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Using Strength-Based Praise to Encourage Student Agency in Grammar

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Using Strength-Based Praise to Encourage Student Agency in Grammar

Kayla Rafferty, Kellyn Wolden, and
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“Can you edit the grammar in my paper?”

Quick-Think

When grammar is stated as a primary goal in Studio conferences:

What strategies have you found helpful for writers in these interactions?

What are some of the challenges of scaffolding proofreading and editing?



Student Expectations of Grammar Consultations

Studio Assistants have shared that **writers often expect comprehensive written error correction** in the Studio due to:

Past educational experiences of handing papers over to peer reviewers to **correct with red pen.**

Expectations of **“perfect” grammar.**

The feeling that they **aren’t good enough at grammar** to make these corrections on their own.




Scaffolding v. Comprehensive Error Correction

Comprehensive error correction is a common strategy in classrooms and writing centers. However, this approach is **not as effective for long term learning as compared to scaffolding.**

Ferreira, D. (2013) compared written corrective feedback with explaining common errors and encouraging students to work independently to spot and fix errors, and found that the scaffolding approach was much more helpful for **increasing autonomy** and **developing long-term skills.**

This approach also helps foster active involvement of students in their grammar process.

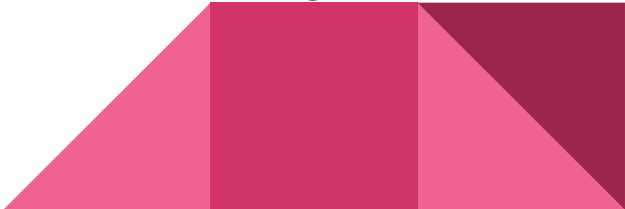


How can our praise be helpful for grammar?

Praising one point of a paper is a common tutoring technique for transitioning into criticism, but often does not recognize any of the **effort to apply and learn the processes of proofreading and editing**.

Calhoun Bell and Youmans' analysis of writing center transcripts showed that praise statements give both L1 and L2 writers more direction when **openly discussing their strengths**.

Other than just letting writers know they are good at grammar, process praise is most effective in **focusing on student effort by modeling correct strategies** and encouraging them to be applied in the future.




Rather than saying “*you’re good at grammar,*” how could a Studio Assistant build on the techniques the writer used to accomplish grammatical accuracy?

One approach could discuss how “*setting up this sentence with the dependent clause and comma effectively leads into the main point you’re trying to make.*”

Instead of telling a writer that “*the language you use is clear,*” what praise might more actively focus on the skills that can continued to be refined in their writing?

A Studio Assistant might ask the writer: “*Could the precise wording and length of this strong sentence be applied to another sentence that is harder to understand?*”



Why scaffold grammar with process praise?

Grammar is often viewed as an ability that some writers have and others fail to grasp. By praising the strengths of writers for **applying strategies that can continue to be learned and built on**, grammar can be reconsidered as an ongoing writing process.


Praising effort also “enhances intrinsic motivation” in students to **complete challenging tasks** (Haimovitz and Henderlong Corpus).



As a motivational scaffolding technique, our intervention aimed to increase students' confidence in accuracy, proofreading, and editing.


When a writer expressed **grammar as their primary concern** and agreed to participate in our study, the Studio Assistant would ask them to **identify an area of their paper to read out loud**.

The Studio Assistant would then address **examples of grammatical strength** in the draft and discuss:

1. How the Studio Assistant thought the sentence worked well in context?
 2. What grammatical process the writer used?
 3. How could the strength be applied in other points of the paper?
- 

“After reading ‘the Insufficiency of Honesty’ I have come to the conclusion that the difference between honesty and integrity is effort. When one take the time to think about what one is doing then the consciences are thought of and the feelings of other people are considered... It could be that author wrote the paper not to discredit honesty, but to show the value of integrity as a larger part of our culture.... Integrity shows strength, strength of being, and strength of character. Because Carter made it clear that it takes a conscious effort to discern right from wrong, in this way it builds a person’s integrity.”

Take a look at this writing sample. How could you find specific praise to aid in scaffolding?



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The two highlighted sentences are examples of the writer’s strength. The writer correctly and effectively uses commas to separate ideas in the sentence.

Brainstorm: How could you use this praise to scaffold comma use in other parts of the paper?



