

The Mediational Role of Teacher Discourse in Students'
Opportunities to Learn and Become Academic Writers

Erin M Bird

A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2018

Reading Committee:

Heather Hebard, Chair

Deborah McCutchen

Kenneth Zeichner

Dixie Massey

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

College of Education

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Erin M Bird

University of Washington

Abstract

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Erin M Bird

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Heather Hebard, Ph.D.
College of Education
Curriculum and Instruction

The teaching and learning of writing in the elementary classroom setting is a complex process. As students participate in the classroom community and write, they engage not only in the cognitive task of academic writing, but in various social practices as well- negotiating positionality, developing identities, cultivating understandings of genre, and navigating language resources in order to communicate. While the myriad factors that mediate students' writing development have been theorized and documented, few studies delve into the complexity of the teaching and learning of writing in the elementary classroom.

One particularly understudied area is the writing conference. Through talk in the conference, teachers highlight the development of ideas and meaning making during drafting, and effectively and efficiently support individual needs (Black, 1998; Dyson, 1999; Smagorinsky, 2001).

Despite the potential power of the writing conference, few studies examine the nature of teacher-student interaction in these moments and explore their affordances for learning at the elementary level without minoritizing students' language and literacy practices and, thus, the very identities of youth. This study, a qualitative case study of two exemplar teachers' writing conferences in a diverse, public, elementary school—examines the discursive moves of the teacher and student within the dyad of the writing conference. Specifically, I examine patterns in writing discourse, teacher positioning, and student positioning across writing conferences. Within this frame, I ask: *How do two writing teachers' conference discourse mediate opportunities for students to learn and become academic writers?*

The study draws on ideas of discourse from sociocultural theories of Gee and Bakhtin to conceptualize teacher-student interaction, Lave and Wenger's concepts of communities of practice and brokering to explain teachers' and students' practices in the writing workshop, and positioning theories as an analytic tool for writing conferences to investigate teacher-student interactions in diverse contexts.

A qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth examination across multiple instantiations of the writing conference, in two intermediate-grade classrooms, which yielded "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) of the nature of writing time in the two classrooms (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2006). Further, a micro-analytic approach to qualitative analysis helped to identify patterns in teacher-student discourse in writing conferences and understand how they mediated students' opportunities for learning and identity development as writers. The comparative case design helped to surface themes across these two high-quality teachers and their students—as well as identify features that made them distinct. The three main sources of data which informed the present analysis were video recordings of classroom observations, field notes, and interviews

with both the teachers and students. I analyzed multiple dialogic facets present in the writing conference and how those facets mediated understanding of writing practices and positioned the student, teacher, and text. I examined the language each participant employed, as well as how the teacher and student used semiotic features including gaze, gesture, roles, spaces, and objects throughout the conference to communicate with one another (Taylor, 2014).

This study illuminates how teacher talk, demonstrated through pedagogical practices, positions the teacher and student, and thus impacts access to and support for learning academic genres for elementary writers. Through their different pedagogical approaches, the teachers framed what it meant to write and participate in the writing conference in different ways, and thus created different norms for engagement in the classroom community. Mr. Branson mediated opportunities for learning through his explicit teacher discourse, creation of a shared language, attunement to students' social and emotional development, and positioning students as writers. Conversely, Ms. Young took up a more dialogic teacher discourse, through her use of questioning. She elicited student understanding and used student responses as a guide for her instruction; decentered her authority; positioned writing as a collaborative endeavor; and positioned students as authors.

Each teacher's discourse and conference structure provided particular affordances for student learning. Mr. Branson provided frequent, explicit, individualized support through conference dyads, reinforcing and repeating curricular foci—coaching his students to work hard to arrive at the “next level” of writing proficiency. Alternatively, Ms. Young's distributed conference structure illuminated how she apprenticed students into participation in the writing community as a collaborator, through her use of guided questions, affirmations, and facilitation of group talk—positioning writing as a social act. Both teachers found opportunities to position

students as writers capable of engaging in complex writing tasks, and built relationships that offered support to take up the conference storyline—and to ultimately take up academic writing practices and identities.

This study helps to understand the importance of attention to all facets of the student's experience within the classroom and supports further dialogue within education about how to support and cultivate the social emotional dimension of learning for students. Furthermore, this study may also contribute more broadly to theories of teacher discourse and student learning more broadly. Together, the theoretical and pedagogical insights from this work can be leveraged to support elementary writing teachers to improve their practice.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to begin my thanking the teachers and students from this study, who allowed us into their classroom and into their lives. Your willingness to let us learn from you made this research and dissertation possible.

Thank you also to my Supervisory Committee for their many years of generous support. Dr. Suhanthie Motha, thank you for giving of your time to serve as my GSR. My gratitude is also extended to Dr. Deb McCutchen, Dr. Ken Zeichner, and Dr. Dixie Massey who also gave of their time to support my scholarship. Your kindness and feedback are so appreciated.

For my advisor, Dr. Heather Hebard, you have been my mentor, teacher, research partner, advisor, and life coach. I am so grateful for the countless hours of support and pages of feedback. I would not have been able to accomplish this without your love and guidance.

It has truly taken a village for this dissertation to come to pass. Thank you to friends who helped raise my children, keep my family fed, provide carpool rides, and lots of hugs and emotional support, especially The Trussel family, Lacie Henriken, Colleen Broughton, and Stacey Lund.

I am lucky enough to have colleagues that I count as friends, I especially want to thank Jenny Gawronski, Starlie Chinen, Christina Hammond, and Annie Kirking. Also, I want to extend my gratitude to my two people, both of whom I met during my studies here, who have been the most supportive and encouraging friends, Liz Donat and Kristin Courtney, thank you.

Thank you to my family. My parents, my in-laws, my siblings, my children, and my husband have all provided invaluable support. A special debt of gratitude to my brother, Grayson, who came to live with us so I could complete this degree. Thank you, this would not of been possible without your help.

Thank you to my children, Rylie, Parker, and Casey. I treasure the three of you and love you to the moon and back.

To my mother, who read every word of this dissertation. I am so grateful for all of the support you have, and continue to provide me.

Finally, to my husband, Christian, what a ride this has been. Thank you for supporting me in following my dreams and being my biggest cheerleader. Thank you for the many, many days and nights of single parenting, so that I could chase this dream. I love you so very much. I am so grateful for you and that we are partners in this adventure together.

DEDICATION

To my mother, Colette

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The teaching and learning of writing in the elementary classroom setting is a complex process. Classroom routines, curriculum, time, diverse student repertoires, and various teaching pedagogies note some of the factors mediating student learning. As students participate in the classroom community and write, they engage not only in the cognitive task of academic writing, but in various social practices as well—negotiating positionality, developing identities, cultivating understandings of genre, and navigating language resources in order to communicate. Writing, then, cannot be defined solely as an individual cognitive exercise, subject area or discipline, but as an “inherent social and multi-voiced activity with text construction being distributed and negotiated among roles and writers,” where the “roots of writing competence are being developed in social interactions in highly contextualized settings” (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006, p.209). While the myriad factors that mediate students’ writing development have been theorized and documented, few studies delve into the complexity of the teaching and learning of writing in the elementary classroom.

One particularly understudied area is the writing conference. The writing conference, as instantiated in elementary classrooms, occurs when a teacher provides individualized support to students in a dyad or small group—typically in the context of their ongoing writing work (Black 1998; Freedman & Sperling, 1985; Murray, 1979). With teacher direction, students “traverse the writing process....through careful scaffolding and structured feedback” (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006, p.276; Gray, 2000; Wilson, 1994). This structured feedback is considered “one of the most critical influences on student learning” (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.102), as students have the opportunity to have their work supported and valued, practice oral ways of using language, and

collectively construct knowledge with their teacher (McCarthy, 1992). Through talk in the conference, teachers highlight the development of ideas and meaning making during drafting, and effectively and efficiently support individual needs (Black, 1998; Dyson, 1999; Smagorinsky, 2001). Despite the potential power of the writing conference, few studies examine the nature of teacher-student interaction in these moments and explore their affordances for learning at the elementary level.

This dissertation—a comparative case study of writing conferences in two elementary classrooms—seeks to improve the field’s understanding of these teacher-student interactions. To do so, I investigate teachers’ practice with regard to 1) what they teach and 2) how they engage with students and mediate their opportunities to learn. In the sections that follow, I put forth a brief literature review to situate the study both theoretically and conceptually. I discuss literature that examines the research on conferencing and feedback and how language, along with other semiotic tools, positions the teacher and student.

1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this review, I define the writing conference as a common pedagogical structure within a rather broad approach to teaching writing known as the “process approach” (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). I then turn to the literature on the nature of talk in the conference—as well as the nature of talk in classrooms more broadly—to explain how talk mediates student learning and identity. Next, I locate conferences at the intersection of students’ interests, their writing, and a teacher’s support and draw attention to two pedagogical conference approaches for feedback (explicit and dialogic). I conclude with a discussion of potential tensions in the writing conference for teachers and students—highlighting the need for research that examines the interplay of the pedagogical,

rhetorical, and relational dimension of writing conferences and how teachers' discursive practices mediate learning and support students with diverse communicative repertoires.

1.1.1 *The process approach to writing instruction*

The theoretical origins of writing research derive from a cognitive approach, attempting to understand and define the mental processes of successful writers. While cognitive researchers (Hayes & Flower, 1980; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1986) identify writing as a complex, iterative endeavor consisting of the simultaneous employment of multiple processes, critics have noted that this frame does not account for the social acts embedded within this process (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006) and the role of power in learning to write (Gunnarsson 1997; Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000).

In answer to these critiques, a social frame of writing research emerged, expanding upon models to include a greater focus on the social and cultural factors present in writing (Dauite, 1998; Wollman-Bonilla, 2001). Adoption of this sociocultural stance resulted in a “process model” pedagogical approach for writing instruction, wherein scholars view writing as a communicative act. Knowledge is constructed as writers participate in the larger cultural system of the classroom through social interactions between reader and writer to accomplish specific goals and form communicative bonds (Bazerman, 2001; Hyland, 2010; Larson, 1991). Although some scholars contest the definition of a “process model” approach, many converge on a number of key tenets for quality process writing instruction (Hillocks, 1994; Lipson, Mosenthal, Daniels, & Woodside-Jiron, 2000; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). Goldstein & Carr (1996) synthesize these key tenets by defining the process approach as providing students with opportunities to engage in the practices of an author— applying a variety of resources to make multiple rhetorical

decisions as demonstrated through planning, drafting, and revising of text, all with a consideration of audience.

The process approach has become the primary mode of writing instruction in elementary schools (Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura, & Valdés, 2004). Often times, this process approach is configured as a “writer’s workshop”, originally modeled after practices of adult writing groups (Atwell, 1986; Calkins, 1994; Emig, 1971; Graves, 1981). The writing workshop structure is malleable, yet consistent in that there are three segments: the mini-lesson, time to write and confer, and a closing. Writing time most often begins with a mini-lesson to teach something about genre, rhetorical features or writing process. This instruction is often explicit in nature (e.g., think-alouds) and heavy in teacher talk. During work time students write independently on self-selected topics and/or genres—though in more recent instantiations of the approach, student choice has become more constrained (e.g., the use of Calkins’ Units of Study curriculum). Teachers confer with individuals or groups of students during this time. Calkins (1994) argues that “conferences are at the heart” of workshop pedagogy, further underscoring this point when she states, “the independent writing and conferencing time is the only indispensable part of the writing workshop” (p.189). Students then engage in some type of closure activity, which might include a brief period of sharing, audience response, reflection and/or feedback.

1.1.2 *Writing conferences*

The writing conference, within the writing workshop, is a vehicle for immediate response and communication with students. During the conference, a teacher uses knowledge of the writer and of their writing to inform their curricular and pedagogical approaches to support students’ writing development. While the teacher drives the talk of the conference, the students’ current writing work is the focus of the discussion. Through the discourse of the conference, teachers

make the writing process and rhetorical decision-making visible to students—as well as demystifies the evaluation process (West-Puckett, 2016). Students respond to, act on, and even fundamentally redesign their communication-revising their work and improving the quality of the writing (Berkenkotter, 1981; Chapman, 1996; Midgette, Haria & MacArthur, 2008; Myers, 1990). In addition, Dyson (2000) notes that, through the dialogic participation in the conference, teachers and students “learn valued relations to the text, to each other, and to the world” (Rowe, 2007, p.411 in Bazerman).

