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Student Files: Their Use in the Informal Evaluation of Writing

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Student Files: Their Use in the Informal Evaluation of Writing

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B.A. Reed College 1980

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the School for
International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont.

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and getting students to use mistakes as a tool for learning.

ERIC Descriptors

INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION   CIJE: 3,444   RIE: 4,621   GC: 310
SN Adapting instruction to individual needs within the group

EVALUATION   CIJE: 3,559   RIE: 4,720   GC: 820
SN Appraising or judging persons, organizations or things in relation
    to stated objectives, standards, or criteria
NT Student Evaluation
    Writing Evaluation

EVALUATION METHODS   CIJE: 4,062   RIE: 6,489   GC: 820
RT Evaluation Criteria

WRITING EVALUATION   CIJE: 36   RIE: 38   GC: 830
BT Evaluation
RT Holistic Evaluation

WRITING PROCESSES   CIJE: 149   RIE: 99   GC: 400
UF Composition Processes

INFORMAL ASSESSMENT   CIJE: 112   RIE: 197   GC: 820
BT Evaluation
RT Non-graded Student Evaluation
RT Portfolios

GROUP INSTRUCTION   CIJE: 192   RIE: 329   GC: 310
RT Individualized Instruction

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Much of the impetus for this paper sprang from my work over my first internship. At this time, I was very involved in improving such things as my lesson plans, sequencing, and actual teaching skills. I relied mainly on my intuition to assess my students' progress. When I corrected their homework, I kept no specific record of how a particular student had done apart from checking that she had completed it. I also administered no formal tests. As a result, I felt at a loss when it came to making specific individual assessments of a student's progress. I did not feel comfortable relying solely on my intuitive sense of how she was doing. I therefore resolved to concentrate on evaluation, particularly informal evaluation, for my second internship.

These problems over my first internship made me recollect my own experiences with homework and tests. Often my homework was checked over quickly by the teacher, which meant that the entire paper was either covered with red marks or, more favorably, with some hyperbolic praise which left me equally uncertain as to where, specifically, I had gone right and wrong.

In addition, the test day would arrive and the test be returned like a stone tablet, with all its weighty implications for my grade. Somewhere along the line my daily progress had been overlooked in favor of this more ponderous

and final evaluation of my work. Since no subjective or
specific record had been kept of the ongoing progress of my
work, the teacher necessarily had to rely on this final
test to stand for a cumulative evaluation. I do not want
to appear unduly concerned with the grade so much as the
sense of loss I felt as a student not knowing where speci-
fically I had made errors or even what my strengths were.

Years later, on my first internship, I found myself in
the same position I assume my teachers had been in with me.
I had an overall sense of how my students were progressing,
but this was based more on intuition than on any specific
evidence. Unfortunately, in the classroom, intuition favors
those students who are the most likeable to the teacher. I
especially wanted to avoid this tendency in the class by
establishing a means of making regular and informal assess-
ments of a student's work.

For my second internship, I hoped to emphasize the
informal evaluation of my students' work. One way of empha-
sizing a student's ongoing progress is to do regular and
informal assessments of the assignments. I therefore
postulated four assumptions which underscore this need for
regular and informal evaluation. I planned to implement
these assumptions during the two one-month sessions I would
be teaching at the British branch of the American School in
Switzerland (TASIS). My paper will concern itself with how
I put these assumptions into practice and what the results
were.

The first assumption, and the one under which all of the others are assimilated, is that students need to be aware that they are making progress on a regular basis. By progress I mean two things: either the assimilation and understanding of an assignment or the ability to use what has been learned to move on to something new or more difficult. This awareness of progress seems to be particularly necessary in the notoriously discouraging process of learning a foreign language. Ultimately, a student's awareness of her progress should contribute to her motivation to continue to learn.
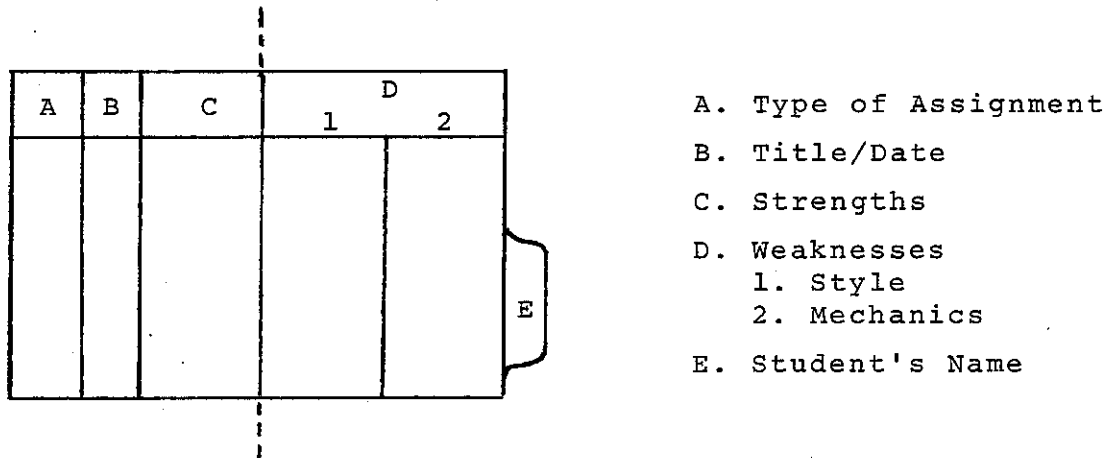
On the other hand, if a student's sense of progress is threatened, as in the case of failing an important test, her motivation to continue may be seriously hindered. For my second assumption I consequently postulated that informal assessment would be less threatening than a more formal means of assessment--for example, tests--and is therefore of more potential value in helping students on a regular basis. I had witnessed the phenomenon that tests often served to preempt the daily classroom work and drew the students' concentration away from the task at hand. I wanted to underscore the importance of having students base their sense of progress on what they are doing now rather than on past or future successes or failures. By giving them numerous assessments of their work, I hoped that the informal and ongoing nature of the evaluation would be stressed.

