more about the students and their perception of themselves as readers to hopefully provide insight into how each feel within the context of the course they are taking.

For the second portion of the interview, I adapted three questions from Armstrong's (2015) RMI to aid in the understanding of each student's purpose of metaphor creation, instructor feedback within the forums eliciting their metaphor, and account for a possible change in their perception at survey creation. The first question, "You mentioned in your metaphor, created previously, that you felt instructor feedback in online discussion forums was like _____, can you explain a bit to me why you feel this way?" was adapted from the original to look specifically at instructor feedback. The second question, "Can you show me some specific examples within the

forums of why you felt this way?” was asked because it allowed the students to reflect on the feelings leading them to create the metaphor and the possible cause of the student’s reaction or feeling. The last question, “Given that some time has passed since you created the metaphor, do you think it is still accurate today?” was asked to assess changes in students’ perceptions from elicited metaphor creation and the interview.

The third portion of the interview was used to elicit students’ feelings about the different aspects of feedback and the platform in which it took place. I generated the first two prompts to target student perceptions of the online platforms in which the instructor and student were interacting. I generated the first prompt, “What do you think about the RDG class in general? Why?” to provide insight into the students’ attitudes towards the class, which could reflect the negative or positive response in the metaphor and give further insight into their motivation for metaphor creation. I asked the second prompt, “To what extent do you feel comfortable using the computer or device you use to post on TRACS? Why?” to gauge the student’s comfort level with the platform of communication, which could be a factor influencing the students’ perceived value of feedback. As a reminder, TRACS is an online learning management system in which students and instructors post and download content about courses.

The final questions I were created to understand the students’ perceptions of instructor feedback in IRW. For example, the last questions, “How do you view the quality of instructor feedback in the online discussion forum posts? Why?”, “How useful is the feedback to you?”, and “How does the feedback make you feel?”, could influence some students’ created metaphors and provide further explanation as to their purpose of creating the metaphor. To ensure organic creation of answers and themes regarding

students' perceptions of instructor feedback, I conducted semi-structured interviews. All questions from the face-to-face interviews are located in Appendix F.

The three data sources in this qualitative investigation were an adapted elicited metaphor protocol, an extension, and a face-to-face, semi-structured interview. I triangulated data from the adapted elicited metaphor, extension, and semi-structured interview to establish validity of students' recorded perceptions and ensure the students' perception was well communicated from student to researcher. As stated by Armstrong (2015), the triangulation of data was used to create a holistic understanding of the relationship between students' metaphorical language, perceptions, and their reported enactment of those perceptions in academic literacy practices.

Participants

I conducted the study in November 2017 at a large public university in the South Central United States. The site was a face-to-face integrated reading and writing course in which approximately 25 students were present in the class. The course served students who placed below the cut score in reading on a state mandated college readiness exam. Credit for this course did not count towards any baccalaureate degree offered by the university but was required as to permit students to enroll in required courses for their degree plan.

Sampling Method

I sampled participants from a face-to-face integrated reading and writing course designed for those who required compensatory instruction in reading comprehension, critical reading, and writing. I used this opportunity to recruit participants interested in participating in the study. Class size was approximately 25. Of the participants who

agreed to participate and had completed at least one forum post, ten were randomly selected to be emailed the survey containing the elicited metaphor with extension. Of the ten that were emailed the survey, only five responded to the survey and followed through with the semi-structured interview. The five remaining participants who completed all the components are used in this study. This RDG course had a required research participation grade and therefore participants were required to choose a research project or alternative assignment to complete once throughout the semester. If the participants chose this research study, they had to complete all three portions of the study in order to gain credit for the required research participation grade.

I presented consent forms detailing the study, its context, and goal to all participants in the class. Each participant, if willing, signed a consent form to engage in the study. The first consent form gave me the ability to access all participants' TRACS forum posts in order to verify participants' completion of one forum post, which was a selection criterion for this study. Participants also gave consent in the form to allow me to review their forum posts during the audio-recorded semi-structured interview. During these interviews, I asked participants to discuss connections between their forum posts and their provided metaphors.

I gave copies of participant consent forms to instructors, at which time I asked instructors to release participant online forum posts to me. The posts I obtained contained the individual participant's posts and the instructor's feedback on the post, if any feedback was provided. Instructors initially created the forums before my study occurred and were viewable by instructor and student in the IRW course. The forums

were created to be between the teacher and an individual participant but were accessible to other participants if they wanted to read them.

Procedures

In November 2017, I attended an integrated reading and writing course. During class time, I took approximately ten minutes to present my research project to the class. During this presentation, I read from a script (see Appendix A) to explain the research and its goals. This script outlined and described the initial consent form (see Appendix B) which requested consent of each participant to partake in the study and give access to their individual TRACS forums posts and instructor feedback on those posts. Participation in the study involved completing an online survey, including demographic items, an elicited metaphor prompt, and an item to schedule the semi-structured interview. Participants had exactly one week to complete the survey. Following the survey participants were given the choice in when they wanted to schedule their face-to-face semi-structured interview.

Directly after the signing of the consent form, all unsigned and signed were collected. Of the participants who had consented to participate and posted in forums at least one time, ten were randomly selected to receive the email containing the survey. Each email (see Appendix C) was directed toward the specific participant, but contained the same information, which included a succinct reminder of the purpose of the study, contents of the survey, and a link to the survey. Four days into the week of time allocated to complete the survey (see Appendix D), I sent a follow-up participation reminder to the participants who had not yet taken the survey.

Once exactly a week had passed, and the surveys had been completed, I individually emailed the five participants who had successfully completed the survey to confirm one of the two interview times. Once a time and date had been reached through correspondence, each participant received a reminder email containing the time, date, and location of the interview.

During the face-to-face interview, I read a verbal consent form (see Appendix E) to the participant to briefly remind the participant of the purpose of the study, share the interview process and protocol, and provide the materials I would use during the interview. The materials were a copy of their previously created metaphor and extension as well as their forum posts and feedback from their instructor within the LMS platform their instructor used. Only upon verbal consent did the interview move forward. If participants did not verbally consent, they could not engage in the semi-structured interview and did not earn credit for the required research participation in their integrated reading and writing course. However, participants not selected for the study did have the opportunity to complete an alternative study or assignment to fulfill the required research requirement for the course. Once verbal consent was given, recording began, and the interview commenced (see Appendix F for interview protocol and prompts).

In the beginning of the interview, I used a question directly from the BRI (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987); I asked participants to provide a general sense of how they viewed themselves as a reader. I generated the next two questions and asked participants to provide an overall sense of how they felt about themselves in their integrated reading and writing course. The next three questions, adapted from Armstrong's (2007) study, were retrospective in nature and asked the participants to

relate their previously created metaphor to their forum posts and the feedback that produced their perception. I asked the last question to observe participants' perceptions since they created their metaphor in the online survey. I asked participants each question to ensure I had a complete understanding of their intended perceptions and better understand the metaphor they provided.

Finally, the last three questions I asked pertained to their perceptions of their instructor's feedback. For this part of the semi-structured interview, the questions, "How do you view the quality of instructor feedback in the online discussion forum posts? Why?", "How useful is the feedback to you?", and "How does the feedback make you feel?" served two purposes. One purpose was to learn more about the participants' elicited metaphors and the other purpose was to understand perceptions beyond the specific metaphor. These questions made it possible to explore specific perceptions of feedback in relation to quality, usefulness, and their emotional response to feedback. The interview was created in a semi-structured format to probe each participant on their metaphors, regardless of whether they did or did not receive instructor feedback. Since each metaphor was different, this semi-structured format allowed for any organic perceptions or explanations to be spontaneously generated.

Data Analysis Procedure

After all data from the online survey and face-to-face interview were collected for the five participants, I analyzed the data inductively using open coding. I used open coding look at each participant's individual perceptions regarding instructor feedback and then combined all participant codes to create larger thematic units encompassing all

participant perceptions. I will discuss additional information on open coding methods in detail below.

The first of the five phases I used to inductively open code for themes involved my exploration of each participant's survey and interview data. In this phase, it was necessary to take a break in between each participant to avoid recycling themes from other interviews. The second phase consisted of working through each participant interview and survey again and either affirming old codes or replacing them with new ones. This phase, similar to the first, had wait time between each participant's data to ensure codes were not reused and recycled. The third phase consisted of creating a spreadsheet of participants, entered in columns, and the questions, entered as rows. This layout allowed codes within questions to be combined and organized by participant. In the fourth phase, I created a new row below the participants' data and combined common codes I saw throughout their interviews and surveys. This allowed for all the codes to be in one box next to each participant to prepare for phase five. Finally, in phase five I took all the codes from all five participants and combined them to create larger thematic units encompassing all the codes provided by each participant.