Writing conferences exist at the intersection of students’ interests, their writing, and a teacher’s support, making them potentially powerful learning spaces. Yet they are also vulnerable spaces—around language ideologies and learning an academic discourse, in this case Standardized English. Within the conference setting, students write in typified genres, engage in specific speech-genre discourses, navigate various symbolic systems, while simultaneously being asked to demonstrate normative social behaviors of participation (Boscolo, 2013; McCutchen, 1996). This high academic language demand, where students must present and perform an unfamiliar language, can be confusing and unclear. Furthermore, within this space, students’ “security issues, anxieties, and self-concept” are on full display as they share their understanding of writing with their teachers (Bazerman, 2001, p.185). As a result, through the frequency, duration, and remediation of their conferencing, students may identify as an unsuccessful writer, resulting in disengagement and lack of participation with writing (Bruffee, 1986; Newkirk, 1995). Learning to write is “a local process- what and how children learn depends on home and school writing practices” (Rowe, 2007, p.414 in Bazerman). Therefore, an attunement to not only the academic, but the affective dimension of student writing is needed to recognize the vulnerability of the writing task and the relation of instruction to students’ cultural and linguistic

backgrounds and repertoires—framing writing as a positive communicative action between teacher and student.

1.1.3 *Conference Pedagogies*

As teachers seek the most effective and efficient ways to respond to student writers (Haswell, 2009), it is important to consider the pedagogies of the interactions between teachers and students during the construction of text and thus, examine the possibilities for students to develop the skills, strategies, and sense of ownership of an effective writer. One hallmark of writing conference pedagogy is feedback. Feedback on writing is considered “one of the most critical influences on student learning” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p.102)- instrumental in a student’s ability to implement the practices of skilled writers. Through the pedagogical structure of the conference, the teacher provides directed, differentiated responses—in real time, not feasible with written feedback—thus opening “other possibilities that should be explored” (Fassler, 1978, p.188) and providing insight into the often-implicit act of acquiring and developing language through the demonstration of writing forms, processes, and meanings (Rowe, 1994; Sperling & Freedman, 1987, p.282).

Many scholars converge on several characteristics of effective feedback. I draw attention to two characteristics, often cited in research and practitioner texts: explicit feedback and dialogic feedback. Explicit feedback is clear, concise and linked to an authentic and purposeful task (Freedman, 1987; Hillocks, 1984; McCutchen, 1996; Sadoski, Wilson, & Norton, 1997; Straub, 1997). Dialogic feedback highlights the interactional dynamics of authorship by focusing on the development of ideas and meaning making. This approach positions the student as the primary source of information of their own text- thus, the feedback teaches the “writer not the writing” (Calkins, 1994, p.228).

1.1.3.1 Explicit approach

Explicit feedback connected to an authentic, purposeful task is “critical to whether students revise” (Beach & Friedrich, 2006, p.224 in MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald). While teachers are often tempted to provide feedback on a number of points in student writing, scholars note that students are most likely to take up feedback when only a few targeted revisions are given in the moment (Ferris, 2003; Hillocks, 1982). There is also general agreement in the feedback literature more broadly that simply praising students is ineffective (Bond, Smith, Baker, & Hattie, 2000; Brophy, 1981). In writing studies, Hattie and Timperley (2007) argue that personal feedback expressing positive (and sometimes negative) evaluations of students- unrelated to the task, is rarely effective in supporting students’ writing understanding. To be effective, teachers should aim to be both positive and *specific* in their feedback. That is, praise should be tied to specific writing tasks/behaviors. If feedback is too general, students may avoid the risk in “tackling challenging assignments, minimizing effort, and having a fear of failure to minimize risk to the self” (p.103; Black & Wiliam, 1998). For example, Brophy (1981) notes solely praising a student as a “good student” or a “good writer” is ineffective. This general praise lacks specificity and connectivity and does not help the writer identify the rhetorical choices or practices they employed—preventing the student to take further action to build or enhance writing understanding. In contrast, positive feedback tied to a specific process or task, lends itself to action, demonstrated through students’ understanding of the rhetorical demands of the task through replication of successful behaviors, expansion of ideas, and a development self-assessment skills.

1.1.3.2 Dialogic approach

A dialogic approach to conferring provides a “context for learning to blossom” (Sperling, 1990, p.318). Dialogic pedagogies include multiple perspectives where students and teachers take active and agentive roles by engaging in the joint construction and negotiation of the generation of text (Snell & Lefstein, 2018). Dialogic instruction is characterized by a “responsive collaborative script with fluid participation boundaries,” and thus increased student responses (Nystrand, 1998, p.482; Gutierrez, 1993). Dialogic feedback also allows for the social distribution of knowledge, “where students can have access to central roles in writing prior to taking them up independently” (Rowe, 2007, p.411 in Bazerman; Larson & Maier, 2000).

Within this approach, teachers provide engaging and purposeful assignments where students have a measure of autonomy in what and how to write—entertaining alternative perspectives that foster discourse between teacher and students and elicits further revisions with feedback varied to meet student need (Beach & Friedrich, 2006; Matsumura, Patthey-Chavez, & Valdes, 2002; Wallace & Hayes, 1992). In addition to providing purposeful assignments, through authentic questions, teachers signal their interest in students and their writing. These discursive exchanges “invite the student to contribute something new to the discussion that can change or modify (their ideas and or writing) in some way” (Nystrand, 1997, p.38). As students are treated as a “primary source of information,” they begin to understand academic writing in their own frame of reference (Beach, 1989; Gutierrez, 1994) and engage in an interactive construction of text (Gutiérrez, 1994; Mehan, 1979; Nystrand, 1997).

Through these interactions with the teacher in the conference dyad, students cultivate knowledge and transform understandings through reflection and talk (Bickard, 1987). In a dialogic approach, the conference positions students as literate participants and draws upon students’ “knowledge, identities, and linguistic repertoires- positioning students as pedagogical

resources,” (Horner, Ly, Royster & Trimbur, 2011, p.304; Canagarajah, 2013; Pennycook, 2010). As students’ ideas are valued and supported they can “understand the interactional dynamics of co-authorship in the construction of classroom texts,” engage in higher-order, challenging writing tasks, and participate as an active member of a “constantly evolving community of learners” (Larson & Maier, 2000, p.470).

While explicit and dialogic approaches share some features (e.g., the importance of a purposeful task and intentional teacher support for student writers), there are marked differences in teacher and student roles. With an explicit approach, teachers take a more directive role, driving the conference discourse by reading student work and deciding the most effective and efficient feedback to support the student’s writing. In contrast, within a dialogic approach, the teacher takes a more collaborative role by engaging in an interactive construction of the text with the student.

In working with culturally and linguistically diverse students, an explicit approach to feedback may provide students with access to the “codes of power” (Delpit, 1995), yet questions remain about the implication of this practice for diverse use. While the explicit approach can support some students’ understandings of writing, a move toward efficiency may curtail time for students to develop their ideas, and as a result students may begin to see their ideas as unimportant and irrelevant for academic writing. Moreover, with a more directive approach, opportunities for student ownership of writing and rhetorical decision making are often eclipsed—thus, questioning the authenticity of the writing task and the impact on student writing identity. As elementary school classrooms are often a site of myriad communicative repertoires, understandings, and needs—more research is needed on the nature and impact of feedback on

student uptake and the development of academic writing identities for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

1.1.4 *Tensions in the writing conference*

Conferring can be challenging for teachers- attempting to negotiate a balancing act between “multiple social roles (e.g., critic, friend, authority), interpretive lenses (e.g. personal, academic), pedagogical aims (e.g. supportive, corrective), and evaluative stances (e.g. approving, disapproving)” (Nelson, 2007, p.441 in Bazerman; Sperling, 1998). Although writing conferences provide opportunities for teachers to position students as co-participants and collaborators in the dialogic exchange of meaning-making, the existing research provides few studies of these interactions in conferences, and even fewer investigate the discourse in conferences with diverse populations of students (McCarthy, 1992; Rowe, 2007). In this section, I highlight three main tensions that have been identified in prior work:

What teachers teach in the writing conference varies considerably (Valencia & Hebard, 2014). It is time-consuming for teachers to serve as rhetorical audience or writing coach, rather than judge (Haswell, 1983). When teachers do respond, their ideologies can often influence the quality and nature of feedback-shifting feedback away from talk centered on content and ideas, with comments directed toward more surface-level, evaluative measures (Hyland, 1998; Taylor, 2002). Commentary focused on surface level (e.g., language conventions and syntax) negates the importance of a discussion of rhetorical understanding (Speck, 1998) and in turn, focuses the student’s writing purpose to formulate their text in alignment with the teacher’s vision (Beach & Friedrich, 2006; Schneider, 2003; Yagelski, 1995). Although there have been calls for an approach that accounts for the “dynamic aspects of each writing conference- the student’s relationship to the text, and the student and teacher’s relationship to each other”—this

collaborative, dialogic exchange is fraught with complexities (Tobin, 1990, p.99). Even as teachers attempt to adopt more collaborative, dialogic conferencing styles, constrained contexts—such as testing regimes and institutional curricular mandates—influence and potentially stifle pedagogical innovations and thus, students’ writing understandings (Dutro, Selland, & Bien, 2013). As a result, classroom conference routines resemble a dominant interpretive framework, highlighting the authoritative-corrective approach, even disapproving of elements in student writing (Ulichney & Watson-Gegeo, 1985) thus, further underscoring the idea of traditional academic writing discourses may impeding student understanding (Newkirk, 1995).

Additionally, meaningful writing opportunities are often “unequally distributed” dependent on a variety of factors, such as socioeconomic status and cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Besnier, 1995). For example, instruction for “struggling writers” tends to focus on conventions, while students seen as more capable receive instruction that focuses on a broader range of rhetorical tools (Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2009). Such instruction attunes students to surface level features of their own texts rather than developing their rhetorical thinking. This focus on “the basics” is most prevalent in schools serving students in poverty, multilingual students, and students of color (Dyson and Freedman, 2003; Graham, Harris, Fink-Chorzempa, & MacArthur, 2003; Tompkins, 2002) and provides little space for students’ negotiation of meaning in the conference. This results in a positioning of minoritized students as “novice” and may cultivate a negative association with writing. Moreover, feedback that does not attend to the students’ cultural and linguistic repertoires, reifies hegemonic language ideologies, exacerbating concerns for how minoritized youth engage in the linguistic practices and genre understandings of school (Delpit, 1995; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). In turn, students’ communicative repertoires become

devalued and students are unable to fully “participate in social worlds, to adopt, to resist, or to stretch available worlds” (Dyson, 1995, p.18).

While conferring potentially offers significant affordances for access, rigor, and equity in learning to write, few studies to date examine the ways that teachers mediate elementary students’ opportunities to learn in the setting of the conference without minoritizing students’ language and literacy practices and, thus, the very identities of youth. An investigation of the conference is needed to further develop an understanding of how teachers’ conferring approaches might cultivate the development of these identities and develop students’ academic writing repertoires. Moreover, we need research that investigates the nature of feedback that is most supportive for students for whom these academic language demands are a significant challenge.

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMING

In this section, I highlight ideas of discourse from the sociocultural theories of Gee and Bakhtin to conceptualize teacher-student interactions. Next, I turn to Lave and Wenger’s concepts of community of practice and brokering to explain how I understand teachers’ and students’ practices in the writing workshop. I then explain how positioning theory provides a useful analytic tool for writing conferences. Finally, I draw on theories of identity to theorize relationships between identity formation and the social world—and classroom discourse, specifically. Together, these concepts help to illuminate how the teachers in my study mediate students’ opportunities to learn in the writing conference.

1.2.1 *Writing Conferences: A sociocultural view*

Sperling (1996) notes, “writing, like speaking, is a profoundly social act” (p.95). Writing—as well as the writing conference—is always situated within a broader social context. Sociocultural

theory provides a way to understand writing and writing instruction as discursive practices. This theory conceptualizes learning as embedded within social events and occurring as children interact with people and objects in the environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Through the support of peer and adult members of children's literate communities, children learn that language can be used for social and academic purposes.

Moreover, sociocultural theory identifies how talk mediates student learning and engagement: learning occurs through interaction, negotiation, and collaboration. Teachers facilitate student understanding by engaging in language around students' personal meanings, the meanings that emerge from collective thinking through talk, and the cultural-historical meanings established in subject areas (Smagorinsky, 2000). By framing my study in sociocultural theory, I can examine how conference talk mediates student learning, identity, and engagement.

The use of texts during writing, the discourse implemented by the teacher during instruction, paired with the discourse students use and exchange with their peers, creates a space where language is a platform for learning. As children participate in social activities involving text, they come to anticipate not only written language's functional possibilities but also locally valued ways of doing, being, and relating to others. Thus, a writing classroom where the teacher engages in dialogue and text production with students—and encourages students to reciprocate those actions—creates an environment where students increase their knowledge of the purposes of writing and build a conception of themselves as writers. Bomer and Laman (2004) state, “the nature of talk” is a crucial aspect of writing conference pedagogy in that it mediates students' “uptake of practice”—that is, “ways of thinking, speaking, habits, dispositions, cultures, relationships, and negotiations” (p.423).