My third assumption springs from the desire not to lose
students to either boredom or frustration. To do so, I
planned to make the curricula as individualized as possible.
In my third assumption, I hypothesized that setting individ-
ual criteria according to a student's need would help both
the student and the teacher to identify the student's
progress. It would thus be an aid in strengthening independ-
ent learning in the student. I intended to accomplish this
by setting criteria for each writing assignment.

Students can also learn to focus on their ongoing
progress by using and learning from their mistakes. My last
assumption is that students can learn to use past mistakes
to improve on their future work. I realized that one tradi-
tional way of reacting to mistakes is to either discard them
altogether or begin anew from a completely different angle.
In contrast, I wanted my students to begin with the mistakes
and build from them. I knew that this would require practice.
But I also knew that the reward would be well worth the
effort in that the students would most likely become more
confident about their learning in general.

My next step was to find a means of implementing these
assumptions in my classes. A major part of the solution
came in the form of a lecture by Gordon Hayward, a writer
and high school composition teacher at Brattleboro Union
High School.[1] Mr. Hayward discussed with the M.A.T. students
a set of materials he used to evaluate the progress of his

students' writing. He used a standard manila file folder to
collect each student's writing assignments. He would then
evaluate each assignment according to certain categories
listed on the inside of the folder. The evaluation would
then be written directly on the inside of the folder. Below
is a diagram of the file folder system he used:

A	B	C	D 1	2

A. Type of Assignment
B. Title/Date
C. Strengths
D. Weaknesses
   1. Style
   2. Mechanics
E. Student's Name

I decided that these files could be adapted to suit my
needs. The files I proposed to use in my classes would be
similar to the ones Mr. Hayward used, with the exception
that I would omit, under "Weaknesses," the categories of
style and mechanics since my ESL students would probably
not be advanced enough to make these distinctions anyway.
Below is a diagram of the file I used:

A	B	C	D

A. Kind of Assignment
B. Title/Date
C. Strengths
D. Weaknesses
E. Student's Name
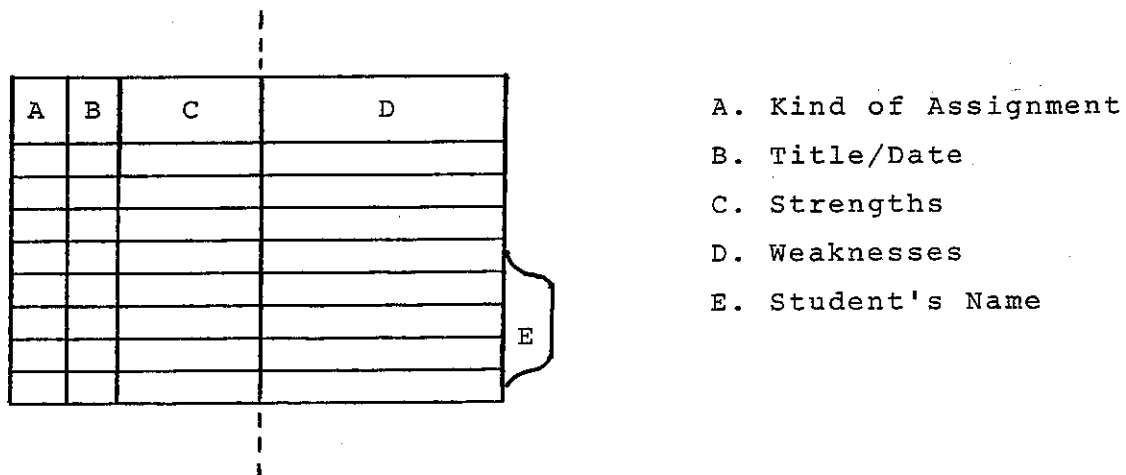
In practice, the files would support my assumptions in several ways. First, students would be given regular and informal evaluation of their writing assignments via my written evaluation of their assignments in the files. Secondly, the assessment would be individualized through the practice of setting a criterion for each assignment according to a student's needs. For example, if the class was working on paragraph writing, one student might have as a criterion for her assignment writing clear topic sentences while another student might concentrate on indentation. By making their tasks realizable and tailored to them, I hoped that the students would be encouraged to work independently. Finally, students would use the mistakes from their writing assignments in that the criterion set for each assignment would be based on the main problem or mistake in the previous assignment. In effect, I had identified three main areas for investigation as extracted from my assumptions.