The goal of my study was to generate knowledge about participants' perceptions of instructor feedback within online discussion forums. The use of open coding allowed for an organic view of participant communication. Upon completion of coding, I compiled a list of themes that emerged most often. My goal was to improve the use of instructor feedback within online discussion forums within integrated reading and writing courses, as well as other educational courses that use a LMS structure using the themes I found in the study.

IV. RESULTS

Prior to the process of combining codes into larger thematic units, it was necessary to look at each individual participant and their thought process concerning instructor feedback. This process was important because to understand where the larger thematic units originated from it was important to look at the context in which they emerged.

Participant Profiles

These participant profiles were intended to provide a description of each participant, as well as highlight some of the larger themes that arose from participants' metaphors and interviews. In the next section, I will discuss each participant individually to better understand the compiled themes and the context from which they arose.

Maria

The first participant, Maria, was one of the first to complete all aspects of the study. Maria identified herself as a Hispanic or Latina. The first portion of the study that Maria completed, as well as the other five participants, was an online survey which instructed the participant to create a metaphor with extension based on their perceptions of instructor feedback. After reading the metaphor prompt, "Teachers' feedback, to me, in online discussion forms in my RDG course is like," Maria answered with "a flying bug", because "writing never goes away." On the one multiple choice question, "Which of the following best describes the instructor's feedback to you on forums?" Maria stated, "I like the feedback."

Maria provided additional data in a face-to-face interview to discuss her metaphor creation about writing and her perceptions of instructor feedback on online discussion

forums. The first question I asked in the semi-structured interview was about her perception of herself as a reader. I asked this question because the theoretical lens through which I viewed the study suggested it was necessary to gauge each participant's self-perception to further explain their overall feelings of feedback. For example, Maria stated, "I would say like I can read words but like I honestly hate reading. I hate reading. I hate reading." Directly after stating this, Maria also stated that she disliked reading for content because if she has to read something she isn't interested in, she has to go out of her way to interpret what the author is trying to tell her. Although Maria expressed she did not like reading, she mentioned she would go out of her way to read news, crime data, or textbooks for her criminal justice courses. Another question I asked Maria was about her feelings in the RDG course. In response to this she responded:

I like it, I mean I guess from like the course title it is like reading improvement, so I guess it supposed to focus on like reading, but I don't know, I don't know if it is really helping. I think it's like yeah, like it's a class, we do fun things like the Socratic circle and we interact with each other, but I don't know if its necessarily improving my reading just because we are reading.

The following questions about her metaphor creation from the survey were used to gather data about the purpose of her metaphor creation about writing when she had previously mentioned in her interview that she was enrolled in a reading improvement course. After being probed about her metaphor and why she created it, Maria stated:

Like, I was seeing it as like, like because you know how a bug flies, and like writing never stops like you just keep going. So, like she had a choice to give me feedback or not, but I think in anything that anyone writes you can always give

feedback, like, and ask why this or why that. So, you can continue like writing doesn't go away and it's going to continue adding on.

Maria followed this statement by saying the instructor was always commenting about her writing.

One of the final questions I asked was about her definition and function of useful feedback. She responded by discussing how feedback sometimes helps her meet a word count or helps her think in broader terms. She followed this information with an example of how her instructor gave feedback on her last forum; the feedback helped her expand on a discussion about Fredrick Douglass and his main point in the book they were reading for the course. She mentioned how the instructor used her response and asked her questions to lengthen her response. Maria also agreed with her previous survey answer of liking feedback by discussing why she likes the feedback. For example, Maria stated:

Yeah, I think it's good. Um, she like comments on my blog a lot because we do blog posts a lot and they are like a lot longer than the forums and I like see feedback as something being good, like it's trying to help you. So, like I know she like comments on my forums and like I like reading what she has to say. Or like for the forums for like when she grades them she'll add in why we made this grade or like what we could have added to make the perfect score and usually it's like asking more questions or like adding on. I mean I think it's good.

Although Maria stated she liked the feedback, she mentioned the feedback was not consistent. She said feedback was helpful and it helped her prepare for the next forum, but also mentioned the course did not follow the syllabus and the course schedule was not adhered to. Overall, Maria stated she liked instructor feedback, explaining that

all writing can improve, as supported by her metaphor; she felt feedback from the instructor furthered her ideas. Maria concluded the interview by explaining the forum due dates and feedback were not very consistent and she desired more consistent scheduling and feedback.

Alison

The second participant I interviewed, Alison, identified herself as a Caucasian or white female who felt neutral towards instructor feedback. Instead of creating a metaphor as the instructions on the survey stated, Alison responded with the word, “informative.” She stated in her metaphor extension that she responded with “informative” because instructor feedback helped her understand how she could become a better writer and reader. When asked how she viewed herself as a reader, Alison described herself as “in the middle” and that she did not read often, but only enjoyed books that she wasn’t forced to read. She also discussed her issues regarding reading when she stated, “just getting the overall picture. Sometimes I just look for the smallest details in the book instead of the overall context.”

After discussing how she felt about herself, I asked Alison to talk about how she viewed the course. Alison compared the IRW course to her high school English course. Alison stated, “Sometimes I like it and sometimes I don’t kind of thing. I feel like I’m in high school again a little bit and like we’re in college.” Alison also stated she didn’t feel like she belonged in the course because she only missed a few questions on the state-mandated college readiness exam

Following the discussion of her feelings about her position in the class she spoke about how she did not really check her forum posts for instructor feedback but did

mention she checked instructor feedback in other courses. When addressing instructor feedback in her other courses, she stated she appreciated how other instructors' feedback challenged and furthered her thoughts. Although she stated she did not check her forum posts for feedback after she posts them in this specific course, she discussed how she would have preferred more feedback in the IRW course and she wrote to achieve a grade. Although she did not read the instructor feedback but wanted additional instructor feedback, she felt the forum posts in helped her with the reading. For example, Alison stated, "like it [the forum posts] makes us think out of the box and like makes us think of like the bigger picture and like how this class is supposed to be."

Finally, after I prompted her about the quality of instructor feedback, Alison discussed how occasionally, the instructor of the IRW course gave feedback during the course, which she felt was useful because of the focused direction of the feedback. Overall, Alison felt neutral towards feedback, did not feel she belonged in the IRW course, did not read the feedback she was given but wanted more, and felt instructor feedback helped her organize and further her thought process.

Britney

The third participant, Britney, identified herself as an African American or Black female who felt neutral towards instructor feedback. In response to the elicited metaphor with extension, Britney responded with, "a box of chocolates because you never know what you are going to get," and also extended it with "sometimes she will respond saying how she feels about my answer, other times I don't even know if she reads them." This metaphor suggested that Britney felt the instructor may not always provide feedback and

if she does, it could say anything and when she doesn't respond she isn't sure if anyone is reading her responses.

At the beginning of Britney's interview, she discussed how reading is hard for her and she stated, "when I read it's like hard to understand what I'm reading if I'm reading. Like it takes time to understand what I am actually reading." Britney also mentioned she would rather read texts that interested her, such as the content related to her university major. When asked how she felt about the IRW course she stated, "I kind of feel like we are just reading and like responding to the reading to like I don't know if I am actually really learning anything in this class."

Following this information, I asked Britney about the metaphor she created in the survey. Britney responded by saying she was emailed by the instructor and was asked to discuss some of her forum post in class the next day. She discussed that the forum posts aren't hurting her and that they are "helping a little bit because I have to read and understand so it's helping me because I have to talk about it." She also mentioned it would be better if the instructor gave better feedback since she had only received feedback in an email and not directly on her forum post.

Finally, Britney discussed she had not received feedback except for the email and wondered if the instructor even read her forum posts. When asked if she would prefer more feedback, Britney answered, "yes." Although she had not received any feedback besides the email, Britney stated the forum posts are helpful because otherwise she probably wouldn't have even read the course content and assigned readings. Overall, Britney felt reading was hard for her, did not feel she was learning much in the course, believed the forum posts were helping a little bit because it forced her to read and

understand the context, and preferred more feedback because she wondered if the instructor is even read the forum posts.

Tatum

The fourth participant, Tatum, identified herself as a Caucasian or white female who liked feedback. When prompted on the survey, Tatum said the metaphor that instructor feedback in her IRW course was like “Music to my ears,” with the extension, “I like to get feedback about the things that I say to know if it meets a certain standard.”

In the beginning of Tatum’s interview, after being prompted to describe herself as a reader, Tatum blatantly said, “Well, I hate reading.” After probing a bit, Tatum described why she felt this way and also stated, “It just depends on what it is I’m reading. So, like if it’s required reading I hate doing it, but if I’m reading on my own you know I’ll do it occasionally.” Dissimilar to her peers, Tatum stated she understood the larger concepts presented in the readings better than the smaller details. Also, unlike some of her peers, Tatum discussed how she felt the IRW course helped her. For example, Tatum stated:

Well, I wasn’t really good at reading in high school and like understand them, the behind the scenes of them. But now that I am in this class I understand a lot more and like how to read comprehensively and like understand it better and write better as well. So, I can write essays a lot better than I used to.