1.2.2 *Teachers as brokers in the classroom writing community*

I conceptualize writing activity in the classroom as a *community of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In communities of practice, collective work toward shared goals, (in this case, the dual goals of producing meaningful, effective written communication, and becoming better at writing) engenders learning over time (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In a community of practice framework, more knowledgeable others (in this case, teachers) are *brokers*, interacting with more novice community members (students) to support their learning through authentic tasks. In the case of the writing conference, I consider the students' ongoing, self-selected writing projects to be an authentic task because they draw on students' identities, experiences, interests, and perspectives.

Within the writing conference, the teacher-as-broker engages in writing talk with students that has both relational and academic dimensions. Through this encounter, participants define the positions of themselves and others. Wenger (1998) notes that the "job of brokering is complex. It involves processes of translations, co-ordination and alignment between perspectives. It requires enough legitimacy to influence the development of practice, mobilize attention and address conflicting interests" (p.8). As broker, the teacher must not only translate abstract concepts and ideas, re-contextualizing meaning (reification), but must also engage in social processes which attempt to align the students' practices to their own.

Through the brokering process, the teacher assists students in performing writing tasks they could not have achieved on their own. Knowledge is externalized, mediated through language and action, for both the satisfactory resolution of the immediate task at hand and to give the novice multiple opportunities to acquire knowledge. In so doing, the teacher works with the novice toward performing tasks with greater independence over time. These brokering moments are nested in the broader instructional and institutional contexts and the practices, priorities, and

power dynamic within these contexts. Thus, conference interactions function as an activity system in which teachers and students restructure and recreate, negotiate and renegotiate meaning.

1.2.3 *Appropriation and identity through discourse*

In viewing the classroom as a sociocultural space, where the teacher acts a knowledge broker, and meaning is constructed through discursive interactions, the nature of talk is a defining feature to examine. If discourse is the mediating factor for learning, it is imperative to further highlight and understand theories of discourse and how one acquires knowledge through engaging in dialogic practices. In this review, I attend to two seminal scholars in discourse, Gee (1996) and Bakhtin (1981), both of whom have theorized how language functions in multiple social worlds. Specifically, their work helps explain the role of affinity and identity plays in whether and how people take up particular ideas and ways of thinking.

Gee (1996) defines Discourses as “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or ‘types of people’) by specific groups of people” (p.viii). Discourses carry the power, behaviors, values, and social practices of social groups. By participating in different Discourse communities, participants build and claim identities.

As students enter into the writing conference with the Discourses of their social worlds, they are often expected to take up the authoritative discourse of academic writing. Gee (1996) asserts that acquiring a new Discourse may entail conflicts between one’s existing ways of thinking, doing and being and the new Discourse. Such conflicts can be mitigated when there are opportunities for people to see some of their existing Discourses as aligned with or complementary to the new Discourse. This theory suggests that teachers should engage students

in ways that build upon students' primary communicative repertoires. The dyadic and small-group nature of writing conferences make them a particularly ripe for engaging the intersections between students' Discourses and the academic discourses of school.

Due to the important role of talk in writing conference pedagogy (Rowe, 2007), Bakhtin's notion of *dialogue* is also useful in understanding writing conferences. Bakhtin defines dialogue as a "real concrete quality of social life, heard in the tones and accents of the human voice, embodied in the complicated relationships between characters and authors, present in the heteroglossia of contending perspectives" (Farmer, 1998, p.xvi). The term, "heteroglossia" derives from the acknowledgment that that various social groups engage in differentiated speech that includes different words, expressions, and perspectives. Teachers draw upon their Discourses, including the academic discourse they are charged with teaching, in their instruction. These discourses may align with, compliment, or contradict student voices. By attending to teachers' instructional discourse about whose voices to authorize, and thus the degree to which heteroglossia is fostered or constrained, we gain insight into an important dimension of brokering interactions within the writing conference.

Bakhtin's (1981) work also helps to explain how we might see evidence of teaching and learning in the writing conference. As students interact with their teachers, meaning is constructed as they listen to, respond to, and take up the teacher's writing discourse. The student's own discourse is "gradually and slowly wrought out of others' words [as brokered by the teacher] that have been acknowledge and assimilated, and the boundaries between the two are at first scarcely perceptible" (p.345). This process of *ventriloquizing* describes how individuals appropriate others' words and, through this process, take up new practices and identities as their own. At the same time, the words "maintain their links to the previous owners

and are populated with the intentions of others” (p.294). Ventriloquizing as a learning process, then, can be fraught with issues of power and identity or conflicts between students’ communicative repertoires and the writing discourse of the classroom.

Bakhtin’s concept of *authoritative discourse* helps to explain how these issues of power complicate the individuals’ efforts to take up new practices such as academic writing. Bakhtin (1981) notes, “authoritative discourse is demanding. It binds up, we encounter it with authority already fused to it. It is indissolubly fused with its’ authority—with political power, an institution, a person—and stands and falls together with that authority” (pp. 342-343). This authoritative discourse is the language of power in school, the teacher’s Discourse, while the student voices—imbued with their understandings—are often “denied all privilege” and frequently not even “acknowledged” (p.342). By its very nature, the authoritative discourse marginalizes students’ “unofficial” discourses (Dyson, 2008). However, as Cazden (1988) notes, when we transform the authoritative discourse of others into our own words, it may start to “lose its authority” and become more “open” (p.76). In this way, students may have the opportunity to move beyond simply taking up and being oppressed by the authoritative discourse, using it instead in transformative ways that give rise to spaces for student agency within the “official” writing discourse (Dyson, 2008). Bakhtin’s concepts of ventriloquation and authoritative discourse may help to uncover the ways in which both explicit and dialogic writing conference pedagogies offer opportunities for learning and identity development.

1.2.4 *Positioning within discursive spaces*

In the writing conference, teachers take up positions both consciously and subconsciously, explicitly and implicitly, to demonstrate their own authority and knowledge, and to mediate student learning. As the teacher takes up a position, they also in turn position their students. This

self-imposed position of the teacher and the proceeding position imposed upon the student has implications for brokering and uptake. Therefore, to further explore and conceptualize the teacher-student dynamic within the conference and understand how individuals realize their roles and responsibilities, I use positioning theory as a lens for examination.

Davis and Harré (1990) define positioning as the “discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (p.48). As two parties enter into an interaction, each person takes on a *part* and plays a *role* in the construction of the social act or *storyline*. As a speaker engages in dialogue they not only position themselves (reflexive positioning), but also position the interlocutor to whom they are speaking (interactive positioning). This positioning can be intentional and strategic or an unrecognized, almost subconscious action. With each shift in the discourse, positions can change, resulting in a shift of understanding of the storyline and subsequent future dialogic action.

There is an inherent power dynamic that exists within positioning. People cannot employ subject positions and storylines to which they have not had access. Within the storyline, the interlocutor must either acquiesce to the positioning of the speaker, resist actively, or adopt an alternate narrative for the conversation. While some individuals can choose acts of positioning, the nature of the teacher-student relationship can become problematic for some students in allowing autonomous constructions of self. Due to teachers being in a position of power, as the “more knowledgeable other” and the very structure of schooling in the United States, they bring to the conferencing dyad different claims or rights to speak. Teachers perform different duties, have different responsibilities and obligations within the classroom and to the students, that reflects the difference in the distribution of power and authority (Bomer & Laman, 2004).

Identity exists as functions of discourse, and position theory provides a framework for how relationships form, develop and shift over time by analyzing the negotiation of identity within interactions (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). The “analytic power of positioning theory lies in its ability to explain not just how participants in conversations discursively construct themselves and others as characters in story lines, but also how they can use these positions and stories as resources for strategic interaction” (Saint Georges, 2013, p.3). Furthermore, in examining positioning within the classroom, students can understand different ways of interacting in discursive spaces. Holland (1998) uses the term “dispositions” to describe appropriated positions from stabilized experiences that become reflected in assumed identities of children. She states, “Children develop a set of dispositions toward themselves in relation to where they can enter, what they can say, what emotions they can have, and what they can do in a given situation” (p.143). Thus, positioning theory provides a lens for understanding student roles and the opportunities for affinity, relationship-building, and access to academic writing Discourses that they afford.

1.2.5 *Positioning in the writing conference: Teacher and student roles*

Position theory helps to operationalize the discursive dimensions of the conference and thus, illuminates the role of teacher brokering in students’ uptake of knowledge and identity. To uncover how two teachers work to position themselves and their students in the conference, I draw on Harré and van Lagenhove’s (1999) “Tripolar Episodic Structure of Conversations”. In the writing conference model, there exists a speech act—the illocution by the interlocutor (i.e., the teacher’s discourse), a storyline—the action or purpose of the intended illocution (i.e., the teacher’s instructional objective), and a position—a role taken up by the interlocutor and the role given to the respondent in the conversation. As the conference begins, the interlocutor (teacher)

puts forth a storyline (the agenda or instructional focus of the conference). The student may align with the teacher’s instructional storyline of the conference through perlocutionary effect—demonstrated through the discourse and practices of uptake (e.g., appropriation, attunement, generation, negotiation, performance, and or reproduction). Conversely, the student may not exhibit uptake of the instruction (e.g., the student resists writing- taking different action from the expected writing practices), thus disrupting the teacher’s storyline. With this disruption, the student repositions themselves and creates a new storyline of engagement with the teacher. The teacher must then shift their discourse and enact a new storyline, renegotiating positions and speech acts—in an attempt to find a different way to support the student’s uptake of writing. Through these encounters, the teacher mediates writing understandings, defines their positionality, and positions their student.

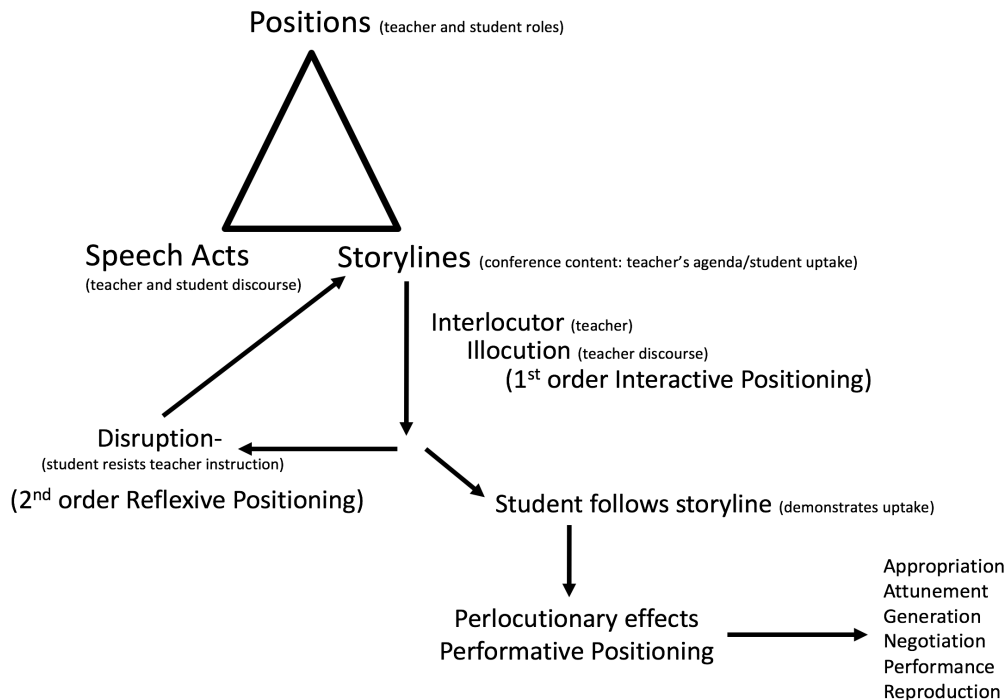


Figure 1.1. Tripolar Episodic Structure of Conversations (Conferences)

1.2.6 *Bringing theories together: A conceptualization of the writing conference*

The elementary classroom setting is a discursive space, where teachers and students are engaged in a community of practice. Teachers and students employ dialogic practices to mediate understanding. During the writing conference, the teacher acts as a *more knowledgeable other* or highly skilled broker through dialogue with the student to communicate understanding of writing in relational and academic dimensions.

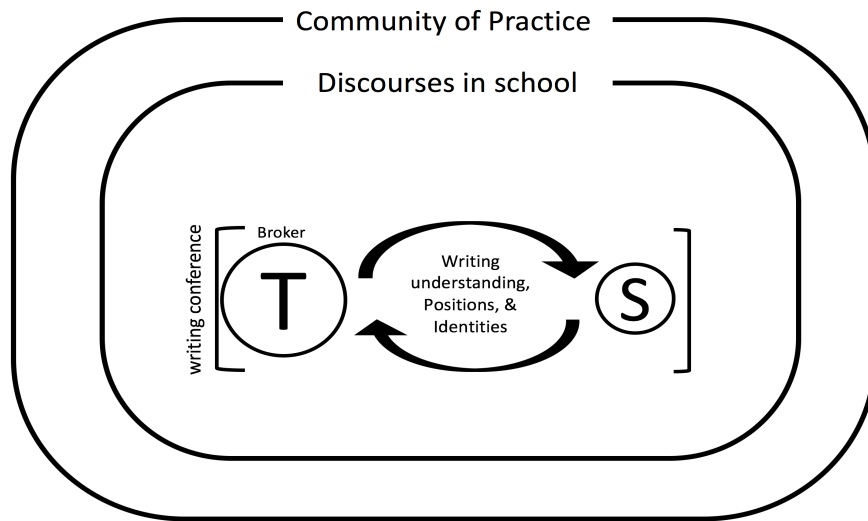


Figure 1.2. Theoretical frame of the elementary classroom where the conference is nested.