This paper will therefore be a discussion of how effective the files were in implementing informal and regular evaluation, in setting criteria for assignments and finally, in getting students to use their mistakes. The second section of this paper will be structured according to these three main areas of investigation. In the third section I will discuss how my work affected and expanded my assumptions. Finally, in the conclusion, after summarizing the main points in the paper, I will discuss the implications this work may have for my future teaching.

II. DISCUSSION OF SESSIONS ONE AND TWO

The American School in Switzerland conducts two inten-
sive summer ESL programs at its British site. They enroll
about one hundred adolescent students from diverse national
backgrounds. Each class consists of approximately fourteen
students and meets for three hours of English per day. The
curriculum is left entirely to the teacher's discretion.
For both of the one-month sessions I requested and was
assigned to teach the most advanced level class in order to
implement my ideas on using the files and teaching writing.
Despite the fact that for both sessions I taught the same
level, there were some major differences between the two
classes.

The class in the first session consisted of sixteen
students between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. They were
a very enthusiastic and energetic group who represented ten
different nationalities. I gave them a questionnaire on the
first day asking them such things as how long they had
studied English, what they hoped to accomplish at TASIS and
whether they wanted to concentrate on speaking, listening,
reading or writing. The results showed that their main
interest was in improving their conversational ability,
although most mentioned wanting to improve their writing
ability as well.

In contrast, in the second session, the group was much

more serious and even subdued in nature. There were fourteen students who were slightly older than the first session class. They came from an even more diverse range of countries. Their overall ability to use English was more developed than that of the first class. The second session class responded to my initial questionnaire with a unanimous request to work at improving their writing skills and, in particular, essay writing.

Because of these differences between the first and second sessions, the discussion for this section will focus on how I altered what I did in the second session as a result of what I learned during the first session. When it is possible, I will make a direct comparison of the two sessions. The discussion will focus on my work with the files and how I implemented informal evaluation, set criteria and got the students to use their mistakes.

At the beginning of both sessions I gave each student a file folder and discussed how it would be used. I explained that the files would contain their written assignments and that both of us would be writing evaluations in the folders. However, it would be primarily their responsibility to keep the files in order and to bring them to class each day. Further, they would be evaluated on how well they stuck to the criterion we set and not on their creativity or ideas. Finally, I would have conferences with them individually every one-and-a-half weeks or so to discuss their work with the files as a focal point for discussion.

The files, then, would be a record of the evaluation of
how well a student met the criterion (denoted on the file
chart as "Strengths"), as well as how she did not (denoted
on the chart as "Weaknesses"). The file also contained an
example of what a student might focus on for her next assign-
ment, as listed under "Weaknesses" in the evaluation chart.
These comments were to be as specific as possible in order
to help a student identify precisely what needed changing or
what seemed valuable about a paper. These were the general
guidelines I had set for using the files. They were to
undergo some major changes before the end of the summer.

Implementing Informal and Regular Evaluation

The files implemented work with informal and regular
evaluation in several ways for both sessions. There was,
however, one important difference in procedure between the
first and second sessions. During the first session, I did
most of the evaluations of the assignments outside of class.
I reasoned that the more work I could do out of class, the
better for the students. Occasionally I did sit at my desk
and go over the students' assignments while they were engaged
in some quiet or independent activity. I discovered that
this gave me the chance to ask them questions for clarifica-
tion and, even more important, it enabled me to get the
assignments back to the students more quickly.

As a result, in the second session I decided to do most

of the evaluations in class. Another justification for these in-class evaluations soon became apparent. By doing the evaluations in the students' presence, it underscored the informal nature of the process. This is in contrast to the often mysterious and threatening procedure of evaluating students' tests and papers out of their sight.

During both of the sessions I held two or three individual conferences with each student. A major function of the conferences was to verify whether the student understood and agreed with the evaluations in the files. I hoped that this kind of open discussion format would emphasize the informal nature of the evaluation.

For the first session, I tended to rely on the students' files as a focal point for our discussions. After having two conferences with each student, I found that the majority of the students usually concurred with my evaluations. Although it was important for us to discuss some of the main points in the file, it did not seem necessary to refer to each assignment in order for the discussion to progress. If the evaluations were to be informal, then it was contradictory and even redundant to read them over again during the conference.

I therefore determined to refer to the files during the second session only in the case where a point needed to be clarified by either me or the student. In contrast to the first session, this enabled us to focus on the student's work

as a whole rather than on specific assignments. By only

referring to the files when one of us felt it was necessary,

I was further reinforcing the informal nature of the evalua-

ations. I was not judging students as based on the evalua-

tions in the files but in a more holistic manner.