When asked to discuss her previously created metaphor, Tatum discussed that she liked when people gave her feedback on anything she does. She also stated that when it came to feedback on her writing, “I enjoy it because it helps me learn better.” She also mentioned in her personal life she appreciated feedback on things such as makeup

because, “it like helps me to like understand everything better, if I’m getting feedback, so like I know what to work on and what not to do next time.” Although she stated she likes receiving feedback, Tatum admitted she would like:

a little bit more, just so I know if I’m doing it correctly because I know there isn’t like a right or a wrong way to do it, but I want to know if I’m writing everything correctly and like making sure everything is in, like a, worded correctly.

Finally, Tatum discussed how she felt the feedback was useful. She mentioned she liked to read the feedback and returned to what she wrote and decipher if there was anything she could change to make improvements. She also mentioned she liked forum posts. Tatum stated, “I think they [forum posts] are a good way to get a lot of information out and like feedback and like how this is. Instead of like writing an essay or something it’s just like something small.” Ultimately, Tatum discussed how she liked feedback in her course as well as her personal life, felt the feedback helped her know what to fix for the next assignment, would like a little bit more feedback and thought the course and the forums were helpful.

Cate

The last participant, Cate, identified herself as a Caucasian or White female who liked the instructor feedback. When prompted, Cate responded instructor feedback on her forum posts was like “Alice in Wonderland.” Cate expanded feedback was like Alice in Wonderland because at first you are unsure as to why you are “writing about certain things or doing certain things and then after the instructor gives feedback, it is clearer as to why they were required in the first place.”

In the beginning of Cate's interview, after being prompted to describe herself as a reader, Cate responded with:

Well for me, if I'm not interested in the reading then I usually forget what I read.

I'm just like a reading robot and not knowing what I'm actually reading about. If

I do like it then I can usually pick out what the summary of the story is.

Cate also stated that whenever she does read, she is probably a bit slower and "a bit below average" because of a hearing problem as a child.

When asked about how she felt about the RDG course she stated that it was helpful and discussed how she would have preferred it being at a time before her freshman English course because the instructor in her RDG course broke the content down and explained concepts that were similar in both courses. She stated a similar answer when I asked her to discuss the metaphor she had previously created. For example, Cate stated:

So, well before you go to class most time you have the forums first and usually whenever you're doing that you don't think it relates to the classroom until you go to that class and then she brings it up. So, basically, you're writing about something that you think is not going to be related to it, like she's not going to talk about it or anything, but whenever you do go to the class, she then talks about it. But she also makes it to where you now understand the question [prompt for the forum posts].

Her response provided clarity to her metaphor of "Alice in Wonderland" because she described how the course was similar a reoccurring theme from the movie. For example, Cate connected the confusion of the forum prompt to how Alice felt when she

first stepped into Wonderland. She related her metaphor to the portion of the text when Alice is forced to eat and drink in Wonderland to become larger or smaller in size.

Finally, Cate connected the final realization and connection of the forum prompt by stating, “Nobody is telling her [Alice] you know that you have to do that, she is kind of learning, she’s kind of progressing throughout the movie, she’s understanding what’s going on.” By this, Cate seemed to be suggesting that until the instructor pieces the course together for her, with the feedback, she is moving through the class without purpose. When I asked Cate the last set of questions to probe her feelings about feedback, she stated:

I do like feedback, because um, if we ever have another discussion or if question on the forums, then I know, okay I need to pick out what I actually need, and put it in there and kind of look back at some of the feedback that she put so I know like, okay maybe I need to fix grammar or going to do punctuation or like try to relate it now.

Cate also mentioned she felt the instructor could be a little more specific in the forum post feedback and how it could improve future forum posts. She also stated the instructor provided helpful feedback. Cate explained she liked instructor feedback because she was not fond of the peer feedback in other courses because she felt her work wasn’t very well done. She also expressed that by receiving instructor feedback, there was less of a chance to receive negative feedback from her peers during peer review edits. Ultimately, Cate felt she was a little behind as a reader, liked the class and the feedback, felt feedback clarified the questions and content of the course, would have liked feedback to be more specific, and thought the course helped her.

Data Analysis

After I collected data for the participants who completed the online survey and semi-structured interview, I assigned pseudonyms to each interview and analyzed the data by inductive methods of open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), open coding is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (p. 61). As a result, I coded the data into five phases. I analyzed the data using an inductive approach because all codes from the data were collected on the premise to supply strong reasoning for larger thematic units among all of the participants. Therefore, data were collected and open coded separately for each participant and then consolidated to collectively formulate larger thematic units of participant perceptions of instructor feedback in online discussion forums.

For the first phase of open coding, I went through each interview and survey to place codes on themes I saw emerging from the conversations. For example, I went through each of the five participants' responses on their survey and interview and looked for themes that emerged without referencing the other participants' responses. This preliminary coding allowed for organic responses to occur and unique codes to emerge for each participant.

The second phase of data analysis took place a day later and required going back through each interview to either create new codes or approve the current ones for each participant. For example, I went back through each participant's data to confirm and add new themes emerging from their responses in the survey and interview data. This phase also took multiple days due to the breaks between the analysis of each participant's data.

This preliminary coding and the use of breaks between coding for each participant allowed for organic responses to occur and unique codes to emerge for each participant.

In the third phase, I created a spreadsheet organized by participant in each column and each question in the interview and survey, by row. For example, I made a column for each participant and a row for each question I asked in the interview and survey. In the spreadsheet, I placed the codes each participant provided into boxes next to the question they were answering in which the codes emerged. If one question had more than one code of a similar nature, I repeated that code to ensure the participants' answers were represented correctly. After placing all codes associated with each question and person into their respective box, I was ready to begin the fourth phase.

In the fourth phase, I used the aforementioned spreadsheet to consolidate each participant's codes into a box below each question. I accomplished this by looking down each column and condensing and combining all the repeated and unique codes into a box in its own row. For example, if a participant's response to a question elicited the code clarity three times, progression once, and need twice, I would place the words: clarity, progression and need in the box below. This condensed and combined the codes to ensure each was represented and all smaller codes could be seen clearly. This phase also allowed for all codes to be condensed into one area to prepare for phase five.

The last phase consisted of consolidating all participants' common codes for the creation of larger thematic units. The codes for each question, for all participants, were combined and placed in a new row. This row encompassed all combined codes from each participant and were used to inform the larger thematic units discussed later. Next,

the findings of individual codes from each participant and the larger thematic units will be discussed.

V. DISCUSSION

The research question that guided this study was: What are participants' perceptions of instructor feedback in online discussion forum posts in developmental integrated reading and writing courses? This section will begin by introducing the codes that emerged from the participants' survey and interview data. This will be done to provide insight into how the following larger thematic units evolved. Second, I will discuss two larger thematic units, self-perceptions and perceptions of the course, that were unintended but could affect students' value of their perceptions of instructor feedback. Finally, I will discuss the last thematic unit, student perceptions of instructor feedback, to address the research question.

Individual and Common Codes

Before discussing the larger themes, I will discuss some of the codes that were used in the beginning phases of data analysis. These themes will act as a bridge between the participant profiles above and the larger thematic units discussed below. Some of the themes that I will discuss are as follows: clarification, direction, progression, usefulness, helpfulness, continuation, need, purpose, reinforcement, accountability, and communication. Although there are many themes that could have been included, after multiple rounds of coding these were the themes that appeared most frequently.

As I examined the themes that emerged after multiple rounds of coding there were a lot of similarities among participants. For example, every participant shared instructor feedback clarified their work. Another way participants suggested instructor feedback provided clarity was by stating that they wished the feedback was given before other courses. For example, Cate, Maria, and Britney suggested that feedback provides

examples of what the instructor wants and gives purpose to the assignments. All of these statements were combined into the larger theme of clarity because the instructor feedback ultimately gave them a clearer understanding of what was expected of them or what the intent of the coursework was for.

The themes of clarity and direction were also found in the two aforementioned studies by Chokwe (2015) and Murphy and Cornell (2010). For example, the participants in their studies also directly listed clarity as an important factor when receiving feedback. Although Chokwe's study was about student perceptions of feedback on academic essays and Murphy and Cornell's (2010) study was on student perceptions of feedback on a particular assessment, all participants from both studies stated that feedback should provide clarity and direction.

A few more themes that emerged from participant data were usefulness and helpfulness. Throughout the interview and survey data, participants described how the instructor feedback was useful in the way that it prepared them for future assignments and posts. For example, as stated above Cate stated:

I do like feedback, because um, if we ever have another discussion or question on the forums, then I know, okay I need to pick out what I actually need and put it in there and kind of look back at some of the feedback that she put so I know like, okay maybe I need to fix grammar or were going to do punctuation or like try to relate it now.