Within this frame of the classroom, this study examines the discursive moves of the teacher and student within the dyad of the writing conference. Specifically, I examine patterns in writing Discourse, teacher positioning, and student positioning across writing conferences. By examining these patterns, I seek to understand the discourses that are privileged in school (e.g., official academic discourses, students' discourses) and uncover how teachers' pedagogical choices and discursive moves establish particular positionings that mediate students' opportunities to understand writing and develop writing identities in an academic setting. Within this frame, I ask: *How do two writing teachers' conference discourse mediate opportunities for*

students to learn and become academic writers? Additional questions, listed below, indicate specific aspects of teacher discourse that I intend to investigate:

- What writing practices does the teachers' conference discourse highlight (e.g., academic genres, rhetorical moves, language conventions, consideration of the audience and purpose)?
- How are these writing practices highlighted in the discourse (e.g., body language, explicit teaching, modeling, implicit elicitations)?
- How does the teachers' discourse position students (e.g., as knowers and communicators, as in control of their writing choices, as learners in relationship to the teacher)?

1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THE REST OF THE DISSERTATION

In the next chapter, I outline the research design and analysis process that yielded my findings. I also briefly describe the two focal teachers, the school setting, and the writing unit selection. In the remaining chapters, I describe the study participants and provide an analysis of the discourse in the writing conferences along several themes. In Chapter Three, I provide an in-depth description of the two teachers, their writing curriculum, and highlight the similarities across their writing practice. I then analyze each of their pedagogical approaches to writing instruction, exploring two themes of their writing positioning. Namely, how Mr. Branson positioned writing as a training camp—an intense, focused, independent activity where students modeled their writing after Mr. Branson's examples and practiced often and Ms. Young's positioning of writing as a "focused beehive", a collaborative meaning making activity where students wrote individual pieces but also collaborated with Ms. Young and one another as resources to support writing understanding. I then shift to focus on each teachers' discourse and positioning in the writing conference and how they brokered writing understanding in their

respective classrooms. In Chapter Four, I present how Mr. Branson brokered writing through his conference discourse, self-positioning, positioning of his students. I conclude the chapter with data from the student interviews—providing a window into their writing understanding and identity development. In Chapter Five, I present a similar pattern of explanation for Ms. Young’s instruction. In Chapter Six, I explore the comparable and contrasting pedagogical approaches of each teacher and discuss the affordances of these different approaches for student learning. The final chapter presents implications and conclusions for the study’s findings.

Chapter 2. STUDY DESIGN, ANALYSIS PROCEDURES, AND PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTIONS

This study sought to contribute to the knowledge base for teacher learning in general and in particular, support teachers’ understanding of what to teach in writing and how to engage with students, mediating opportunities to learn within the writing conference. As discussed in the previous chapter, I view learning as a social act, mediated by language within a community of practice where collective work is done toward shared goals. Through interactions with a more knowledgeable other, students receive support in their learning through authentic tasks. Therefore, I designed a qualitative study that examined I aimed to illuminate how teachers broker writing understanding in their classroom community through the individualized interactions in the writing conference.

In the previous chapter, I noted that despite the potential power for student learning and cultivation of relationships between students and teachers in the writing conference, few studies examine the nature of these interactions and explore the affordances for learning at the elementary level in these particular diverse settings. My study addresses this need. In this

chapter, I describe the study design, data collection and corpus, and analysis procedures. I also provide a brief description of study participants and context of the setting.

2.1 METHODS

To answer the questions above, I conducted a qualitative, comparative case study of writing conferences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study, which drew on existing data from a study of expert writing teachers in diverse contexts, focused on writing conferences in two intermediate-grade classrooms. A qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth examination across multiple instantiations of the writing conference, which yielded “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of the nature of writing time in the two classrooms (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2006). Further, a micro-analytic approach to qualitative analysis helped to identify patterns in teacher-student discourse in writing conferences and understand how they mediated students’ opportunities for learning and identity development as writers. The comparative case design helped to surface themes across these two high-quality teachers and their students—as well as identify features that made them distinct.

2.1.1 *Case Selection*

In this section, I describe the school and teachers selected for this case study—Pacific Elementary School, a highly diverse, public elementary school in a large, urban school district, and the two focal teachers, Mr. Branson and Ms. Young. I then provide an explanation for their selection.

2.1.1.1 School selection

Pacific Elementary School was the site selected for the larger study. Pacific School supported a number of “multi-age” classrooms at the site and conceptualized these combination classes as “multi-age.” The literacy specialist elaborated on Pacific School’s ideology behind these classes,

“The benefits of ‘multi-age’ classrooms are to frame for the teacher that each student works at his or her own level. The challenge is to identify the level and teach what the student is ready for next with an eye toward grade level standards.” Pacific School was selected as a site for the larger study for two reasons. First, it served a highly diverse group of students.

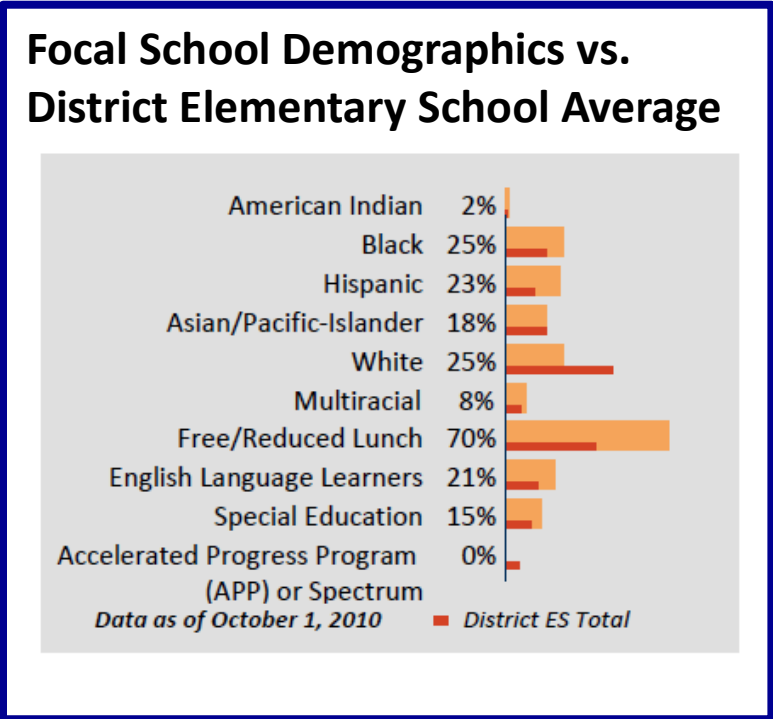


Figure 2.1. Demographics of Pacific school

Historically, this school site had not seen much success in passing the state writing assessment. The year prior to this research study less than 50% of the 4th graders tested passed the test. Second, the school’s principal and literacy coach had led a sustained effort to support writing instruction across the grades. This included professional development and curriculum from Teacher’s College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP). It also included regular, scheduled time for grade-level team planning for writing, optional book studies, and support from the school’s literacy coach, who had received training from TCRWP. Because teachers at

this school had received more support for instantiating a workshop approach to teaching writing, they served as a “demonstration school” for visiting teachers, coaches and administrators.

2.1.1.2 Teacher selection

For the study, several factors informed my teacher selection process. First, because I am interested in documenting promising teaching practices, evidence of high-quality instruction was crucial for teacher selection. Consultations with the literacy coach, along with information about which teachers were frequently visited during demonstration walk-throughs, was one important criterion. A second selection criterion was years of experience; contrasts illuminated differences in levels of expertise, differences in ideology, and differences in methodology that helped to highlight core features across teachers as well as important variations—and their affordances and constraints for students’ learning and identity development as writers. Finally, the final years of elementary school are a crucial time for writing development—especially now, in the age of the Common Core State Standards. Per these standards, writing instruction in grades four and five include a healthy dose of essay-writing—both to inform and to argue for a position or interpretation. A focus on writing conferences in these grades highlighted the tensions and opportunities in the teaching and learning of academic discourses. Given the criteria highlighted above, I studied two teachers—both of whom teach a split-grade class of fourth and fifth graders.

The first focal teacher, Mr. Branson (a pseudonym) was a White, monolingual male who was in his third year of teaching. The second teacher, Ms. Young, was a White, monolingual female who was a seasoned elementary teacher who had taught at almost every grade-level—including preschool. Both teachers voiced a strong commitment to working with a diverse student population, and engaged in work to understand how to best meet the needs of their students. Both teachers also spent many hours after school planning lessons and working with

the school literacy coach. Mr. Branson also participated in a book club, offered by the literacy coach, which focused on writing conferences. The purposive sampling of these particular teachers focused my inquiry on their use of discourse with their students in conferences and enabled a greater understanding of the data (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2003).

This case study design used multiple sources of information to yield in-depth descriptions and interpretive themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The multiple data sources I drew from to investigate my questions included: field notes, video recorded observations of the writing time, classroom artifacts, teacher interviews and student interviews. All data were collected by the principal investigator and myself.

2.1.2 *Classroom Observations*

From 2011 to 2012, before the study began, I spent a full year as a weekly volunteer during the writing time in both classrooms. This activity continued during the year the data was collected—except on the days that we collected observational data. On these occasions, I stepped out of my role as volunteer to focus on video recording and writing field notes.

2.1.2.1 Unit selection and timeline

Because of the aforementioned focus on essay-writing in grades four and five, we collected data during units that focused on this. These included a fall unit on “opinion” writing (a gateway to later argument writing, which begins in grade 6), an information-writing unit in winter, and a state test preparation unit in the spring. For each unit, we observed and recorded two to three writing workshop periods, which were typically about an hour long. Each observation included documentation of the full writing workshop time, which provided important context for understanding the writing conferences.

Table 2.1. Data set for Mr. Branson

Date	Unit	Lesson Title	Mini-Lesson (minutes)	Conference (minutes)
10/23/2012	Opinion	Rad Reasons	25	18
10/25/2012	Opinion	Conferences		26
10/29/2012	Opinion	Conferences		29
1/15/2013	Information	Sources	14	90
1/16/2013	Information	Voice	10	22
1/22/2013	Information	Conferences		27
4/2/2013	State test prep.	Rubrics	37	
4/4/2013	State test prep.	Opinion	3	29

Table 2.2. Data set for Ms. Young

Date	Unit	Lesson Title	Mini-Lesson (minutes)	Conference (minutes)
10/25/2012	Opinion	Strong reasons	9	
10/30/2012	Opinion	Conferences	3	33
1/15/2013	Information	Meaningful notes	10	33
1/22/2013	Information	Teaching—big topic/sub topic	18	19
2/19/2013	Information	Body Paragraphs	31	15
2/20/2013	Information	Body Paragraphs	24	16
2/27/2013	Information	Conferences	8	39
3/28/2013	State test prep.	Opinion	21	29
4/2/2013	State test prep.	Narrative	38	
4/4/2013	State test prep.	Narrative	6	

2.1.2.2 Video recording

All lessons were video recorded. The camera was typically placed in the back of the room so it would not create a distraction for students learning. When the teacher engaged in conferences, we would move the camera to better capture the conversation, discursive moments, and artifacts. Because verbal and nonverbal discursive actions during the writing conference are the focus of my inquiry, these video recordings were the central data source for my analysis. To support analysis and the navigability of the data corpus, all video recordings were transcribed. An outline for the organization of the video transcripts is in Appendix A.

2.1.2.3 Field notes

Field notes were written to capture the writing classroom in its entirety and gain context for the topic and language of the subsequent writing conference. An outline of the field note protocol is in Appendix B. In addition, I focused on how language was used, writing down teacher and student discourse verbatim, when possible. The field notes were further elaborated after the observation, and included brief memos about questions to follow up on, emerging themes, and notes from conversations with the teachers and secondary informants, such as the literacy coach and principal.

2.1.2.4 Classroom Artifacts

During and after each observation, teaching artifacts (mostly in the form of charts and writing on the board) were photographed to provide further context. Photographs of student writing were collected to provide further context for the video, where students' texts were often not visible.