For both sessions, the student-teacher conferences

worked well on the level of synthesizing and clarifying the

more detailed evaluations in the files. The files were

there if necessary to provide this clarification. Without

the files, we would not have had a background and basis for

our conversations. In other words, the files enabled us to

go beyond the specifics they contained and do the more

important work of summarization.

Setting Criteria

The emphasis on informal and regular evaluation could

not have been accomplished without the regular setting of

criteria for each assignment. The criterion for each assign-

ment limited and controlled the work a student was to do.

In this way, the workload and expectations were kept at a

reasonable and informal level. It also helped to focus the

students on the task at hand and to give them a clear indica-

tion of what and when they had accomplished something.

The purpose of setting criteria for each assignment was

to help the student to concentrate on one realizable goal

which grew organically from the previous assignment. I set

the criterion for a particular student according to the main problem in the preceding assignment. In both sessions, identifying a criterion proved to be a much easier task for both me and the student than actually sticking to it once it had been chosen.

Some of the confusion with the latter resulted from the nature of the comments in the files. In the first session, my evaluatory comments were too general. As a result, the students were confused as to what their particular criterion was. For example, on one representative paper I wrote the following for strengths: "very interesting, good division of paragraphs, neatly written," while for the weaknesses I wrote: "One thing I would consider is your choice of words in some places." I realized that there were several factors influencing this problem.

First, I felt compelled to evaluate as much as possible in order to uphold my image of what a good teacher should be --someone willing to spend hours pouring over papers. Second, I was not making a clear enough distinction between correction and evaluation. As I read over a paper, I wrote notes about such things as spelling errors or problems of verb tense. Meanwhile, I also evaluated the papers in terms of the most salient problems. This problem or mistake would become the criterion for the next assignment. As a result, students often identified mechanical errors as the criterion for the next assignment.

I began to alleviate this problem halfway into the session by using correction symbols to mark the mechanical errors such as spelling, verb tense, or word omission. I thus saved my written commentary for the evaluatory remarks such as a problem with paragraph development or run-on sentences. In so doing, I hoped to highlight those problems which could possibly be changed permanently. This distinction between correction and evaluation proved useful for the rest of the first session and throughout the second session. In particular, it helped both the students and me to concentrate on the criterion rather than getting mired in the numerous more minor problems.

As I continued to evaluate assignments, a problem related to the nature of comments for setting criteria arose. I often determined a criterion for the class, only to realize later that another criterion might have been more suitable. This problem was particularly prevalent at the very beginning of both sessions. Because I had not yet determined individual criteria for students, I necessarily began by assigning the entire class a general criterion for their first few assignments. For example, I had the first session students write a descriptive story about their arrival at TASIS. At first I emphasized writing in detail as the criterion. Almost as an afterthought, I added that the stories should also include their feelings upon arrival.

The students responded to this ambiguity by turning in

essays which tended toward either of the criteria: one which

had been set beforehand or the other which came up afterwards.

How was I to evaluate papers which were either full of feel-

ing and no description, or vice versa? Because I had set

the criterion that they be descriptive, it did not preclude

their writing about their feelings in the essays. However,

it did give both me and the students a guideline for writing

and evaluating.

Consequently, in the second session I spent more time

thinking over what the best criterion for the first assign-

ments might be. I reminded myself of the importance of making

sure that the students were clear about what was expected of

them--even when it seemed obvious to me as their teacher.

The students themselves helped me to make another modification

in my approach to setting criteria.

In the first session, one or two students expressed dis-

satisfaction with the criteria I had set. They complained

that it made their work too easy--that they wanted to work on

more problems. In the second session, this response was much

more prevalent. I attributed it to the students' need for a

more familiar response to their papers in which every problem

the teacher can find is marked.

Some of the students explained that they would be tested

on "everything" for their university entrance examinations

and they therefore wanted to see as many of their mistakes

as possible. Rather than reverting to the approach of

evaluating everything to meet their request, I decided to add one criterion at a time. I likened this to the situation in which a music student is anxious to play a very difficult and refined piece in order to be prepared for an audition. The student may request that her teacher give her very difficult pieces to prepare her for the situation.

The teacher might respond, as I did, by allowing the student to concentrate on one more aspect of a piece rather than taking on the formidable task of overwhelming the student with all that she could conceivably work on. This eagerness on the student's part is of course very desirable and must be worked with. In adding another criterion to a student's assignment, I tried to elicit this criterion from the student herself.

I had learned several important lessons about setting criteria in the first session. For one, my comments needed to be specific enough so that the student could identify the criterion for the next assignment. Second, I needed to distinguish between correction and evaluation. I did this by separating and denoting mechanical errors with correction symbols from those mistakes which could be evaluated and possibly permanently changed. Third, I learned how important it was to be sure about the general criteria set for a class before giving an assignment. Finally, toward the end of the first session, a few students requested that I add more criteria to their assignments. I addressed this

problem by adding one criterion at a time according to what

a student identified as the main problem. All of these

changes were greatly facilitated by the use of a syllabus

in the second session.