This statement could suggest that the instructor feedback was useful and helpful to Cate because it showed her what she needed to correct or informed her ideas for her next forum post. These themes were also present in the aforementioned research. For

example, mentioned above in Murphy and Cornell's (2010) study, participants suggested instructors create a system in which they can access all instructor feedback on their assessments to identify areas for improvement. This is similar because Cate suggested that feedback is beneficial for improving her work and the participants from the other studies mentioned that feedback that improved their work was necessary for achievement.

Another common code that emerged in participant data was the code, progression. This code represented each participant's statements regarding how the feedback progressed their ideas within their forum posts or how it would progress their ideas within the forum posts to come. For example, Maria stated:

It's supposed to like help you for the next forum, like look at that, is there more you can add on? Or more you can go in-depth with? Like she's not going to ask everything, kind of just expects you to add on or say more.

This statement suggested that Maria felt instructor feedback informed her on how to progress her discussion in the next post. Similar to the codes above, this code was also identified in the research above as important when receiving feedback. For example, in Getzlaf, Perry, Toffner, Lamarche, and Edward's (2009) study, they found the theme "gentle guidance" as being important when receiving feedback. Although Maria did not directly state that the instructor feedback was guiding her in progressing her ideas, her statement does suggest the instructor feedback does, in fact, guide her to go more in-depth or to add more ideas to her previous forum posts.

The last theme that will be discussed emerged from multiple participants and was generally coded as "need." This was notable because although three of the five participants received feedback on their forum posts, all expressed the want for more

feedback. For example, Tatum, a participant that had received feedback stated, “I think I would like a little bit more just, so I know if what I’m doing is correct because I know there isn’t like a right or wrong to it.” This suggested that even if there is feedback being given, there is still a want for more.

Similarly, another participant, Maria, stated that she felt the instructor feedback lacked consistency. For example, Maria stated that during the semester at some point they stopped following the syllabus in the course and that the forum posts were not regularly assigned. Directly following Maria explained how she liked the feedback, suggesting she would like more consistent feedback.

Finally, another participant, Britney, also stated that she would have liked more feedback. Britney was the student who did not receive any, besides an email correspondence, and suggested that with the lack of feedback she wondered if the instructor was even reading her forum posts at all. In all three of these participants’ statements it is clear there is a want and need for more feedback. Although this was a common theme in this research study, in the previous research provided it was not found. This could suggest that the need for feedback is specific to this particular research study. With this information, an instructor could ensure that feedback is being given consistently as well as providing enough so students feel their posts are being read.

Although there were many more common themes that were present in the participants’ perceptions of instructor feedback, in the fifth phase of data analysis they were consolidated into three larger thematic units. These larger thematic units will be discussed in detail below.

Combined Themes

Although the themes regarding the only research question of this study will be discussed, it became apparent through the analyzation of the data that there could have been other factors possibly influencing the participants' perceptions of instructor feedback. Because of these possible influences, this section will be separated into three units. The three thematic units identified through analysis are: (a) participants' self-perceptions, (b) participants' perceptions of the course, and (c) student perceptions of instructor feedback.

The first unit, participants' self-perception, are important to discuss first because students' self-perceptions could influence the value they place on receiving instructor feedback. The second unit, participants' perceptions of the course, are also important because if students do not understand what is being taught in the course their value for the feedback within the course could be affected. The last unit, student perceptions of feedback, will be addressed to answer the only research question for this study. These three units combined will be discussed to suggest that although students are perceiving instructor feedback in similar ways, influences from other factors, such as self-perceptions and student perceptions of the course, ultimately have an influence on how each student internalizes and values the instructor feedback.

Self-Perceptions

Participants revealed their self-perceptions when answering the interview question, "how do you view yourself as a reader?" Each participant was forthcoming and willing to discuss how they felt about themselves within an integrated reading and writing course. Two important sub-themes of self-perception arose; these themes were

their self-perceptions as readers and their concerns of context. These themes will be discussed to address the participants' self-perceptions in context with the value they place on instructor feedback.

Reading self-perceptions. The first sub-theme that arose after being asked “how do you view yourself as a reader”, was each participant’s self-perception of their own reading ability. This question was important for a few reasons. The first reason being that this is a developmental, integrated reading and writing course, so participants may have had prior feelings of this course in association with their skills that could affect how they perceive the instructor feedback. For example, Tatum described herself as being an “okay” reader. A second participant, Cate, stated “I’m probably a little bit slower than most people”, and a third participant, Alison, identified herself as a reader by saying “I’m like in the middle.” These three separate self-perceptions suggest a lack of confidence in themselves as readers, which could impact the value they place on instructor feedback in a positive or negative way.

Although this self-perceived opinion of themselves as readers suggested a lack of confidence in the context area, this was not prevalent in the research studies presented previously. If researchers had accounted for the participants’ perceptions of themselves within the context in which they were receiving feedback, there could have been answers as to why participants did not appreciate or utilize the instructor feedback. For example, in the interview with Alison she self-proclaims that she is “in the middle” as a reader and that she did not check for instructor feedback on her forum posts. This could suggest that since Alison is not confident in herself as a reader, she is not checking for instructor feedback on her forum posts because she does not value the feedback.

Self-perception summary. Participants' self-perceptions are important to consider before examining the participants' perception of instructor feedback because their self-perceptions could influence the value they place on the instructor feedback. Without understanding and representing these self-perceptions, the context from which the perceptions of the instructor feedback is taken and the interpretation of the perceptions of instructor feedback could be misinterpreted. Aforementioned, if a participant stated they felt negatively about them self as a reader, this could be a reason as to why they do not care about receiving feedback from their instructors or have a seemingly negative outlook of the course. Ultimately, their perceptions of self could influence their value of feedback and are important to discuss to better understand the context in which their perceptions developed.

Perceptions of the Course

As important as it is to understand the participants' views of themselves, it is also important to understand their view of the course. This is equally as important because if participants state they do not care for the course, this could influence their value of the instructor feedback they receive in a positive or negative way. Although statements of participants liking and disliking the course were expected, a larger, possibly more influential theme arose which trumped the need to discuss smaller answers of like and dislike, and ultimately changed the topic of perceptions of the course as a whole.

Consequently, this unit will be dedicated to discussing the disconnect between the course content and the participants' perceptions of the course content that was observed in the interview and survey data. This is important to discuss because if participants do not understand what is being taught, their value of the feedback could be affected.

The disconnect. When I sat down and started comparing and combining the themes for the larger thematic units, it was apparent that some of the participants had very different perceptions regarding the type of course they were enrolled in. Aforementioned, these participants were sampled from an integrated reading and writing course with the prefix RDG. For example, in response to my initial elicited metaphor prompt, “Teachers’ feedback, to me, in online discussion forums in my RDG course is like,” one of the participants, Maria, stated that it is like “a flying bug, because writing never goes away.” This answer suggested a disconnect because although the prefix of the course is listed as RDG, reading improvement and the prompt asked about instructor feedback in general; this participant chose to respond with a metaphor about writing. Her answer suggested there may be a disconnect between participants’ understanding of the course content and the actual course content. This concerns their perceptions of instructor feedback because if Maria is unaware of the content she is learning, she may feel less inclined to value the feedback the instructor is giving her. For example, if Maria thinks the course is focused on writing, she may be less motivated to read and utilize the feedback the instructor is giving her on her reading.

As the study continued, there were a few more occurrences within the interviews and survey responses that suggested participants may not have been completely aware of the integration of reading and writing within the course. For example, in Cate’s interview, she discussed how she felt the course would have been more beneficial if it had taken place before her freshman English course because it helped her understand the content necessary to succeed in her freshman writing intensive course. This suggested a disconnected because although the help may have been in the reading comprehension

area, Cate's response suggested she was only seeing it as a benefit in her English, writing course.

Alison had a similar understanding to Cate. When I asked Alison about her thoughts about her RDG course, Alison responded with "it's kind of like my high school English class." Alison related her perception of the current integrated reading course with a high school English course. Although she was specifically asked a question about a reading course, she responded about an English course, which is writing intensive.

Although there were conflicting perceptions of the purpose and content of the course, not all participants were confused. For example, in Tatum's interview she stated:

Well, I wasn't really good at reading in high school, and like understanding them, the behind the scenes of them. But now that I am in this class I understand a lot more and like how to read comprehensively and like understand it better and like write better as well, so I can write essays a lot better than I used to.

Tatum's perception of the course suggested she understood the course content, unlike her peers.