2.1.3 *Teacher Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers at multiple times during the study, most often at the end of the unit of study, to debrief planning strategies, share their thoughts

about the lesson implementation and student learning, and articulate their next moves for teaching. These interviews were conducted by both the principal researcher and myself either during the teacher’s lunch break or after school, typically lasting anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour. This format allowed for me “to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic”, offering a greater understanding of teacher knowledge and practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.111). These interviews have been transcribed and were used to provide context for understanding the lesson objectives, teacher language, and considerations of individual student need in the writing classroom. The interview protocols are in Appendix C.

2.1.4 *Student Interviews*

Students also participated in a 10-20 minute interview at the culmination of the school year, Students were interviewed individually, by the principal researcher or myself, in the hall outside their classroom during their scheduled writing work time. During the interviews, students were asked about their writing preferences, how they felt they had grown as a writer, how they hoped to improve, and the practices of “good opinion writers.” In addition, we asked students to select their best writing from their year-long writing portfolio and comment on its rhetorical strengths. The full student interview protocol can be found in Appendix D. Student portfolio commentary around rhetorical decision-making, in particular, provided an opportunity to see the writer in practice—as students talk about themselves, their reasoning, their process, and their rhetorical tools in the context of their own writing. Together, these interview responses helped to make students’ understandings of writing and their self-positioning visible. These data enabled me to triangulate findings from the conference data and offer further insight into how teachers

mediated opportunities to learn academic writing (Patton, 1999). These interviews have been transcribed.

2.2 DATA ANALYSIS

I analyzed multiple dialogic facets present in the writing conference and how those facets mediated understanding of writing practices and positioned the student, teacher, and text. I examined the language each participant employed, as well as how the teacher and student used semiotic features including gaze, gesture, roles, spaces, and objects throughout the conference to communicate with one another (Taylor, 2014). I used ATLAS.TI, a data analysis software package, for my data analysis.

2.2.1 *Classroom Observation Data*

My analysis process for the video data was comprised of three phases. As this is an exploratory study, in the first phase I coded using orienting categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to develop an understanding of the nature of the conference—as well as the nature of writing in each classroom more broadly—and identify any emergent themes. Next, in an effort to understand the discursive moves in the conferencing dyad, I employed iterative rounds of coding leading to a final set of codes. The rest of this section provides the details for each step of my analysis.

2.2.1.1 Phase One. Coding the workshop

To begin, I coded the instructional time before independent work and conference time, identified as the *mini-lesson*. Specifically, I coded the mini-lesson for: the learning objectives of the unit, classroom expectations and norms, how genres are framed, student roles and academic expectations, and the structure for student-teacher interactions (e.g., peer conferencing). An

analyzation of the time prior to the conference provided a context for interpreting the conference and the different discourses and practices employed in the writing community.

2.2.1.2 Phase 2. Parsing the conference data for deeper analysis

Next, I identified patterns in each teacher's discourse to parse the data into segments which followed Anderson's (2000) conceptualization of conference structure. Anderson organizes the dialogue of conferences into four stages. First, the teacher uses questioning to understand the student's writing and set an agenda for what to teach. Then, once the teacher knows where the student may need assistance, they commence instruction. During instruction, the student provides input, the teacher provides feedback, and the teacher then concludes by nudging the student through specific action steps or a more informal response, to begin their guided or independent practice.

2.2.1.3 Phase 3. Coding for themes

I coded for major themes related to my research questions. Codes related to instances of **writing practices** helped build an understanding of academic genre in the classroom, as well as what specific practices of writing were exhibited through discourse in the conference (RQ2). **Brokering** codes identified how practices were taught to the student (RQ3). Finally, codes that related to **discursive moves and positioning** shed light on the resources teachers employed and how the teachers used verbal and semiotic cues to position themselves and their students, all to examine how they mediated understandings of the writing process (RQ1). I discuss each of these, in turn, below.

I established writing practice codes informed by literature which examines the writing process approach (Calkins, 2003; Graves, 1983; Rowe, 2008; Shanahan & Newman, 1998; Wade & Moje, 2000). These codes included references to writing practices, rhetorical moves (e.g.,

starting the essay with a strong lead or “zinger”), audience and purpose, and how genres are framed. Then, I adapted these codes to my context, using common vernacular found in most elementary writing curricula where appropriate. The writing practice codes detailed different components/foci of the writing process. For example, the coding group “writing practices” included sub codes for audience and purpose, genre features, language conventions and rhetorical moves. For additional examples and accompanying definitions, see Appendix E.

I then shifted my focus to how the teachers brokered writing practices. These brokering practices are exhibited in verbal and nonverbal means in communicating with the student in the conference. For example, the coding group “brokering codes” includes affirmations and encouragement, explicit naming of academic language, questioning, and think time. For additional examples of “brokering” related codes, see Appendix F. These codes help to identify and describe teacher’s moves make writing practices (e.g., rhetorical decision-making, accessing resources, eliciting feedback) accessible to students.

My focus then turned to codes to describe how the teachers were using language to position themselves and students. The teachers primarily positioned themselves and their students through instructional conversations, but also through non-verbal, semiotic means. Within the elementary classroom, positions and storylines are not freely constructed. The teacher holds a role of authority. Language governs the mediation of writing knowledge and student engagement. To address specific types of positioning and discourse makers, I created another meaningful layer of more refined codes. Discourse markers are,

ways of positioning a speaker either in relation to the information or another speaker, of responding to an earlier utterance, even of gaining the floor when speaking turns are contested. Discourse markers are one important way in which we create coherence

between units of talk, connect ideas, and shape the speech event at utterance, discourse and even social levels (Black, 1998, p.42).

These markers included such phrases as, “you know” and “I mean,” which invited or evoked the concept of shared knowledge and of the students’ entry into the community represented by the teacher. I also used discourse markers as an expanded idea for body positioning and language. These discourse markers allowed for me to see how the language and other semiotic moves positioned the teacher and the students and therefore, mediated understanding of writing. In summary, I coded for positioning codes such as decision maker/authority, collaborator/coach imbued with discourse markers. For additional examples of “positioning” codes, see Appendix G.

Finally, positioning codes included student positions. As the teachers take up these deliberate self-positions, they in turn position their students. Codes for student positioning included: knower, decision maker, and practicing writer. For additional examples of “student positioning” related codes, see Appendix H. Students can choose to take up, acquiesce or resist these positions and through their discourse. As the brokering practices the teachers employ informs mediation of the writing process and the teacher’s positioning and positioning of the student, the student could in turn elect to take up practices or disrupt and resist the storyline. Due to this trajectory, I coded for evidence of student uptake as demonstrated through the student’s language and semiotic moves. Examples of codes for evidence of student uptake include—appropriation, performance, and resistance. For additional examples of related codes, see Appendix I.

2.2.2 *Teacher and Student Interviews*

Interview data followed similar analytic patterns as the conference videos for coding. In the first phase I used orienting categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to develop a broad understanding of how the teachers conceptualized the writing lessons (e.g. their goals and objectives for learning) pertinent to the data in this study, as well as their reflection of the lesson following enactment. These data provided contexts for understanding the lesson purpose and objectives, lesson sequence, teacher language (defining terms such as “rad reason” or “next level”), assessment choices, and consideration of individual students’ needs in their classrooms.

Next, I examined student interviews to understand how students took up academic writing practices and identities through the writing workshop. I coded for specific writing practices in students’ talk (e.g., references to drafting, conventions, elaboration, audience, etc.). I coded these rhetorical moves as evidence of uptake, which I then traced back to the conference time, and conjectured about how conference discourse mediated uptake over time. I also coded for instances of positioning. For example, portions of the transcript in which the students spoke to the strengths and/or weaknesses of their own writing—or writing more generally—were coded as “knower.” As another example, the code “decision-maker” was used to highlight portions of transcript in which students spoke to their authorial choices.

2.3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have outlined my study and provided a brief description of the study participants as a backdrop to the cross-case analysis chapters. The cases of these two teachers presented in this chapter begin to illustrate their different pedagogical approaches to writing and how within those varied approaches, how they brokered writing understanding and mediated students understanding of academic genre writing in the writing conference. There were several

differences noted in their instruction and conception of writing in these genres and spaces which may have influenced their positioning of writing as an individualized, explicit event or a collaborative, dialogic interaction. I provide further examination of these two teachers and the discursive practices in the writing conference in Chapters Three through Six.

Chapter 3. EXPOSITORY WRITING IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

This chapter provides a description of the teachers, setting, and curriculum to provide a context for later chapters focused on the discourse and positioning in the writing conference. In this chapter, I first profile the two focal teachers, Mr. Branson and Ms. Young, and detail the number of similarities between their writing classrooms, specifically the content, academic language and structure of instruction. I then focus on two particular aspects of those similarities to identify discursive practices employed by both teachers: the curriculum and the structures to teach that curriculum in the workshop model and their grade level planning meetings. I then show how differences that emerged in the planning meetings for the information unit began to illuminate and define the teachers' different pedagogical approaches to writing and caused a departure in their alignment of curriculum enactment. To examine these differences, I present a picture of each teacher and their writing classroom—providing an in-depth examination of their ethos, structure, and pedagogical approaches to broker writing instruction while identifying themes in their instruction. These themes presented in each classroom, were further highlighted through the discursive practices of their writing conferences, which I will examine in Chapters Four and Five.

3.1 THE TEACHERS

The first focal teacher, “Mr. Branson” is a White male, early in his career (third year), and taught a fourth/fifth grade class. He was the only male on an upper elementary grade level team. Through conversations and interviews, Mr. Branson voiced a strong commitment to and

engagement in working with a highly diverse population and wanting to develop his own understanding of writing and how to best meet the needs of his students. He often spoke about his desire to help this population of students by providing the children with tools or skills (defined by him as ways of thinking, doing, and being) to not only be successful in school, but in life as well. He spent many hours after school planning lessons for his students, attending research meetings for the larger study, soliciting input from the school literacy coach, and participating in a book club about writing within the workshop model.

The second teacher, “Ms. Young,” is a White female, a seasoned teacher who taught at almost every grade level—including preschool. Similarly to Mr. Branson, Ms. Young voiced a strong commitment to and engagement in working with a highly diverse population and a desire to refine her practice to support the learning of her students. She too spent many hours after school planning lessons for her students, attending research meetings in and out of school for the larger study, and solicited input from the school literacy coach.

3.2 THE STUDENTS

While the teachers were the primary subject of inquiry, due to conferences being a dialogue between the teachers and the students, it is important to note the students whose conferences were selected for analyses. However, in both classrooms, the teachers were especially concerned about privacy for the students during this study, therefore there was not comprehensive biographical data collected on each of the students, but from observations in the classroom, we noted a small number of demographical data.

Mr. Branson’s class was a multi-age class, a combination of fourth and fifth graders. Writing was taught to the whole class, with every student receiving the same instruction and writing task. There were 26 students in Mr. Branson’s class, six fourth grade girls, six fourth

grade boys, six fifth grade girls, and nine fifth grade boys. Twelve of his current fifth graders were in their second year with Mr. Branson, as they had attended fourth grade in his room. Out of his 26 students, 22 were students of color, with four of his students demonstrating a familiarity with a language other than English through their language use in the classroom. Two students in Mr. Branson's class received specialized academic services from an instructional assistant and support teacher, but these students were present and participated in the writing workshop time. Eighteen of his 26 students completed permission slips to have their data be used in this study.

Ms. Young also taught a multi-age class comprised of 26 fourth and fifth graders, with four fourth grade girls, four fourth grade boys, thirteen fifth grade girls, and five fifth grade boys. Out of the 26 students in Ms. Young's classroom, 21 were students of color, with five students demonstrating an understanding of dual language proficiency, again through their employment of language with one another in the classroom. Fifteen of Ms. Young's fifth graders were in their second year with Ms. Young as their teacher. Two students in Ms. Young's class received specialized academic services from an instructional assistant or support teacher. A number of times throughout the study, these two students arrived from their support services class during or past Ms. Young's instruction, but she would meet with them immediately and both students participated in the writing workshop. Twenty of Ms. Young's 26 students participated in this study.

3.3 SIMILARITIES IN PRACTICE

Mr. Branson and Ms. Young shared several similarities across the content and structure of their writing classrooms. They taught the same grade levels and had similar schedules for the writing time in their class. The two teachers utilized the same curriculum—Units of Study from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, with directives to also align their teaching to the

Common Core State Standards (in their first year of adoption at the time of the study), and the district-wide pacing guide. This curriculum employed a process approach to writing instruction through a “workshop model.” The use of this common curriculum led to a similar discourse for describing writing for genre features, writing processes, and strategies. The teachers planned together in grade-level team meetings which also included Ms. Ray, who taught a third-fourth grade multi-age class. They discussed writing units prior to enactment and often debriefed after lessons, examining their instruction and student learning from their respective classrooms.