Syllabus

In the first session, I did not establish a syllabus.

This was partly due to my lack of organization. It also had

to do with the fact that I had resolved to evaluate writing

assignments for the files, and since the students were also

doing a lot of other kinds of assignments such as conversa-

tion or grammar, it was difficult to devise a syllabus which

would be appropriate to use with the files. This made it

much more difficult to set overall goals for the first

session. Not having a syllabus probably detracted from the

students' sense of direction and momentum since we went from

one assignment to another without building toward any goal.

In contrast, it was much easier to set a syllabus for

the second session since a sequence suggested itself at their

request to improve their expository writing skills. I there-

fore made up a syllabus which progressed from work on descrip-

tion to narration and finally to work on expository writing.

As a result, the second session students seemed much better

at pacing themselves than the first session students. For

example, the second session students knew that a short essay

would be practice for their final essay in the last week.

The syllabus helped them stick to criteria and build toward
a culminating point.

The syllabus also enabled me to summarize the students'
overall performance for the course in the last assignment.
Since the assignment built toward this final goal of a term
paper, it was not a matter of overemphasizing the final
paper so much as documenting how far a student had come to
arrive there, or how much effort had been made to meet the
criteria which led, step by step, to this final assignment.

I hoped that my encapsulated final course evaluation of
the final paper in the second session would provide the
students with a sense of completion and accomplishment. This
had not been possible in the first session since we moved
from one set of criteria to another with no overall syllabus
to guide us in a logical pattern. In retrospect, I wish I
had established some sort of syllabus for the first session
students in order to exploit the potential of the files.

Using Mistakes

Throughout both sessions I attempted to use the students'
mistakes as a basis for in-class lessons. For example, if
many students were having problems with writing run-on
sentences, I would take a few of these sentences and examine
them as a group in class. I tried to apply this same tech-
nique in the students' work with the files by having them

use their mistakes to establish criteria for each successive assignment.

One of the most direct ways of using mistakes in writing was through revision. I would define revision as either the practice of rewriting those parts of a paper which seem troublesome or awkward, or the revision of an entire paper, which would entail a more thorough job of rewriting. The practice of revision seemed particularly applicable to my work with the files in that each assignment generated a new criterion for revision. I hoped that by emphasizing the revision of their work that the students would be encouraged to concentrate on refining a piece, on the process of writing rather than on the final product. I therefore began the first session by requiring that all of the students revise their first three assignments. Several of the students seemed to resent this. They claimed that their first effort was good enough and that they had never had to revise anything in the past. In most of these cases I agreed with the students' assessments.

I realized that revision was not unilaterally necessary. If a student felt good about her work and I also felt reasonably satisfied, to ask for revision seemed to undermine the student's efforts. On the one hand I did not want to revert to viewing revision as a punishment for bad writing. On the other hand, I wanted to be able to accept an assignment which was well written in the first draft. I hoped that these

polished first drafts were due in part to the revisions the
student had made while writing the paper. I therefore
changed my policy toward revision for the second session
and only required it when it seemed necessary.

In both sessions, I found that the students started
making optimum use of their mistakes about midway through
the course. Apart from their having had practice, I also
attributed this success to their being able to see how they
had worked at using their mistakes in improving past assign-
ments. In other words, time was ultimately the most important
factor in motivating students to use their mistakes. After
the students had both practice and examples of using mistakes,
as in the case of coming up with alternatives to run-on
sentences, they worked much more independently and with more
ease in using their mistakes as a guide to what needed
improving.

II.   HOW THE WORK AFFECTED ASSUMPTIONS

If I identified one factor which affected my work with the files over the summer, it would be the lack of time. Although it was worthwhile for both me and the students to use the files, over the long term their use would be more effective in implementing the students' awareness of progress, setting of criteria, and using mistakes.

Informal and Regular Evaluation

In the Introduction I stated that the most important assumption behind my work with the files was that the students should be aware that they are making progress on a regular basis. This goal was the most easy to meet of all the assumptions in that there were several assessments done each week. Because of the frequency and informal nature of the evaluations, students never reacted with dismay or surprise when I returned the files to them. This is in contrast to the reaction which often accompanies the return of tests or formal papers.

In the context of the files, progress meant that the students were either able to meet the criterion set for them or go beyond it and establish another criterion for the next assignment. Their progress was therefore clearly monitored by the structure of the files.

The students' sense of progress was further reinforced by the noting of strengths for each assignment. The focus on a student's weaknesses could at least be tempered by a mention of some strong point. However, for both sessions, it was much more difficult to be specific about strengths, or even to find them at all, than it was to be specific about weaknesses. Part of the problem had to do with my lack of practice in identifying strengths.