Possible cause of the disconnect. When thinking about why these statements of course content and participant perceptions of the course might not be clear in the participants' minds, one possible factor arose. In the participants' reading course, it is listed as a reading improvement course under the prefix RDG. Although it is listed as an RDG course, these courses are taught as integrated reading and writing courses with the theory that reading and writing are inseparable parts of literacy. With this in mind, this course is also writing intensive, requiring participants to write as much as they read. Therefore, with the prefix of the course being RDG, the name of the course being reading

improvement, and the writing intensive structure, it may not have been clear to the participants that this course instructed both reading and writing.

Why recognizing the disconnect matters. Although this confusion may seem of little importance, it could directly influence the participants when it comes to their perceptions of other aspects of the course, such as feedback. For example, all of these observations may seem of small importance when looking at perceptions of feedback, but the connection and importance of understanding the objective of the course could affect participants' value of the class, which is indicative of their value of feedback. In simpler terms, if a participant is unaware of the purpose of the activity they could be less inclined to do well and therefore may not be concerned with receiving instructor feedback.

Summary of self-perceptions and perceptions of the course. First, this unit was not presented in previous research and was not expected when researching student perceptions of instructor feedback. Although it was not present in the aforementioned research studies concerning student perceptions of instructor feedback, it could have possibly influenced some of the perceptions that were documented. For example, by looking back at the aforementioned theoretical framework, schema theory suggests that participants previously created schemata and the community in which they are learning, could affect their willingness to connect with the feedback they are receiving. So, if participants are uninterested with the content of the course, or are confused with the intent of the content, this could directly affect their perceptions of the instructor feedback and the value they place on receiving feedback in general. By reviewing the findings above, these participants have perceptions of the course that could influence their

perceived value of instructor feedback, and therefore the last thematic unit I will discuss should be read with this in mind.

Perceptions of Feedback

Now that factors that could influence the participants' value when receiving instructor feedback have been considered, I will discuss their perceptions of instructor feedback to answer the one and only research question. The four sub-themes regarding participants' perceptions of instructor feedback in online discussion forums that will be discussed are (a) the utility of feedback, (b) the clarity feedback offers, (c) progression feedback imposes, (d) and their desire for more.

The utility of feedback. The first sub-theme, regarding participants' perceptions, that emerged were their perceptions regarding the utility of instructor feedback. The utility of feedback, for this research, is defined as the perceived usefulness, profitableness, or benefits that instructor feedback provides to participants. For example, Cate stated,

I do like feedback, because um, if we ever have another discussion or if question on the forums, then I know, okay I need to pick out what I actually need, put it in there and kind of look back at some of the feedback that she put so I know like okay, maybe I need to fix grammar, or going to do punctuation, or like try to relate it to now.

This suggested that Cate found instructor feedback as useful and understood the feedback was benefitting her.

A second participant, Tatum, also described her thoughts on the utility of feedback and stated:

Um, I like when people give me feedback on anything that I do. So, like, writing things, I enjoy it because it helps me learn better, and like I do makeup, so when people tell me if its good or bad, it helps me a lot, and I listen to a lot of music, so I know it helps me to like to understand everything better, if I'm getting feedback.

This response suggested Tatum saw feedback as useful and that it benefitted her progress.

Similar to her response, Alison stated, "I think it's useful because sometimes I do miss the biggest picture and I looked at the smallest details and write about that. But like sometimes I misunderstood or misinterpreted like the prompt or thesis." Here, Alison also suggested that feedback was useful, and that the instructor feedback influenced her understanding in locating the main idea of texts.

Utility is not only present as a theme in this study, but it was also mentioned in the prior research. Although the theme utility was not directly stated in previous research the other identified themes presented a similar concept. For example, in Chokwe's (2015) study participants reported they valued feedback because it helps avoid repeated mistakes. This suggested that the participants valued feedback because it was useful to help avoid making the same mistakes in future work. This is similar to the perceptions from this study because my participants also reported they value the benefits the feedback gives them, such as how to avoid future mistakes.

Clarity. Although clarity could have been a subsection of utility, I separated these sections into two because not all usefulness or benefits of feedback provide clarity and there were many more examples of clarity than suggestions of utility. Clarity, for this study, is defined as the participants' desire or appreciation of the instructors'

feedback providing clear expectations of the current or future assignments. Of the five participants, all reported they felt instructor feedback, in general, provided clarity. Similar to the participants in this study, others in previous research felt similarly. For example, as stated above, in Murphy and Cornell's (2010) study they found that structured and clear feedback was important to their participants. Similarly, Haupt and Bikowski (2014) also found that direct feedback with codes, comments, and explanations were more useful to the participants than less detailed feedback. These themes suggest that the participants in both studies value feedback that is clear, similar to the participants in this study.

Cate's clarity. The first participant that discussed the many ways instructor feedback influenced the clarity of her understanding was Cate. As a precursor to this example, Cate's metaphor, in response to metaphor prompt in the survey, was "Alice in Wonderland." Cate described that instructor feedback was similar to Alice in Wonderland because in the movie Alice was asked to do certain things without knowing why. Cate's response suggested that although the course was similar to the feeling of being lost in Wonderland to her, the instructor feedback provided clarity as to why activities and assignments were happening in the course, similar as to why strange events were happening in Wonderland. For example, Cate stated, "...she's [Alice] kind of learning she's kind of progressing throughout the movie, she's understanding what's going on." Cate's statement suggested that the instructor feedback ultimately provided clarity as to why certain posts were required and certain things were discussed.

Another occurrence Cate proposed instructor feedback provided clarity was after being prompted to discuss the quality of instructor feedback. In response Cate states, "...

with the feedback it helps you understand about the question a little bit more, about your answers and how it, how you can relate it....” This answer implies that the feedback she is receiving on her forum posts gives her clarity as to what the task is, and how she can expand her ideas and connect it to others.

Alison and Britney’s clarity. Similar to Cate’s clarity, Alison and Britney also thought instructor feedback on their online discussion forum posts provided clarity. For example, when prompted to discuss her instructor feedback, Alison stated, “Like if we didn’t get a certain concept, or like the biggest picture of something, then she like tells us like well, you missed the concept.” This answer suggested feedback refined her responses and led her towards a clearer forum post. Similar to Alison, Britney also suggested her desire for clarity, but under a different context. Britney was a participant who did not receive feedback. She stated, “...I wonder if she even reads it [forum posts] or if she just reads it to give us a grade, so I don’t really know if what I’m saying is true sometimes.” This suggested though Britney did not receive feedback, she wanted the clarity and confirmation instructor feedback provided, to ensure her posts progressed in the right direction.

Tatum’s clarity. The final participant’s data that suggested the theme of clarity was Tatum’s. When asked to discuss the metaphor she created of what instructor feedback was like to her, she stated it was like music to her ears. She followed this by stating, “it helps me a lot, and I listen to a lot of music, so it helps me to understand everything better. If I’m getting feedback, so like I know what to work on and what not to do next time.” This statement suggested feedback she received provided clarity for the next assigned forum post and the areas to improve. Similarly, Tatum also stated she

would like more feedback by stating, "...just so I know if I'm doing it correctly." This statement, similar to the one prior, suggested feedback acted as a guide to improve and understand her coursework. Ultimately, participants in this study, as well as participants from the previous research, consider clarity to be important when discussing feedback.

Literacy progression. The participants perceived the value of utility and clarity instructor feedback provided, but they also identified the progression in which their instructor's feedback imposed on their work. Progression, for this study, is defined as perceptions in which participants indicate instructor feedback has progressed or improved their work. For example, when I asked Tatum about the utility of feedback, she responded with,

like I read it and I understand it and go back and look at what I wrote and like see if there is anything I could change to make it better or if it's like already good enough, see what I could do to improve it.

This statement suggested that by receiving instructor feedback, it helped her improve her knowledge about the tasks to be completed and would likely influence how she completed a future task.

Another participant, Maria, also discussed that feedback progressed her answers. For example, Maria stated:

Like I can tell I should have looked broader, like she, I don't remember exactly what the question was, but if she asks me a question I might have answered it, like, usually one question needs one answer, but sometimes there's more to it. So, like this could have been the answer, me responding that it was a best seller, but

then there is more to it. Like why do I think it's a best seller, or what kind of person buys the book.

Maria stated this as a precursor as to how the feedback pushes her to look deeper.

Directly following this, she also stated:

It's supposed to like help you for the next forum, like look at that is there more you can add on? Or more you can go in depth with? Like she's not going to ask everything, kind of just expects you to add on or say more.

These statements suggested that Maria saw that the instructor feedback enhanced her ideas and led to a better understanding of what was expected of the forum posts initially. These perceptions of participants' feedback being progressive is also exemplified in a study by Murphy and Cornell (2010). The participants in this study stated they would like a feedback chain that was a system where they could access all of their feedback to identify areas for improvement. This suggested that the participants in this study were also interested in progressing their ideas and responses with the use of feedback.