3.3.1 *Curriculum*

The data collected for this study focuses on the discursive practices of these teachers in writing conferences with their students and highlights the teacher’s negotiation and implementation of the Common Core State Standards and writing curriculum from Columbia’s Teachers College. As noted in the Methods chapter, in the years prior to this research study, fewer than 50% of the fourth graders had passed the state writing assessment. These results paired with the curriculum adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards resulted in a heightened focus from the principal on how writing was taught—fostering a school culture of results and accountability. For, example, teachers were required to submit grade-level writing plans to the principal in advance of each unit and were expected to align their instruction with the curriculum.

For writing curriculum, both teachers aligned their teaching with Lucy Calkins’ Units of Study¹. This writing curriculum follows the elements of a workshop model and is organized

¹ The Units of Study are writing curricula for the elementary grades, created by Lucy Calkins and the Teachers’ College Writing Project, published by Heinemann.

using a genre study approach. The Units of Study acted as a guide for teachers, not a script. Students therefore create an understanding of specific tenets of a genre, in a graduated approach, layering on particular features or elements of the genre with each writing piece they craft. Each lesson in the curriculum is aligned with the Common Core State Standards and offers suggestions for a “learning target” (the objective of instruction), a mini-lesson, small group work, and conferring.

The data for this study are from three expository genre units during the 2012-2013 school year. I was particularly interested in expository writing units due to the aforementioned need for teachers to provide explicit instruction that supports the child’s learning of processes, strategies, and techniques that are transferable to future writing (e.g. Calkins et al., 2005; Hartman & Calkins, 2007), as well as developing an understanding of how students are positioned and acquire access to empowering modes of discourse (Nasir & Hand, 2006; Gutierrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009). The opinion essay unit was the first genre we examined in our study, a four-week unit beginning in October. The second unit focused on informational writing, which commenced after the winter break in January, and the final unit of study was the state test preparatory unit in April, where Mr. Branson and Ms. Young revisited previous genres written during the year and provided instruction to students on writing for standardized tests.

For each of the units, Mr. Branson and Ms. Young taught students the structure of expository texts and referenced this in their instruction through the graphic organizer entitled, “Box and Bullets” (Figure 3.1). This transferred to talk about drafts. Thus, a thesis statement was sometimes referred to as “the box” and supporting paragraphs as “the bullets,” other features included introductions, conclusions, and accompanying language conventions. During these lessons for the opinion essay and state preparatory units, students wrote in response to one of

several teacher-provided prompts or chose their topics. However, during the information unit, Mr. Branson and Ms. Young diverged in their approaches to topic selection. Mr. Branson's students researched a self-selected topic and produced an informational chapter book. Conversely, Ms. Young's students engaged in collaborative writing projects, researching and writing about different dimensions of Northwest Coast Native American history and culture.

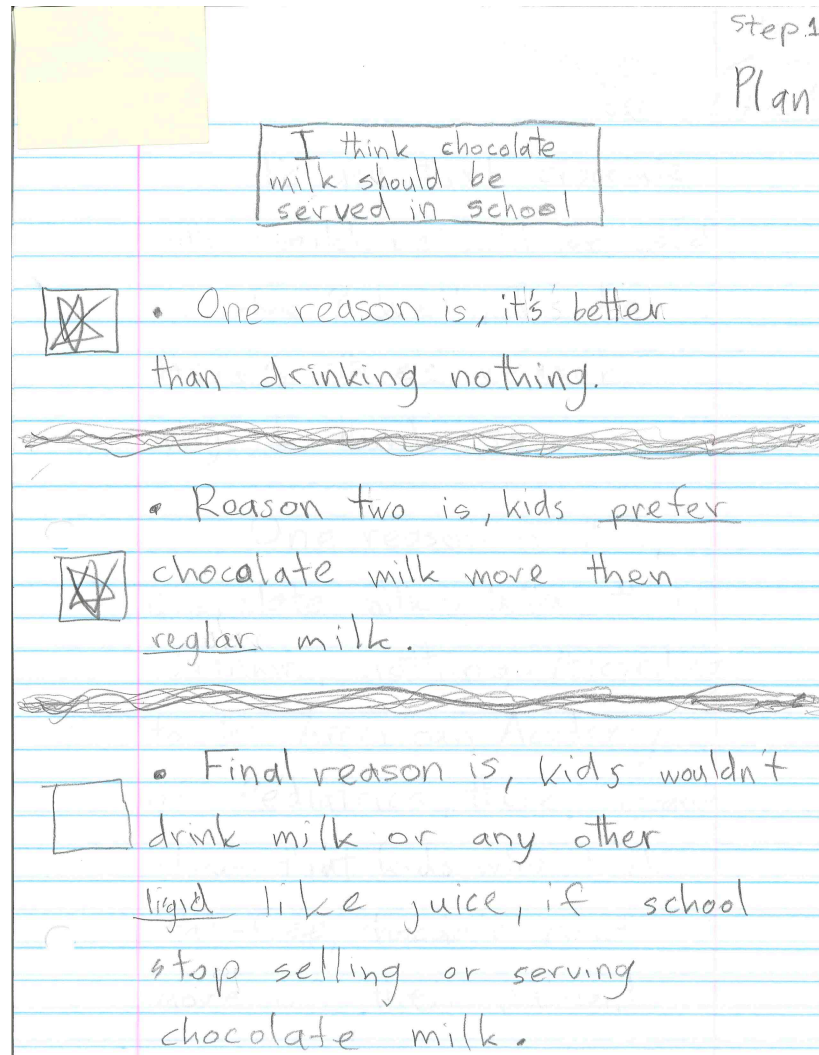


Figure 3.1. Student sample of the graphic organizer, “Box and Bullets”

3.3.2 Workshop model

Both teachers engaged in the workshop model from the Teachers College of Columbia University while also aligning their instructional objectives and content with the Common Core

State Standards and the district wide pacing guide. This intentional choice of curriculum lent itself to discourse which supported students to construct meaning through talk and writing and provided the teachers with a measure of autonomy in deciding the content and language of their writing instruction. The organization of the workshop followed a predictable, albeit flexible schedule. At the beginning of the daily writing time, the teachers gathered students at the front of the room for a whole-class mini-lesson. The mini-lesson was a time for direct instruction that often involved teacher modeling and thinking aloud to demonstrate writing process strategies and rhetorical decision-making—lasting anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes. At the conclusion of the mini-lesson, the students were excused back to their desks for independent work time to craft their own texts. During this time, the teachers either met with students at their desks or pulled individual students to a side table to support their writing through conferring.

3.3.3 *Planning meetings and teacher interviews*

For this study, we collected data from the teachers' planning and debriefing from each expository writing unit. Mr. Branson and Ms. Young planned and debriefed as a grade level team for the opinion and state test preparatory units. However, for the information unit, they did not plan and debrief together. Rather, they shared their thoughts individually through an interview with either the principal investigator or myself. During grade-level meetings, teachers met during sanctioned time after school to discuss their curriculum plan. They would often meet in one of their classrooms, sit at a large table, and begin with a friendly check-in, debriefing one another on happenings in their classrooms. The conversation would then shift to a discussion about the next unit of instruction, during which they referenced their curriculum materials, their district pacing binders, notes from the previous year, and the Common Core State Standards. Mr. Branson typically spoke more than the other two teachers, but each would share their

understandings of the curricula and ask one another questions on their understanding and enactment. In this way, they negotiated and renegotiated their understandings of the genre, instruction, and curricula in the context. Often, they would discuss goals for students' learning, individual students' needs, how to best support implementation accountability, and a shared awareness of students' writing achievement on state measures. Typically after the unit, they would meet again as a team to discuss successes and opportunities to modify the curriculum to better suit their needs for the following year.

In the following quote, during an interview prior to the information unit, Mr. Branson speaks to their dynamic in planning:

There's a firmer alignment between how we're presenting our stuff [compared to last year]—what we're expecting and just the sort of general philosophy of, it's the process, not the product, between Ms. Young and I. We're able to communicate in a way that's really clear and transparent for both of us, and we both are seemingly on the same page. And even though we do our things a little bit different, it's [their understanding of the curriculum] it's generally really aligned.

During the opinion unit, Mr. Branson's and Ms. Young's plans were closely aligned. They decided to begin the unit by developing prompts for students to write to and then instruct students in how to generate their own ideas as the next step for their writing development. They agreed on the graphic organizer, "boxes and bullets," to support their instruction of the rhetorical features of the genre: an introduction, thesis, and three supporting reasons, while also providing specific instruction on elaboration. During their team debrief of this unit, they both agreed that students needed support on "specialized vocabulary" and the use of "outside sources" to strengthen their opinion and create a more cohesive and convincing opinion.

While some pedagogical differences between the teachers presented themselves during the observations of their instruction and conferring in the opinion unit, the planning and enactment of the following unit, the information unit, illuminated and defined Mr. Branson and Ms. Young's contrasting pedagogical approaches to writing instruction. In the beginning planning stages for this unit, Mr. Branson and Ms. Young met a couple of times to plan; however, during those initial meetings they could not come to a consensus. Mr. Branson wanted an approach to teaching the unit more aligned to the curriculum. He wanted the students to learn the rhetorical genre features and writing processes for writing a chapter book by writing individually on a self-selected topic. Ms. Young, however, was interested in aligning her instruction for this unit with a social studies' theme—the Northwest Coast Native Americans. They did not come to an agreement before their winter break and, due to the unit beginning directly afterwards, each decided to pursue individual routes. We interviewed the teachers after the unit, and both reflected on their decision-making and the implications for their teaching, illuminating their different pedagogical approaches and goals.

3.3.4 *Mr. Branson*

During Mr. Branson's interview of the information unit, he shared his understanding of the genre, planning decisions and goals for student learning. He reflected on his alignment and fidelity to the curriculum throughout and how this fidelity informed his teaching. Mr. Branson first reflects on his brokering move of providing "crystal clear models" and then his deconstruction of these models to focus on specific genre features.

I make a visual for them on charts or the board. Instead of saying, "this is what a killer introduction looks like," having sticky notes that point to the zinger and one that points to

forecasting and thesis, so they can go up [to] that wall and go, if they're stuck...the [students] can go access the chart and go, "Okay, that's what he means by zinger."

In this example, Mr. Branson's identifies two features of his pedagogical discourse to broker understanding of academic genres: his use of models as an example for students to use in their own writing and his use of academic language demonstrated through the naming of genre features (e.g., zinger, forecasting, introduction, and thesis). Mr. Branson then shares his goals for student learning within the unit.

I want them to learn the structure, "how to." I don't care what they wrote about. I want them to know that to be an effective essay writer, or basically an effective writer, you have to have a crystal clear thesis, and you have to support that with evidence—or you have to support that with reasons or thinking or opinions that elaborate on what you are talking about. That's what I want them to get. To be a successful writer or communicator, you have to really have a clear point, and then support that point with reasons or opinions or whatever it is that directly supports your idea.

There is that line between process and formula, because with our essay stuff, that is a formula. That is a recipe. It's like, "do it like this," and that sucks. It's just teaching to the test, "do it like this," so we can get our scores up. But it is just such a fine line because on this side, it's like here's the "how" that we want you to remember, "This is the strategy that we want you to use," So it is a real fine line.

Mr. Branson articulates his understanding of "effective" genre features needed to write in expository genres, emphasizing clarity and the use of evidence to support an argument. He also notes the tensions he felt in teaching writing—attempting to find a balance between process, or

more flexible approach to genre, and a formulaic approach to genre, that provides access to the writing expectation of testing—and often by teachers. He juxtaposed providing space for student voice and understanding while also supporting access through explicit teaching, referencing teaching to the test and the need to “get scores” up, drawing attention to his positioning of writing as a high-stakes, strategic discipline in the elementary setting. He provided further insight into his planning, conceptualization of writing, and his instruction during his debrief interview. When asked, he explained:

We started off with an assessment that was money. I went through the TC [Teachers College] curricular calendar, pulled out our learning targets, met with my grade-level team, hammered through that, looked at some student work. I looked at the Common Core, looked at MSP [the state test preparatory materials] stuff. We are trying to reconcile that, the three-headed monster: MSP, Common Core, TC—how do those fit?

He went on to describe how he and Ms. Young arrived at an impasse in their planning:

A big factor here is that me and Ms. Young were completely splintered on the unit. Part of the reason is that I choose to work with fidelity to my curriculum, and my principal, and my team, and what is “supposed to happen.” Because I am a big believer that, right or wrong, if you’ve got dissension all throughout the ranks, then of course it’s wrong. But if you try it and it’s wrong, at least you have some reasonable data. You can say, “Okay, we tried that with fidelity, and it didn’t work.” That’s not always how it works, especially in my grade level team. So there were some misunderstandings about what the Teachers College curriculum was suggesting we do. So, I was sitting here going, “All right,

everybody's jumping ship on what we are supposed to be doing," which comes down from the principal, and the literacy coach and so I basically stuck to the book.