I tended to be very general in my assessment of their strengths. As a result, I resorted to the clichéd language of teacher praise. In addition, the students could not apply their specific strengths as easily as they could the weaknesses I had identified and marked as the criterion for the next assignment. Although students are not as likely to actually apply specific strengths to future assignments, it is still important that they fine-tune their awareness of their strengths.

I also intended to stress an informal means of assessment throughout my work with the files. This intention was somewhat confounded by the nature of the TASIS program. The summer program was very informal, with no required tests and only two required evaluations for each session. Although this made it easier for me to experiment with the files, it also made it difficult to determine whether the files helped to emphasize an informal approach to assessment or only further enforced the informal nature of the program as a

whole. In other words, I had a hunch that the files would be most useful in the context of countering a more formal curriculum than the one used at TASIS. It would be interesting to use the files in a more formal and long-term context to test their effectiveness in emphasizing informal evaluation.

Setting Criteria

My third assumption stressed individualizing criteria in order not to lose students to boredom or frustration. This goal was met, by and large, by the setting of an individual criterion for each student's assignment. However, as mentioned in the last section, I had particular difficulty in this area. My comments were often too general or not clear enough. As a result, the effectiveness of setting individual criteria varied from student to student. Some had clearly stated criteria while others had only very general criteria; this detracted from the overall clarity of setting criteria. I learned that one of the most important ways of countering general or vague comments is to develop very specific kinds of guidelines for comments which set criteria.

A study by Lynch and Klemans (1978) on students' responses to teachers' comments on their papers sheds some light on how to make my comments more effective. They found that students felt that "the most useful comments were those that explained why (emphasis added) things went wrong."[2] By

focusing on a very specific explanation of why something seems weak about an assignment, I am enabling the student to understand a problem, not just merely identify. This is in keeping with my goal of evaluating those things which can be understood and changed in an assignment.

Using Mistakes

My last assumption concentrates on the practice of using mistakes to improve future work. Using mistakes also encourages students to be independent in their learning. This was validated during both sessions by the fact that it was common for students to set right to work when I returned the files to them. By giving them specific criteria for the next assingment which could be accomplished, they were able to set to work without me. Ultimately, their learning to use mistakes should help them to apply this to other areas of learning or future classes. At the very least, they had some experience working independently.

In conclusion, my assumptions were generally met by my work with the files. However, due to the lack of time and the informal nature of the program, it is difficult to assess just how well I achieved the goal of emphasizing the informal assessment of my students' writing assignments.

IV. CONCLUSION

In retrospect, I thought that it would be easier to use the files to achieve the ends I had established than it was. I did not expect that so many logistical problems would arise in implementing my assumptions. A friend likened this situation to buying a one-of-a-kind car with the expectation that it would run smoothly, only to find that it is necessary to write a service manual so that others can use it. So this paper has evolved into a rough "service manual" for using files to informally evaluate students' writing.

Even before using the files, a teacher must be clear about the general criteria she expects the students to follow. The teacher must necessarily begin by assigning very general criteria for the entire class and make these criteria more individualized as the course progresses. If, on the other hand, the teacher is too general in setting her criteria, both she and the students will suffer. The students will not be sure about what the criterion is and the teacher will not know precisely what she is evaluating. My resolution to this problem was to help the students concentrate on one realizable goal for each assignment to avoid such confusion. More important, I wanted the students to have a feeling of making steady progress through their accomplishing of these clear goals.

The next step is to make sure that both the students and teacher are certain about how the files are to be used. One major distinction I needed to make was between correction and evaluation. The files, I learned, were to be used to evaluate those things the students could work on and change. They were not to be used to make note of everything that could be corrected. I suspect that this distinction will serve me in good stead in future teaching contexts. Teachers so often get mired in correcting papers, in fixing routine, mechanical problems that a student could easily do for herself. As a teacher, I would rather spend my time helping the students to write clear paragraphs, for example, than point out that the spelling is bad.

Once these problems of establishing clear criteria for the files, as well as understanding the function of the files, have been accomplished, it is important that the students have a sense of direction. One standard way of assuring that the students and teacher do not get lost is through the use of a syllabus. In the first session, the students moved from one criterion to another with no sense of overall direction or coherence. In contrast, the second session students followed a syllabus with a very clear trajectory. However, if a teacher is too rigid in following a syllabus, as I fear I was for the second session, the intent of keeping the evaluations informal fails. This problem seems to be one which time and practice will alleviate.

In the context of making regular progress with informal evaluation, it is important to be just as specific about what a student is doing right as it is to be specific about problems. There are times, for example, when a student may use two approaches to achieve a satisfactory result. It is up to the teacher to help the student determine which approach of the two that she has tried may be more reliable and why. In this way, the student can apply what she has learned from her strengths to her future work.

Once I had written this rough service manual and put the files to work, I set to work envisaging and anticipating the future uses they could be put to. There are many ways in which the files might be adapted to other ESL contexts.

Implications for Future Classes

There are several ways in which I would expand what I have done for my classes in the future. In the context of teaching writing, I hope to place more emphasis on revision and writing as a process. In addition, I foresee ways in which the conference format which I used could be expanded. Finally, there are ways in which I could use the files to get the students to practice both peer and self evaluation.