The need. Finally, although the participants' interviews and metaphors suggested many things, they repeatedly exemplified wanting additional instructor feedback on their discussion forum posts in the future. Interestingly, although three of the five participants received feedback, all stated the need for more feedback. This suggestion for additional feedback was expressed in many ways. For example, participants' data provided this theme by comparing the current integrated reading and writing course feedback to other courses or areas with more feedback and by just stating they wanted more feedback to know their instructor was reading their posts.

The need by comparison. One example of participants' data implying they would prefer more feedback was by relating it to other courses that provided more feedback. For example, Alison contrasted the lack of feedback she received in her integrated reading and writing course to the feedback she received in her English course. She stated:

I kind of like know like the ones [feedback] in my English class are, she like posts back to us and says like "Oh I like this, but you could explain this better", I wish she did that a little bit, so we could like understand the whole context, because this is like helping us go into like further.

She then stated, "I wish we had more feedback in here, because maybe like we didn't get the forum posts, like topic, and I just like to write to get a grade...." These statements suggested Alison valued the feedback from her English instructor and would prefer to receive similar instructor feedback in her RDG course.

Another example of participants' need for instructor feedback occurred during Maria's interview. Maria discussed the value of the instructor feedback on her posts. Maria stated:

...she like comments on my blog a lot, because we do blog posts a lot. They are like a lot longer than the forums and I like see feedback as something being good. Like it's trying to help you. So, like I know she like comments on my forums and like I like reading what she has to say. Or like in the forums for like when she grades them, shell add as in why we made this grade or like what we could have added to make the perfect score and it usually it's like asking more questions; like adding on. I mean like I think it's good.

She also said:

I think the forum posts and the blog posts aren't so consistent, so like the syllabus says, but I think like when we do, do them, and when it comes up, they are helpful because we don't really like to do them as often. If that makes sense? In my writing ENG class we do a lot of forums, we do a forum every week, and but I think it's helpful, like I like it.

These two statements suggested Maria valued instructor feedback but would have preferred a more structured facilitation of the posts in order to utilize the feedback. She mentioned she created a forum post every week in her ENG course which also suggested she would prefer her forum posts in the integrated reading course given as frequently.

The need for more feedback. Not only did participants discuss their need by comparison to other course and situations but they also stated it ensured them that someone was reading what they were writing. For example, Britney stated, "...I wonder if she even reads it or if she just reads it to give us a grade. So, I don't know if what I'm saying is true sometimes." This suggested that Britney would like more feedback to know if her work is done correctly and to know if anyone is actually reading her work. Similarly, Tatum said, "I think I would like a little bit more, just so I know if what I'm doing it correctly because I know there isn't like a right or wrong to it...sometimes a little more [feedback] would be nice." These two statements suggested that participants preferred more feedback to further conceptualize and solidify meaning to produce more purposeful and critical forum posts.

Summary of perceptions of instructor feedback. Although there were factors mentioned previously that may influence participant perceptions of instructor feedback,

such as self-perceptions and perceptions of the course, participants still suggested that utility, clarity, progression, and more feedback were generally most important to them when receiving instructor feedback on their forum posts. This is notable because although the platform had changed from a face-to-face medium to an online medium, none of these themes were directly related to either platform. Although the themes I encountered were not different from previous research in non-online formats, the participants' desire for more feedback was still prevalent. This is interesting because aforementioned, online platforms make feedback accessible and able to be given almost anywhere and anytime, (Kinash, Brand, & Mathew, 2012) but participants still proposed this course and its instructor did not provide enough feedback.

Finally, as mentioned above, instructor feedback is perceived differently by each person, but this data suggested the idea that some are shared for each participant in multiple research studies. By comparing these themes to others from the previous research it is obvious that some themes are shared, and some are not. This agrees with the pervious suggestion that currently there is a wide array of student perceptions of instructor feedback and unless smaller, more contextualized, studies are done, there will be no clear answer of what will work in any given classroom to support student success. coursework.

Summary of Discussion

This study explored student perceptions of instructor feedback in online discussion forums in integrated reading and writing courses. The particular discussion forums under investigation asked students to post a written response to a reading that was open for the class to view, but their classmates were not required to read or respond to

their classmates' posts. The teacher, however, frequently posted feedback on students' online forum postings, and this study analyzed students' perceptions of that feedback (or the lack of feedback). Findings from this study suggested that students' perceptions of instructor feedback could be clustered into four overarching themes: clarity of feedback (i.e., the participants' desire for or appreciation of clarity in the feedback received by the instructor, such as, clear expectations of performance on current or future assignments) utility of feedback (i.e., the perceived usefulness, profitableness, or benefits, that instructor feedback provides to participants), progression of feedback (i.e., perceptions in which participants indicate instructor feedback has progressed or improved their work), and need for more feedback (i.e., wanting additional instructor feedback on forum posts).

The findings from this study aligned with findings from previous research. For example, Murphy and Cornell (2010) found that structured and clear feedback was important to their participants, which relates to the finding in this study that students wanted clarity in their feedback. Participants from Murphy and Cornell's study also recommended developing a system in which they could access all of their previous feedback so that they could use it to progress their learning; this finding related to the progression of feedback theme found in the current study. Chokwe (2015) found that students valued feedback because it helped them avoid repeating past mistakes, which is similar to the finding in this study that students perceived the utility of feedback as important. Although the need for more feedback was not found as a theme in the previous literature reviewed on students' perceptions of feedback, a long line of research on the effects of feedback suggest that feedback plays a critical role in student learning (Hattie, 1999).

Although this study converges with previous research on student perceptions of feedback, it also extends this research to include student perceptions of themselves and the context as potentially important areas to study. This investigation found themes such as utility, clarity, progression, and need for more feedback as important to students when receiving feedback, but also found larger themes such as perceptions of the course and students' self-perceptions that could influence their perceptions of the instructor feedback.

As schema theory (Bartlett, 1932) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) suggest, students' previously created schemata and their position socially and culturally should play a role in how they perceive a phenomenon. This study found that students had more or less favorable perceptions of themselves as readers. Although students did not explicitly state that their schemata of themselves as readers influenced their perceptions of feedback, it seems plausible that this could be the case. Similarly, students' perceptions of the course could also potentially influence their perceptions of instructor feedback and vice versa.

Another finding of this study indicated that students may not understand the content presented in the course; this implies that educators using IRW frameworks should work to ensure their students understand the purpose of incorporating both reading and writing in the course. This particular finding was not found in previous research and therefore provides an opportunity to scholars and practitioners to look deeper into how well students understand the learning objectives related to reading, writing and the integration of the two.

Although the findings suggested general themes of perceptions regarding instructor feedback, it was also found that students have their own unique perceptions of instructor feedback which could potentially be dependent on their previously created schemata and their role within the context of the situation. Therefore, generalizations of themes from previous research may not be appropriate given the uniqueness of each student, course, and specific feedback received by the instructor. Accordingly, instructors may benefit from conducting their own case-by-case assessments of students' perceptions of their feedback. For example, a general way for instructors to collect student perceptions of instructor feedback is by having the students self-appraise their work. This could be done by building a sample quiz or narrative-style questionnaire that intends to collect students' self-perceptions of their work and what would be beneficial to them in regard to instructor feedback. Another way in which previous researchers have informally collected student perceptions of feedback was through the monitoring of their interactions with peers. For example, in a study run by Ertmer et al. (2007) instructors used peer feedback within discussion forums to enhance the quality of student online postings. The results from this study suggested that the quality of the students' postings was maintained through the use of peer feedback, despite their preference for instructor feedback. The study also noted that giving peer feedback not only reinforced their learning but enabled them to achieve higher understanding. This could be reflected in current practice by using peer interactions to see how students respond and what they ask of others as a way to provide insight as to what types of feedback are important to them.

This study did not just ask students what their perceptions were, but it also probed as to why they had those perceptions. Therefore, it may also be important for educators

and scholars alike to examine the reasoning behind students' perceptions. In sum, this study and its findings find their place among the current literature on student perceptions of instructor feedback but also open a new door into researching the possible influences student perceptions of self and their perceptions of the course may have on their value when perceiving instructor feedback.

VI. CONCLUSION

A major purpose of this study was to examine students' perceptions of instructor feedback in a specific context. When I conducted the study and analyzed the data, unexpected themes, such as perceptions of the course, arose and suggested student perceptions of feedback does not stand alone, and other factors may be influencing the value students place on feedback. Although these findings were from a particular subset of participants and should not be generalized into larger settings, the findings do relate to the larger body of literature of perceptions of feedback by proposing similar themes such as utility, clarity, literacy progression and the need for feedback.