Study Methods

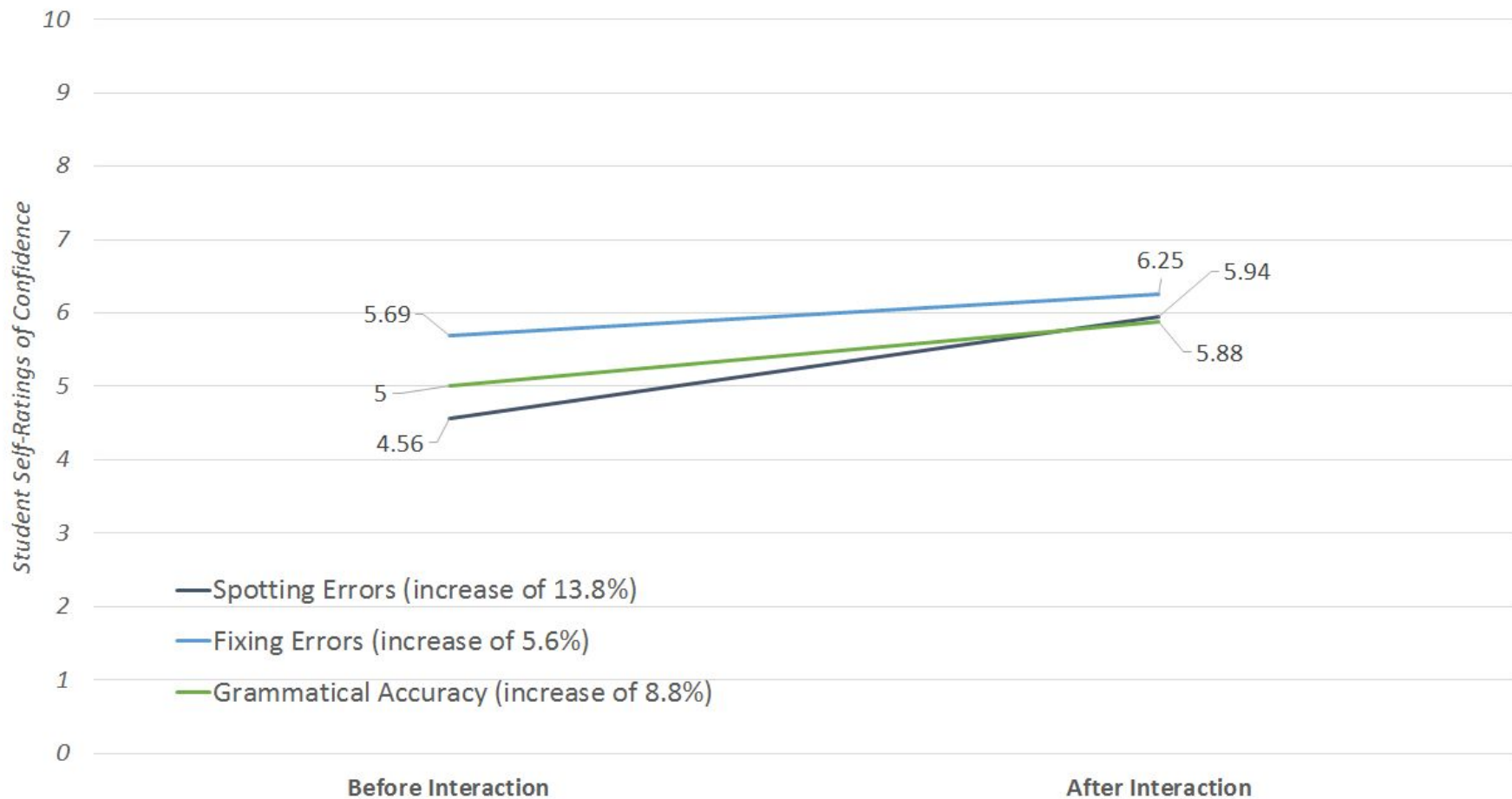
We gave a sample size of 8 students an identical survey before and after the interaction described previously.

Our survey asked students to rate their confidence from 1-10 in spotting errors, fixing errors, and overall grammatical correctness.

The survey also asked the writer's goal for the assignment and the steps needed to reach this goal.



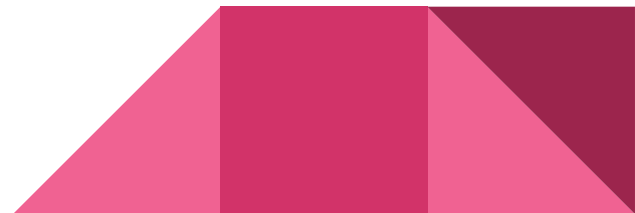
Changes in Self-Rated Grammar Confidence



Conclusions

Motivational scaffolding increases student confidence in spotting errors, fixing errors, and overall grammatical accuracy.

Using praise is an effective way to scaffold grammar in consultations in the studio, both for multilingual and monolingual students.

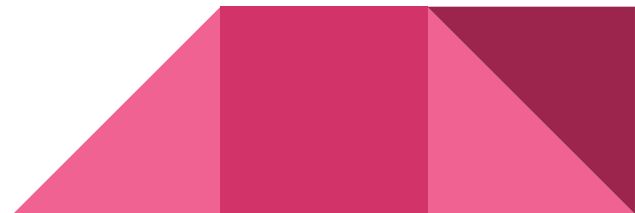


Limitations

Small sample size somewhat a result of beginning with a focus on multilingual students and shifting study to all writers concerned with grammar.

While our intervention was somewhat scripted, it was only followed loosely depending on the goals of the individual student.

Students may have felt pressure to record an increase in confidence to show their appreciation for our help.



Afterthoughts

While our initial goal was to find an alternative method of grammar instruction for multilingual writers, we found that **our strategy can be applied in a number of other contexts**; for example, one of our interactions was with a student with dyslexia.

Using process praise can be used in the Studio during **many aspects of the writing process**, whether it is praising strategies used to construct an argument or praising a brainstorming process that seems to be moving a writer forward.