Because I chose to work with the informal evaluation of writing for this paper, I will need to further clarify what the process of writing entails for refining my approach to teaching future classes. Zamel (1982) indicates that the

writing process involves "not only the act of writing but pre-writing and rewriting, all of which are interdependent."[3] Ultimately, then, writing enables a writer to go on a journey and learn something in the process; to arrive somewhere new at the end of the writing, whether this place is a change of perception or an improvement in writing skills. One question which arises from this assumption is how the files might aid in getting students to view writing as a process or journey.

Zamel goes on to compare native-speaking composing strategies with those of ESL students and finds that both spend a lot of time in the "prevision" stage of composing--working through ideas by writing them down in fragments. The students then enter the process of revising and writing progressively finer drafts. In order to implement these strategies, Zamel recommends student-teacher conferences so that the teacher can monitor a student's progress in the process of writing rather than after the fact.

Both the files and the conferences were my attempt to give the students regular feedback on their work. However, I did not stress "prevision" or revision to any great extent. For the final paper of the second session, however, I did use the files to mark the stages of the paper. This could be one way of stressing revision in my future work with the files.

In other words, rather than moving to another assignment after each evaluation, a student could use the criterion

derived from a core assignment to work on the revision of the next draft. This would emphasize the process of writing more than I was able to do this summer. Again, this suggestion would be best implemented over a more long-term course.

Zamel also stressed the importance of a student-teacher conference in monitoring the stages of a student's paper. However, in most teaching contexts the time constraints prohibit this as a means of providing regular feedback. None-theless, a teacher should be able to conduct at least one conference with each student in the course of a class. The conferences I held this summer were very effective in coming to an understanding with my students about their work and my teaching. The conferences basically took the format of dis-cussing work which had already been evaluated.

Another format for conferences which I would like to try in the future was suggested in a study by Fassler (1978).[4] Fassler advocates actually evaluating papers with a student during the conference. She claims that this is particularly helpful in letting the student see how the teacher interprets something as she reads it and vice versa. Then, if there is a gap between the student's intention and the teacher's com-prehension, it can be worked on together rather than later, when the student would traditionally receive a paper filled with red ink and question marks. With regard to the files, this concept could be expanded by having the teacher and student set the new criterion together at the conference.

This leads me to another way in which the work with the files could be expanded in the future. In this paper, I focused on the evaluation of papers as a teacher. I did, however, experiment with self and peer evaluation.

In the future I would like to further encourage independence in my students by getting them to do more self-evaluation of their papers. The files lend themselves easily to this goal. Students could practice setting their own criteria for a piece and evaluating how well they met this goal.

In a study by Miller (1982) exploring how writers evaluate themselves, she discovered that one important mode of self-evaluation was "whether the piece fulfills the writer's intention."[5] Miller also asserts that "those who do not evaluate their own writing do not gain from having written."[6] If I replace "intention" with criterion, the students could use the files to develop the capacity not only to fulfill their intention, but also to define and clarify it. The files would serve to increase a student's awareness of her intentions for a piece and the way she accomplishes them.

There are other ways in which the files might be used for evaluation in the future. Students could form regular pairs or small groups to evaluate and discuss each other's work in the files. This could also be extended to my holding a conference with the pair or small group. The possibilities for practicing evaluation skills with the files are virtually limitless.

In conclusion, I will let my students' comments stand as the most important proof of the usefulness of the files this summer. One student commented: "You made us know our mistakes without any discussion with you which is what always made me try to avoid making the same mistakes." In a similar vein, another student wrote: "I think the files have been very helpful. The best thing was that you had to concentrate on one main point in your essay." Finally, a student stated: "I liked it that you could also see your strengths. Most times you only see your weaknesses--in school and at home."[7]

NOTES

[1] From a lecture given at S.I.T. by Gordon Hayward in May 1983.

[2] Catherine Lynch and Patricia Klemans, "Evaluating Our Evaluations," College English, 40 (Oct. 1978), 169.

[3] Vivian Zamel, "Writing: The Process of Discovering Meaning," TESOL Quarterly, 16 (June 1982), 195.

[4] Barbara Fassler, "The Red Pen Revisited: Teaching Composition through Student Conferences," College English, 40 (Oct. 1978), 186.

[5] Susan Miller, "How Writers Evaluate Their Own Writing," College Composition and Communication, XXXIII (May 1982), 179.

[6] Miller, p. 181.

[7] Student comments from final questionnaire asking them whether the files had been helpful and why. Only one student wrote that the files had not been helpful but gave no explanation as to why.

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APPENDIX I

Syllabus, Course Descriptions

FILES

There are several reasons why I would like you to use your file throughout the course. The most important reason is that I want you to have a record of your work and progress with it. Secondly, I want you (with me) to choose what it is that you want to focus on in each assignment (to set criteria). That way you won't feel overwhelmed by having everything (Grammar, style, punctuation) corrected. Last of all, I would like you to develop skills in evaluating your own and your classmates' work.