Mr. Branson voiced the difficulty that he and Ms. Young had encountered that year with attempting to reconcile three different instructional resources, the Common Core, MSP, and Teachers College Units of Study, citing "misunderstandings" about the "suggestions" from the curriculum. Mr. Branson made connections between his fidelity to the curriculum, to support of his students' learning. Furthermore, he drew attention to the pedagogical differences between Ms. Young and himself, with a comparison of his "fidelity to the curriculum" to Ms. Young's "dissension in the ranks." This comparison illuminated Mr. Branson's focus on following the script, and the importance of sticking together as a planning team for data-driven decision making. He continued with his goal for student learning and how he began his instruction in the unit:

I wanted the kids to recognize the difference between informing, writing an informing essay, and writing an opinion essay. So, we worked on that. We worked on planning. "How does planning for an information essay look differently than planning for an opinion essay?" That's where we got the whole chapters list, the whole chapters idea. . So my best shot was to create a box and bullets, which is basically a chapters list. I leaned into TC stuff because essentially kids have written "All About" books before and I wanted to take it up a notch. One way I did this was...an informing chapter, a pros and cons chapter, a profiling chapter, and a cause and effect chapter, or whatever. That's kind of TC heavy stuff.

Mr. Branson identified three of the instructional foci for this unit—planning, boxes and bullets, and the use of different chapter structures. He decided to use the organizational structure, “boxes and bullets” and the chapter structure as his entry point into informational writing because of the potential familiarity his students had with “All About”² books, which allowed for Mr. Branson to build upon and extend their learning. Mr. Branson then closed with another reflection on his role as a teacher being a “good soldier” and, regardless of his own “personal platforms,” “staying true to curricula and learners” impacted student success.

The Common Core is our guiding light. I want to stay true to our state thing. Even though I don’t truly believe in it, I want to be a good soldier. I don’t want to be a weak link in the chain because of my own personal platform. I understand the world is bigger than me and if I don’t believe something, then I’m not helping the kids. Just stay true to my curricula and various leaders. It is important to shape it into what’s realistic and that’s where we end up with problems when teachers have different ideas of how to shape their own curriculum. It’s not like anybody wakes up in the morning and goes, “How am I going to screw these kids up?” No one does that, but just everyone comes with a different perspective...Because Ms. Young is such a good teacher she was able to pull some stuff out and get some stuff done. It turned into a big six-week gigantic project. Mine was different, just a direct result of not being on the same page.

Mr. Branson wanted to support his students’ learning and the best way he determined to do that was through fidelity to the curriculum. He noted many dilemmas that teachers face today—

² “All About” books are short, informational texts that explain attributes of one topic. These are commonly taught as an entry point to writing in the primary grades.

how to best meet students' needs and the impact of personal teacher ideologies and pedagogies on curriculum and student learning.

3.3.5 *Ms. Young*

During the debriefing interview for this unit, Ms. Young described the conception and planning of this unit, and shared her thoughts on her departure from alignment with the curriculum. She also discussed her goals for student learning and the different possibilities for students' text production in this unit.

Well, I guess the conception of it was just really wanting to delve into some social studies stuff and knowing how fun it is to integrate it like that. I wanted to do the Northwest Coast thing because it is so rich...I looked at reading materials and made packets from two different sources and thought, "I'll TC-ify this as much as I can!"

In contrast to Mr. Branson, Ms. Young began with the content of the unit, the Northwest Coast Native American history and culture and integrated the content to work with the writing curriculum, as evidenced by her comment, "I'll TC-ify this as much as I can." Ms. Young especially wanted to teach this content in writing because of the particular connection it gave to students of where they are from and their environment. "It is where they live...and it just dovetails right into modern stuff, like why are these guys so upset about their fishing rights?"

Ms. Young then discussed how she solicited and collated different resources and materials at various instructional levels to support a primary feature of informational writing: reading and citing sources. For this two-month unit, students self-selected into four groups and chose a "big topic" to focus their research: tools, totem poles, storytelling, and housing. Within each of these big topic groups, individual students selected smaller, related "sub-topics" to learn

and write about. The evolution of these sub-topics and group formation, “naturally bubbled up, which is cool.” While each student was responsible for the authorship of their individual sub-topic writing, students were encouraged to solicit support from one another. The final project was a group collaboration: a presentation of the big topic and each subtopic.

Ms. Young described how she weighed curriculum options with what the students needed to learn. She voiced a desire for students to have both an individually-written component and a collaborative artifact that the group produced. She decided students would create both. They would have “some long writing to put in their notebook...practicing organizing, funneling, organizing and funneling—focusing on a topic and generating their ability to explain and elaborate why...about their sub-topic.” Through these tasks, she hoped students would learn to “pick information from multiple sources and somehow put it together in a meaningful, cohesive thing.” While this goal mirrored Mr. Branson, her ideas about how to support it reflected a more flexible stance toward form: “Are they going to write an essay? They could have...but this is a fun way to do it.”

Reflection on how this unit went, she noted the role of collaboration in students learning:

There was a lot of processing going on between the kids. They thought about the whole topic, they thought about what are some main sub-topics of that, and they organized this thing. They did a lot of talking back and forth, a lot of collaborating. A lot of work helping each other, asking questions like, “I think our topics are the same, what should we do?”

She also highlighted the advantages of collaboration and differentiated end-products for students with varying levels of writing proficiency:

They are just making this meaningful whole from multiple texts and [they] process it, and [then they] come out with this cohesive writing and organized it, and they are all on different levels.

Planning and teaching this unit also afforded opportunities for Ms. Young to learn. She noted:

I think what I learned is how to take a topic like that and sort of workshop-ize it a little bit, which is something I have never been trained to do, and I have never had any of the social studies training. I think I also learned. I think, in my particular situation, it was a really big, liberating step for me to just be, “I’m going to do whatever the hell I want to do,” which is how I used to always teach, but here it was really, really hard. It can be emotionally painful to do that because of the repercussions you suffer. I just thought, “Screw it. I’m not going to ask for permission and I’m just going to brace myself.”

The content for this unit is what drove Ms. Young’s instruction. She wanted students to have fun examining a topic, which directly impacted their understanding of where they live, creating a meaningful writing context. Ms. Young also spoke to pressures of curriculum and administration on instruction, but, in contrast to Mr. Branson, she chose to diverge from what she was “supposed to do” and found “liberation” in her autonomy.

To summarize, while differences presented themselves during the opinion unit, Mr. Branson and Ms. Young articulated their different pedagogical approaches during interviews prior to and following their enactment of the information unit. Mr. Branson emphasized explicitness and fidelity to the curriculum, while Ms. Young stressed collaboration and autonomy in her teaching, deviating from what was “required” or “expected.” For the remainder of this chapter, I examine

each teacher independently, zooming into their classroom setting and pedagogical approaches to further show how they mediated expository genre writing.

3.4 MR. BRANSON: TRAINING CAMP

“We want to push ourselves and change the way we write. That is why we’re doing this. And the learning target today is practicing writing with voice. You can do whatever you want in life. [But] really good informational writers can use voice—really, really good ones. So, if you want to step your game up and you want your informational text to be even better than maybe it was in fourth grade or third grade, then you will practice your writing with voice. We are going to hit it up for two minutes, a lot of super intense, high level, focused writing.”- Mr. Branson

3.4.1 *Ethos*

Mr. Branson positioned writing as an important job, a “training camp” where students need to “work hard” and “practice” to learn how to “play the game” (e.g., learn to write using specific rhetorical genre features, writing processes, language conventions, and purposes) to get to the “next level” of academic writing proficiency, in order to effectively communicate with an audience. This analogy of a training camp, illustrates Mr. Branson’s pedagogical stance of writing as “intense,” focused activity, where students had to practice, and practice often, modeling their writing after his instruction to become “really good writers.”

In Mr. Branson’s instructional discourse, he explicitly identified, repeated, and reinforced rhetorical genre features, writing processes, and standardized language conventions, and then connected these to audiences and purposes through standardized and colloquialized academic discourses. He demonstrated how to take up these attributes of academic genre writing through

articulating aloud his own thinking and demonstrating how to write, often by composing in front of them. From these lessons came mentor texts students could access later in independent writing. This instruction further supported his “training camp” stance, as his explicit naming and modeling showed students “how to play the game” through his focus on “effective strategies” for students to employ in future writing. Furthermore, he expressed his desire for students to know the language and structure of academic writing in order to become “effective essay writers and effective communicators.”

Students were charged to take writing seriously. The expectation during the mini-lesson would be their undivided attention on Mr. Branson, listening to his instruction, and participating when called upon. When students were excused back to their seats to write, they were expected to engage with the day’s writing task independently, and keep talking to a minimum as to focus on their work and not be distracting to their peers. Also during this time, Mr. Branson challenged students to take their writing to the “next level” through revisions and multiple drafts. While students worked independently, Mr. Branson selected students to confer with based on his assessment who needed support.

3.4.2 *Classroom*

Mr. Branson and Ms. Young’s classrooms were located in the main building of Pacific School—a school built in the 1950’s, one of the older schools in the large, urban school district. Their classrooms were in the same hallway, with just a few doors between them. Although the sizes of the classrooms were very similar, each teacher arranged their space differently. As an early career teacher, Mr. Branson had not yet accumulated the resources and supplies typically found in the rooms of teachers with many years of experience. As a result, his room was very organized with every item in the classroom housed in a designated location. At the front of the class were

his desk, an area rug, and a large whiteboard where students would gather for whole-class writing instruction. He had two bulletin boards he primarily used—one that held student work he deemed exemplary and one that held his anchor charts, or “mentor texts,” that he created during writing instruction. There were six tables in the room—five tables where students self-selected their seating and one horseshoe table. Students could elect to sit on the floor or at tables during independent work time. There was also a large kidney shaped table where he would sometimes assemble a small group of students for individualized support.

3.4.3 *Schedule*

Mr. Branson scheduled a relatively generous segment of instructional time for writing within his literacy block. Following the lesson, the time was often disrupted for a break for physical education. Mr. Branson worked to mitigate this disruption through high expectations for using writing time wisely. Writing would then take place for another 45 minutes and quickly adjourn for lunch. Writing’s placement between these two time constraints led to the conclusion of the writing time typically being a hasty wrap up from Mr. Branson, if there was a wrap up at all.

3.4.4 *Mini-lesson*

Writing in this classroom followed a typical writer’s workshop structure: a mini-lesson followed by independent work time with conferring. On occasion, Mr. Branson had time to close the workshop with opportunities for students to share, but typically students wrote until lunchtime. Mr. Branson would most often commence instruction with a mini-lesson in the front of the classroom with his students gathered around him on the carpet. Here, he would write a learning objective on the whiteboard and use either the document camera or large notepaper to create examples of his own writing as a model for student access during independent work time. Mr.

Branson created and referenced artifacts and models of his own writing to mediate learning throughout his lesson.

Mini-lessons were an almost theatrical experience, where Mr. Branson would vary his physical positioning from standing in front of the students, to crouching down, sitting at the document camera, walking among the students, and even standing on the counter. During this time, he would also use varying vocal intonations, non-academic vernacular, and gestures. Mini-lessons were predominantly teacher-led and, therefore, filled with teacher discourse, Mr. Branson used this space to provide explicit instruction, name academic genre features and writing process, highlight examples of his own writing as models for students to appropriate. However, he did provide opportunities for students to engage in responding to his questions, in sharing their own stories and ideas with the class or talking in small groups. Within the storyline of the mini-lesson, Mr. Branson directed the instruction and students were expected to be quiet and listen, but also participate when called upon. After the mini-lesson, students would write independently, most often on self-selected topics, where they were encouraged or required to try out the strategy that Mr. Branson had taught.

3.4.5 *Example of the mini-lesson*

In this section, I provide an example of a mini-lesson in action to show Mr. Branson's instruction. I provide an excerpt of a transcript from the information unit. This mini-lesson was from a workshop time near the completion of the unit of study. Mr. Branson instructed students on how to construct chapters as a way to share information and teach the reader about their respective topics. As students developed their chapters for their informational books, Mr. Branson identified the need for more explicit instruction on how to use and cite outside sources

to support details in their chapters. First, Mr. Branson began this mini-lesson with reinforcement of his management expectations. He stood at the front of the room and said:

Okay, show me five. If you have a comment or question raise your hand. I can't have kids calling out after each thing I say. Eyes totally glued. Nothing in hands. No distractions.