The literature of instructor feedback and students' perceptions of that feedback is comprehensive, but this research helped demonstrate the value of the influence of researching in smaller more contextualized areas when moving forward. Each student is not a cutout of the student before them, just as each course and situation is unlike any other. As these findings suggested, although there were themes that were similar to previous research studies on student perceptions of instructor feedback, the participants in this study also suggested themes that were not present in previous data. This emphasizes the importance of smaller, more contextualized studies to ensure each context and its participants' perceptions are represented correctly. In return, this research could help instructors of courses, such as RDG, understand perceptions that are specific to their students and their course and adapt their practices to better meet student concerns.

Limitations

The intent of the study was to examine student perceptions of instructor feedback in online forum posts in integrated reading and writing courses. Although the research

did look at student perceptions of instructor feedback, all the students happened to be female. Due to the study being optional for students to participate in, the class size being small, and having a selection criterion, all final participants were women. This could be a limitation because it is not representative of perceptions of other genders or non-gender conforming students. The study should not generalize to non-female individuals.

Another limitation could be the experience level of the instructor. Although the instructor was a full-time doctoral student within the field of developmental education, this was their first semester teaching with the integrated reading and writing model. This factor could influence the students' perceptions and perceptions may have been different with a more experienced teacher.

Future Research

These commonalities and differences pave the way they in which future researchers conduct and utilize research. For example, this research could be utilized by scholars because it illuminates reasons for running more context specific studies to produce research that is more specific to different situations. For example, with the wide array of outcomes provided in previous perception research, it is hard to generalize these findings to smaller situations that may not have much in common with the larger settings. In contrast, the data from this study suggested themes specific to a certain context and body of students which now allows scholars to directly utilize these findings in similar contexts.

Another way in which this research could be useful for future scholars is that it could suggest further analyzation into seemingly unimportant areas. For example, as stated above, feedback is one of the top ten indicators of student achievement, so it can be

assumed that feedback is very valuable when discussing achievement. So, if a scholar were doing research on student retention, it could be important to take into factors, such as feedback, when looking at why students are dropping out or persisting. Without understanding the student perceptions and the context of the classrooms on that campus, scholars could be overlooking important reasoning as to why the students are dropping out or persisting.

Now that some ways in which these findings could be useful for current scholars have been discussed, they can be discussed on a practitioner level. The first way practitioners could utilize these finding is by reflecting on them in their own practice. For example, a practitioner could ask themselves if they are providing enough feedback or if the feedback they are providing is as clear as it can be. Although each student is unique, a practitioner could monitor this by simply asking each student if their particular needs are being met.

A second way in which practitioners could utilize this research in their own practice is by understanding new areas to be cautious of when providing feedback. For example, a finding of this research suggested that students value consistent feedback. If an instructor was noticing a lack of engagement with the feedback, the instructor could then try to provide more consistent feedback to attempt to engage their students further.

Finally, this research suggested that it is important that practitioners' make clear what their course is covering. Do my students know what this course covers? Do my students understand the course is supporting their reading and writing? As this study suggested, this is important because if the students do not recognize what the course content is, their value for certain types of feedback could be affected in different ways.

Ultimately, one purpose of this research was to provide common themes integrated reading and writing students perceived of instructor feedback in their online discussion forum posts in current postsecondary education. But, as the aforementioned research and theory suggested, students are individual, and each situation provides different perceptions. Therefore, it is incumbent on researchers and instructors alike, to understand the context in which their students are performing in and consult the students on their own preferences in that unique situation.

APPENDIX SECTION

- A. IN-CLASS SCRIPT FOR CONSENT
- B. CONSENT FORM
- C. E-MAIL CONTAINING SURVEY LINK
- D. QUALTRICS SURVEY
- E. VERBAL CONSENT
- F. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

APPENDIX A

IN-CLASS SCRIPT FOR CONSENT

Hi Everyone! Thank you all for your time today. Before I begin, please clear your desks.

All you will need is a writing utensil. You can use a pen or pencil.

- My name is Stephanie Jarrett, I am a master's student here at Texas State University in the department of Curriculum and Instruction. I am working on my master's thesis research, and I am interested in your perceptions of instructional feedback within your online discussion forums for your RDG course. My research will hopefully provide important information that I can use to inform your instruction and interaction with your professors in RDG specifically, as well as in reading instruction in general. I could really use your help with this project.

-You can receive credit for your required research participation in this class for participating in this study. Unfortunately, if you are under 18, you cannot participate in this study and you should not sign the consent for. However, you can still earn the credit through an alternative study which your professor will speak about with you later.

-Now, I will hand out the consent form. Please do not sign the consent form until I have gone over the form with you. You can use pen or pencil. Please raise your hand if you need a writing utensil.

-If you consent to be part of this research, and you are selected, I will ask you to take an online survey that will be emailed to you, following this class. I will also ask you to complete a 15-20-minute, audio-recorded, interview with me at a time of your choosing.

-If you consent to this survey you are also giving consent, to allow me to access your online discussion posts, instructor feedback on those posts, and to audio-record your face-to-face interview.

-In regard to the survey, it will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The survey will consist of an elicited metaphor with because clause, demographic items measuring age, sex, and ethnicity, and an item to schedule their semi-structured interview.

-In terms of risks, there are minimum risks in participating in this study. For example, when taking the survey, you may encounter questions that you prefer not to answer. You will be able to skip any questions that you would not like to answer. All data collected, as part of this project, will be stored in a secure location on a password-protected encrypted hard drive. No names will be kept, and pseudonyms will be given to ensure actual names will not be kept or disseminated. Nothing you share in this research study will be shared with your professor.

-In terms of benefits, by participating in all parts of this study you will receive credit for the required research participation portion of your RDG course. To receive full credit, you must complete all consent forms, the online survey, and the semi-structured

interview. Failure to complete one of these activities would mean that you cannot receive any credit for the required research portion of the class. Regardless of whether you did the first consent forms and the online survey, you must complete the face-to-face interview for your instructor to award you credit.

-If you decide not to participate or if you are under 18, you can still earn credit by completing other opportunities presented by your instructor.

-Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you can stop participation at any time.

-Do you have any questions about the consent form? [Answer questions]

-Now, please decide if you would like to consent to be in the study or not. If you consent to be in this study, you will sign the consent form and receive an email containing an online survey. If you do not consent to be in the study, you will need to complete an alternative assignment to receive credit for the mandatory research participation for your RDG course.

-For those of you who would like to take part in this study, please note that you must be 18 or older.

-Now turn the paper to the third page of this packet to consent to participate in this study. For this consent form, make sure you clearly print your name, student ID number, NETID, and sign your name.

-Your student ID typically begins with A0 and can be found on your identification card. Your NetID is what you use to log into your school email. It typically begins with 2 or 3 letters followed by a series of numbers.

-Please keep in mind that if you do consent to participate, you are giving me permission to obtain your forum posts and instructor feedback, as well as to audio-record your semi-structured interview.

-Regardless of whether or not you want to participate in this study, I ask that you please remain seated, so we can reduce distractions to the other students. When you finish, please sit quietly and I will walk around and collect the consent forms, whether you signed them or not.

-For those of you who did not sign the consent form and do not wish to participate in this study, you still have the chance to earn credit for the required research participation in your RDG course by other opportunities presented by your instructor.

-Thank you for your time and I look forward to speaking more with those who are interested participating in my research. I will now walk around and collect both signed

and unsigned consent forms. [Walk around and collect all signed and unsigned consent forms]

APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Perceptions of Instructor Feedback in Online Discussion Forums

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Jarrett

Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor: Dr.

Taylor Acee

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being conducted and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may experience while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

➤ **PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to learn more about your perceptions of instructor feedback, specifically through online discussion forums in your course Reading Improvement (RDG) course. The information gathered will be used to potentially inform instruction in this course and in integrated reading and writing courses in general.

➤ **PROCEDURES**

You will need to be over 18 years old to participate in this study. Also, you must have submitted at least one post in the online forum discussions for you RDG course. Of the students that meet these criteria and agree to be in the study, 10 will be selected at random to participate. If you agree to be in this study and are selected to participate, you will be asked to complete the following:

- One online survey including open-ended and multiple-choice items (approximately 10 minutes).
- A face-to-face interview completed one week after the survey (approximately 20 minutes)
- By signing this consent form, you are giving permission to the researcher to access your forum posts and instructor feedback on those posts in your RDG course.

Using the email, you provide on this consent form, you will be notified whether you were selected to be in this study.

Once you have completed all portions of the survey, you will be contacted again via email, with the time you have selected to participate in the face-to-face interview, and we will confirm a date for the interview. For the interview, you will be asked to come to a designated room on campus and discuss your perceptions of instructor feedback on your forum posts. By completing the interview, you will earn research participation in your RDG course. Sharing your perspectives could help us improve instruction in reading and writing courses.

➤ **RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

Participation in this study has minimal risks/discomfort. In the event that some of the survey questions or face-to-face questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. Should you feel discomfort after participating and you are a university student, you may contact the university health for counseling services.