Before you begin to evaluate a piece of writing, please consider exactly what you are looking for (what the criteria are). Is the purpose of the assignment to have clear paragraph organization? Or is it to focus on writing shorter sentences? If you are looking at how well you have organized your paragraphs, then only write about this aspect of the assignment in your file.

Sometimes I will set the criteria for an assignment. At other times I will ask you to choose what it is you want to focus on. This should enable you to concentrate on specific problems that you may have.

Finally, when you write down your comments in the file, please be specific about the strengths and weaknesses of a piece. In other words, make sure that you are writing about something in the assignment such as "the third paragraph was too long."

We will be doing some sample evaluations in class.

SYMBOLS USED FOR CORRECTION

₸P paragraph

sp spelling

C capital letter

∿ word order

T tense of verb

Pr preposition

W better word

? can't read

O omit the word

/ end the sentence here

∧ word or phrase is missing

pl. make this word plural

neg. make this word negative

TASIS
England
American School

July 8, 1983

As an advanced class, we have been doing a variety of activities aimed at improving performance in all four of the main skill areas: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

WRITING:

Daily journal work
Descriptive essay on their arrival at TASIS
A Letter written to a friend with an emphasis on the descriptive
Two articles for the class newspaper: one on their country and
   the other on a subject of their choosing such as an interview,
   music, fiked trip, etc.

SPEAKING/LISTENING:

Discussion on an editorial about women's rights
Situational role-plays: acting out such predicaments as having
   only one parachute between two people as a plane is going down
   and having to use their English to save their lives and persuade!
Debates: on such topics as capital punishment, gun control, animal
   experimentation. A pair of students gave presentations pro or con
   on their issue and then spent ten minutes in debate.
Geography Questions: we made the classroom floor into a map of the
   world and discussed such questions as--where would you most like
   to visit in the world. From that vantage point on the map/floor,
   the students were asked to give their reasons why.
Discussions of holidays: on the fourth of July,I gave a lecture on
   the American celebration of this holiday and then the students each
   spoke of a holiday in their country.

READING:

A book on Madame Tussaud's as preparation for our visit there on
   Tuesday, July 5.
An editorial on women's rights

OTHER:

Spelling Exercise
A Verb Review on all the tenses
Individual conferences on the student's progress up to that point,
   using a file with all their work and my comments as a basis for
   discussion as well as the student's personal assessment of his/
   her work.

The class is very spirited and works well together. They
are improving in the area of working with each other and helping each
other as well. It has been a pleasure working with them for the last two
weeks.

Christie Herbert/TELP 8

August 5, 1983
Advanced Level C
7/25 - 8/5
Christie Herbert

TASIS
England
American School

The first day of class I gave the students a questionnaire in the hopes of determining what they felt their objectives for the course were. The result was that without exception, every student wanted to improve his/her skills in writing. There was also a general call for strengthening their vocabularies and speaking skills.

The following is a list of the activities we have done over the last two weeks, according to skill area:

WRITING:

Daily writing in their journals
A Character Sketch of the protagonists in "The Open Window"
A descriptive, informal letter
Their own ending to a short story("Egbert")
A description of their first weekend trip
A description written in the voice of a grandmother or father
An introduction to expository writing and paragraph writing

VOCABULARY:

Crossword puzzles
The vocabulary game "Fictionary"
The card-sorting game "Concentration"
Vocabulary review and quiz

SPEAKING:

Situational Role-Plays: The class did impromptu dramatizations of
      various situations such as being stuck in an airplane with
      just one parachute when it catches fire
Discussion of the stories we read
Discussion of an editorial and women's rights

READING:

"The Open Window" by Saki
"The Demon Lover" by Elizabeth Bowen
An editorial on feminism
Chapters from Ordinary People by Judith Guest

GRAMMAR:

Extensive review of prepositions
Passive voice

OTHER:

Watched the movie:"Ordinary People"

The class is quite advanced and enjoyable to work with.

TELP Session II
Advanced Level C
August 8 - 19
Christina Herbert

**TASIS
England**
American School

August 19, 1983

These last two weeks saw an increased concentration on writing skills and vocabulary building. We began our expository writing exercises by working on paragraph formation and culminating in a formal, short report.

WRITING:
*Essay on a problem in the student's city(presented in class)

*Essay on a magazine article or short story of the student's choice (it was then read by another student in the class)

*A visit to the British Museum with a follow-up essay on a piece of art (or a comparative essay)

*A final, formal report with five day's of step-by-step preparation

READING:

"The Necklace"

Stories and articles of their choice

Material for their report

VOCABULARY:

Fictionary Game

"Concentration"

Quiz

OTHER:

The students spent a lot of time evaluating their own and others' work and recording their observations in a file containing their work.

The class showed great self-discipline in finishing up their work this session. Every student, without exception, improved his/her writing. It was a pleasure working with this class.

Christina Herbert

APPENDIX II

Sample Copies of Files from Sessions One and Two