➤ **BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES**

The information gathered will be used to potentially inform instruction in this course and in integrated reading and writing courses in general. In addition, you will be able to earn required research credit in your RDG course. If you would not like to participate in this study, you can earn an equal amount of credit by completing another opportunity presented by your instructor.

➤ **EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

All data collected as part of this project will be stored in a secure location on a password-protected encrypted hard drive. Reasonable efforts will be made to keep personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of this research team and the university research office may access the data. The university research office monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants. As a reminder, none of the information you provide will be shared with your instructor or others you may take in the future.

After all data are finalized, any identifying information will be removed. Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for seven years after the study is completed and then destroyed.

➤ **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION**

You will receive the required research credit in your RDG course for participating in this research study. To receive the full credit on your final course score, you must complete the initial consent forms, the online survey, and the 15-20-minute face-to-face interview. Failure to complete one of these activities would mean that you would not receive any or partial credit.

If you decide not to participate in the study or if you are under 18, you can still earn an equal amount of credit by alternative opportunities provided by your instructor.

➤ **PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**

You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you would like to stop participation in the research study and complete the alternative assignments instead, please do not sign the consent form and coordinate an alternative assignment with your instructor.

➤ **QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Stephanie Jarrett.

This project was approved by the university's IRB. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair or IRB Regulatory Manager.

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I am over 18, and I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Printed Name of Study

Participant

Signature of Study Participant Date

Student ID of Study Participant

Net ID of Study Participant

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

APPENDIX C

E-MAIL CONTAINING SURVEY LINK

To: All students who completed a consent form

BCC: Students' Emails

Subject: Research Participation Invitation: RDG Survey

Hi Everyone,

This email message is an approved request for participation in research that has been approved by the university Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Congratulations on being selected to participate in my research study. Just as a reminder, my name is Stephanie Jarrett, and I am a masters' student in the College of Education at Texas State University. I am working on my masters' thesis research, and I am interested in exploring your perceptions specifically concerning instructor feedback in online discussion forums within your RDG, TRACS forums. My research will provide important information that I can use to inform instruction in this course specifically, as well as RDG and online education in general.

This email contains a link below to the survey which will towards your required research participation. As a reminder, you must complete the survey as well as the interview, scheduled at the end of the survey, to earn credit for your participation.

This survey will contain an elicited metaphor with because clause, demographic items measuring age, sex, and ethnicity, and an item to schedule your semi-structured interview.

Failure to complete the entire survey approximately one week after it has been sent, will result in the inability to continue with the research study and you will not earn credit for the required research participation in your RDG course.

Below you will find a link that will take you directly to the website containing the survey.

Survey Hyperlink:

Thank you for your help and time!

To ask any questions about this study, or if there is any issue with the survey link, please contact Stephanie Jarrett.

Best,

Stephanie Jarrett

This project was approved by the university IRB. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair or IRB administrator.

APPENDIX D
QUALTRICS SURVEY

RDG Survey

Introduction

Thanks for agreeing to participate! This survey will take approximately 10 minutes and it must be completed in one sitting because you cannot save your responses.

As a quick reminder, this survey consists of (a) personal descriptive information, (b) the creation of a metaphor, and (c) general demographic information. In order to earn full credit, you must complete all of the survey items, have all consent forms signed, and sign up and complete a 15-20 minutes interview.

If you prefer not to answer a survey item, or want to stop participating for any reason, please close the survey and inform Stephanie Jarrett that you would like to stop participating. If you stop participating, you will still be able to earn extra credit by completing the alternative opportunity provided by your instructor.

Please type your full **First** and **Last** name.

Type your Student ID in the box below.



Type your NetID in the box below. It typically begins with 2 or 3 letters followed by a series of numbers



Please enter your email address.

Instructions for Survey

The survey items on the following pages are about you and your perceptions of instructor feedback specifically concerning the posts on your RDG discussion form.

You are to read each statement and respond with the answer that best describes you, not in terms of how you think you should be or how others want you to be. There are no right or wrong answers. Your individual responses will not be shared with your instructor and will in no way affect your relationship with us, your instructor, or the university.

The usefulness of our research depends upon you carefully and honestly responding to each survey item. Please take your time and answer each item as best as you can.



For the first portion of this survey you will be creating a metaphor based upon your perceptions of instructor feedback in your online discussion forums. This metaphor will be based upon how you feel about the feedback you receive, or don't receive, specifically in TRACS in your required online discussion forms.

Let's get started!

For purposes of understanding students' perceptions, a metaphor is defined as a comparison between two things (even if framed as a literary simile). For example, to explain how you feel about a current task you are required to complete, you could say "it was like climbing a mountain. It was enormous and was consistently an uphill climb, but it was beautiful at the top."

For purposes of investigating people's perceptions, a metaphor is defined as a comparison between two things (even if framed as a literary simile). For example, to explain to someone how you feel about a movie you just saw, you could say "it was like a roller-coaster. It built up slowly, then went really fast, up and down, almost made me sick, but was really exciting."

In this project we're going to ask you for some metaphors of your own, along with a short explanation or extension via a 'because clause.' As an example, let's say we're interested in how you would describe an "eyeball."

The format would look like this:

Metaphor: An eyeball is like a camera.

Because: Because they have similar parts. For example, both have something to control the amount of light (the shutter and the iris), and they both have something that allows them to store images for processing (film and the retina).

OR, you might write:

Metaphor: An eyeball is like a window to the soul _____.

Because: Because looking at someone's eyes can tell you whether they are happy, sad, or angry, as if it were a window you could look through to their soul.

In other words, you might explain how an eyeball works by comparing it to how a camera works, or you might explain how revealing eyes are by comparing them to a window.

Of course, we're not interested in eyeballs with this survey, we're interested in your perception on feedback, specifically in relation to online discussion posts. So, for the following question, please come up with a metaphor by completing the sentence provided; then write a short extension of that metaphor with a 'because clause.'

Once again, please keep in mind this metaphor should be about your perceptions of the feedback you receive, or don't receive, in RDG (integrated reading and writing); more specifically in TRACS through your required online discussion forms.

Metaphor:

“Teachers’ feedback, to me, on my online discussion posts in my RDG course is like:

Extension:

Because:

Which of the following best describes the instructors’ feedback to **you** on forums?

- I like the feedback
 - I dislike the feedback
 - I feel neutral towards the feedback
 - I don't read the feedback
 - The teacher has not given me feedback
 - I do not participate in online discussion forums
-

What is your sex?

- Male
 - Female
 - I prefer not to say
-

What is your ethnicity?

- Hispanic or Latino
 - Not Hispanic or Latino
 - Unknown
-

What is your race?

- African American or Black
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Caucasian or White
- Native Hawaiian or Another Pacific Islander
- Other (Please Specify)

[Click here to add answers](#)

What day and time would you like to complete your face-to-face interview?

Day

Time

APPENDIX E

VERBAL CONSENT

Study Title: Perceptions of Instructor Feedback in Online Discussion Forums

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Jarrett

Co-Investigator/Faculty

Advisor: Dr. Taylor Acee

Hello _____. My name is Stephanie Jarrett. Thank you for scheduling an interview with me. Just as a refresher I am working on a research project focused on learning more about your perceptions of feedback, specifically concerned with online discussion forums in your RDG class. As a part of the requirements for conducting research, I need to quickly review information about the project and obtain your verbal consent to complete this interview.

In this project, I will gather information about your perceptions of instructional feedback within online discussion forums for your RDG course. As a reminder, this project, and your perceptions of instructor feedback, will not be shared with your professor and will not affect your course grade or your relationship with your instructor or the university in any way. As a part of this interview, I will be asking fairly general questions about your current feedback, your perceptions of the feedback, and about the metaphor you created in the online.

You do not have to participate in this interview, and during the interview, you can skip any questions or stop at any time. To make sure I get everything down in my notes, I will be audio-recording this information.

Do you have any questions for me about this project?

Would you be willing to consent to participate in this interview?

APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Burke Reading Interview (BRI) (Burke, 1987)

- 1- Describe yourself as a reader.

Feedback in general:

- 1- What do you think about the RDG class in general? Why?
- 2- To what extent do you feel comfortable using the computer or device you use to post on TRACS? Why?

Retrospective Questions adapted from Armstrong 2011

- 1- You mentioned in your metaphor, created previously, that you felt instructor feedback in online discussion forums was like: _____, can you explain a bit to me why you feel this way?
- 2- Can you show me some specific examples within the forums of why you felt this way?
- 3- Given that some time has passed since you created the metaphor, do you think it is still accurate today?

More about feedback in general

- 1- How do you view the quality of instructor feedback in the online discussion forum posts? Why?
- 1- How useful is the feedback to you?
- 2- How does the feedback make you feel?

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