He then launched his instruction with a kid-friendly, accessible anecdote to teach how and why to cite sources when writing and informational text:

Have you kids ever been in a situation when you wanted something. And I'm asking these questions rhetorically. I don't need a bunch of answers. Imagine yourself. Imagine if you wanted to have a sleepover with a friend. You have to go ask your mom or your dad. Some of your parents live apart so this may not be the best example—I'm going with it anyway. Say you gotta go ask your mom, right? And your mom is like, "no." Sometimes when I used to do that as a kid, "Mom, can I go sleep at Dan's house?," and then my mom was like, "No, you have had too many sleepovers." Know what I would go do? I would go ask my dad and ask, "Dad, can I go have a sleepover at Dan's house?" And he'd be like, "Sure!" Then I'd go back to my mom and say, "Dad said it was okay" Tell me if you have ever done that to your parents? (Some students raise their hands) Do you know what you did? You went and *got information from another source to strengthen your argument* with your mom because just asking your mom wasn't enough. And as soon as your dad said it was okay, she said, "Well..." maybe she'd say yes, maybe she'd said no—it doesn't matter. What I am talking about *is going to another place to get more information to strengthen your argument*. That's what I am teaching

you how to do today with our informational writing task. Our learning target is going to be, “I can use information from books, magazines, and the internet. I can even ask an expert. And I can get information to *strengthen* my informational text.” We are going to use information that is not just coming from our brain—we are using information from our brain and from another source. Okay? How am I going to do that? Well, I am going to choose information that supports my chapter.

Mr. Branson begins his instruction with an engaging narrative on a topic potentially accessible to his students—asking one parent for something and the need to use another source, in this case another parent to strengthen his argument. While this beginning anecdote is unrelated to the information piece he had modeled on basketball, this example provides a reference for students with its’ connection to opinion writing and with his language use, “strengthening an argument” from the unit they had just completed. With this example, Mr. Branson draws attention to using outside resources to support writing chapters. Mr. Branson then pivots to his modeled informational text and draws student attention to writing information in their own words and the language of citing sources:

My chapter is about college [basketball] versus the NBA (pointing to the wall where his modeled writing is posted), so I am not going to choose any information that talks about the rules of the game or how basketballs are made. I want to choose information that supports my chapter on differences in the college and the NBA. Also I am going to rewrite the information in my own words. I can’t copy out of the book. I’ve got to rewrite in my own words. . . You have to give credit to the book by using, “According to...” So, if I went to my mom and said, “Can I spend the night at Dan’s house? According to Dad,

I can.” Do you see how I gave credit to a source? Let me give you an example of how to do this with my information text. Okay guys, watch and learn.

Mr. Branson then selects a book on basketball, reads and thinks aloud about which information from the book would best support the chapter he is writing. He identifies a chapter that compares the lengths of time in college and NBA game as a good place to look for information. He then reminds the students to use the phrase, “According to,” when citing a source. He then chooses a fact to include and models:

I found some information in my book, just watch how I plop it into my text. According to...according to what? According to *The Kids’ Book of Basketball*. And guys, when I am talking about a book, I have to underline it.

Here Mr. Branson also embeds instruction on language conventions, “I have to underline” and then closed the lesson, “inviting” students to “practice” citing sources in their own work. He draws attention to his modeled writing for students to reference during their writing time and encourages students to make their writing “better” by independently working “hard” and “strong”:

And that is our learning target for the day. That is what I am inviting you to practice today. Do you have to do this? No. This is just one way to make your writing better, to make your writing really strong. Here are the steps. And right here I have got my examples and I am pointing right to it. . . There are lots of things that we are working on with our informational writing. We are practicing building different structures for our chapters. One of those is pros and cons. . . compare and contrast is another one. So there is a lot going on. . . I caution you with buddying up to stay on task and actually be doing our

learning target instead of talking shop. Okay, we have an hour to write hard and strong.
Are we ready to do it?

In this transition, Mr. Branson summarizes his instruction and reminds students of their course of expectations during independent writing time. The students are then excused to go write, with an enthusiastic send-off, “Are we ready to do it?”

3.4.6 *Independent Writing Time*

The bulk of the independent writing time was spent planning and drafting. Students would try on the instruction of the mini-lesson storyline, but due to the somewhat individualized nature of writer’s workshop, students could be working in different stages of the process and on different elements of their writing. Toward the culmination of each unit, students also engaged in revision and editing practices. During individual writing time, students were expected to write with relative independence and not engage with one another, while Mr. Branson would circle around and confer with students he selected. He often stated to the whole class that conference time was special and he needed students to be mindful of their classmates and not interrupt the conference time. The expectation was that students would not solicit the teacher, but as with conferencing in many elementary school classrooms, this was not always observed.

In sum, through Mr. Branson’s interviews and instruction, we see his conceptualization of writing in schools as a high-stakes discipline, with rules and curricula to be followed with fidelity. The standards guided his instruction. We also see the responsibility he felt to prepare his students to take up specific language, rhetorical genre features, and practices in order to be effective communicators and successful writers in academic settings. Mr. Branson’s instruction was filled with a profusion of teacher talk—explicitly naming and defining features and

processes of academic writing, paired with his use of models in his attempt to support students access to academic writing. The responsibility he felt for their development was shared with his students through his directives to focus and use every minute of writing time to practice and take their writing to the “next level.”

3.5 A FOCUSED BEEHIVE

“This is going to be a focused beehive of getting work done. It’s going to be talking, talking, talking, and the partners working, working, working, asking questions, giving feedback, being a good partner, right? Getting that work done...a lot of writing going on.”- Ms. Young.

3.5.1 *Ethos*

Ms. Young identified her class as “a focused beehive” a number of times during the yearlong study. This descriptor highlighted her pedagogical stance of writing being a collaborative meaning-making endeavor. With Ms. Young at the helm, each person was responsible for their own individual piece of writing, but also held responsibility, as a member of the writing community, to provide feedback and support for each other—including Ms. Young as she wrote during her mini-lessons.

In all three of the observed units of study, Ms. Young had students craft individual pieces of writing, but encouraged students to construct meaning together. Ms. Young viewed students as resources for one another during independent work time, where students could solicit thinking from each other, share their writing, and ask for feedback. Ms. Young would often facilitate this talk between students for meaning-making. Talk was a central feature in Ms. Young’s writing classroom. Through talk, Ms. Young provided a scaffold for students to access and take up

writing practices. During lessons, she used talk to collaborate with students—soliciting student ideas to craft her modeled writing pieces. These interactions supported Ms. Young’s understanding of her students’ uptake of academic genres and positioned writing as a collaborative, meaning-making process.

3.5.2 *Classroom*

Ms. Young’s classroom was a physical manifestation of her many years of teaching—she had countless books, posters, pencils, papers, and art supplies. The classroom had a lived-in feeling with lamps, a small couch, and two chairs in a corner nested among the books in her library. Behind the couch was a kidney-shaped table, where an instructional assistant, and, occasionally, Ms. Young would meet with students. Students were assigned to individual desks that were arranged in groups of four to six which lined the periphery of the classroom. The bulletin boards varied what was displayed, from student work to material relevant to topics being studied. Sometimes both of these were true. For example, during the informational unit, the bulletin board depicted a student-created mural of Northwest Coast Native American life.

3.5.3 *Schedule*

Ms. Young’s writing block was scheduled during the morning and was in large part uninterrupted, except from two students occasionally arriving late from their academic support classes. This scheduling afforded Ms. Young the opportunities to close her writing time in varied ways. Some lessons concluded with a summarization of the day’s learning target—often providing a context for the purpose of writing and forecasting next steps. Other times, she would solicit students’ understanding of the learning target through whole-class questioning or invite students to share their work with the class and receive feedback.

3.5.4 *Extended mini-lessons*

Ms. Young's focus on collaborative meaning-making permeated her interactions with students. As noted in much of the practitioner literature for the writing workshop model, writing instruction customarily begins with a teacher-directed instructional time, identified as a "mini-lesson." These mini-lessons feature direct instruction of a feature of academic writing and typically last between 10-15 minutes. However, in Ms. Young's classroom, mini-lessons regularly lasted between 20-40 minutes. During this time, Ms. Young would externalize her knowledge of academic writing practices through modeled writing. In real time, she would explicitly name and reinforce different features, structures, and purposes for writing. While composing aloud, Ms. Young solicited input from students, taking up a number of students' responses in her text, positioning students as collaborators in her own writing. Below, I provide examples of components of her extended mini-lessons to illustrate how Ms. Young provided access to the authoritative discourse of school genres and positioned writing as a collaboratively constructed practice.

Ms. Young began mini-lessons sitting in a chair in front of her students on the carpet. Here she would introduce the learning target for the day—identifying or highlighting a genre feature (e.g., including a "zinger" in the introduction) or process strategy (e.g., writing with stamina). For example, in one lesson during the Northwest Coast Native American information writing, Ms. Young's learning target was "Researchers take meaningful notes by using a graphic organizer to organize their thoughts." The learning target language identified academic writing practices specific to the genre, in these instances: taking meaningful notes, using tools and resources (graphic organizers), and organizing thoughts into a coherent structure. After writing the learning target on the board, Ms. Young questioned students about the academic language of

the target, solicited a definition of the terms, and then restated her definition of the learning target for the day.

Once there was a shared understanding of the objective, she would begin writing—creating her own text in front of the students, in real time, demonstrating the learning target for the day. As Ms. Young began to craft her own writing, she provided a model—thinking out loud; verbally processing her use of writing strategies; highlighting language conventions; the genre/rhetorical features of the text; and identifying features by their academic name and definition. During this time, she frequently employed a self-created graphic organizer to explicitly teach the structure of the expository piece. While she was writing, she would stop and co-construct her writing with her students, soliciting student input—asking students their thoughts of the text or the next steps she should engage in and to support their response. Ms. Young also encouraged students to speak with another during this instructional time—prompting students to add on to one another’s answers, to collaboratively construct meaning. After student responses, Ms. Young would often ask a clarifying question or revoice the students’ answer using academic language. Through these whole class interactions, Ms. Young could quickly determine students’ uptake of the day’s learning target and students could collectively build meaning together through the sharing and hearing of multiple examples.

3.5.5 *Example of the mini-lesson*

As an example of the mini-lesson in action, I describe a lesson from the informational writing that was integrated with their studying on Northwest Coast Native American history and culture. This mini-lesson was conducted a month into this unit. Students had researched various topics of Northwest Coast Native American history and culture and were in the drafting stages of their informational writing. After meeting with groups and reading notes the students produced, Ms.

Young decided the students would benefit from a mini-lesson on crafting thesis statements. During her instruction, Ms. Young brokered understanding of the structural and genre features for information writing through cognitive modeling, the explicit naming and explaining of academic language, and the co-construction of text through the elicitation and sharing of student responses. Ms. Young began the mini-lesson questioning a student, Shaniyah, about her group's "big topic," communities and Shaniyah's individual "sub-topic," longhouses. After repeating her answers to the whole class, she began her instructional storyline on the learning target:

Good, we need that information, so hang on to that in your head and look at this learning target here. We're going to give this a try today. The learning target is going to say, "We're thinking about our paragraphs that we are writing," right? Because now we're trying to take our information, all of our notes, and stuff on your sub-topic. We're trying to collect those into paragraphs. You have to keep in mind that we are teaching. We're trying to write this information, informational paragraphs, cause we learned some stuff about the Northwest Coast Native American culture and we want to teach it to others, so we are kind of using this...we are using this for teaching here in our paragraphs. I'm going to say that our learning target today is, "To introduce my sub topic, I signal my big topic." (Ms. Young writes on the board) We are going to try this out in our first paragraph. In the very first sentence of the first paragraph, we are going to try to mention the group's big topic and our sub-topic in the same sentence. Let me show you what I'm thinking of, okay?

Within this first explanation of the learning target, Ms. Young employs multiple discourse markers that signal writing as a collaborative space, writing as a rhetorical practice and process, and features of academic language. Ms. Young identifies writing as a collaborative space

through the use of the discourse marker “we.” In using the word “we,” she signals that teacher and students are making meaning together. Ms. Young also repeatedly uses the word “try.” “Try” indicates that in Ms. Young’s classroom, writing is a process and a rhetorical practice. In other words, writing requires multiple drafts in which writers try different ways with words and make rhetorical decisions to communicate effectively. Communication to an audience is also highlighted in her discourse, identified by her explicit statement that the rhetorical purpose of information text is to “teach.” Finally, her discourse features academic language through the identification of the structures of informational writing: paragraphs and sub topics by modeling how to “try” ways of constructing a thesis statement so it is contextualized within the broader topic.

Ms. Y.: We’re going to pretend like I’m in a group, and my group is a group called, “Northwest Coast Native American communities,” and my sub-topic, my smaller topic, is going to be longhouses.

So to introduce my sub-topic, I’m going to give this a try. I’m going to try to use an outline...my group’s big topic and then my sub-topic in the first sentence...so, that means I have to come up with a sentence that somehow sort of tells that people lived in communities, right? And also mentions longhouses. And then I am going to start explaining what I know about long houses, okay?

So, let me see, let me try...so what if said, um, Northwest Coast Native American Communities lived in villages. And in each village, families, uh, each family lived in a longhouse. Would that work?

That just might work. So, in Northwest Coast Native American...

Unidentified student: Communities

Ms. Y.: Communities. (Ms. Young laughs.) Is that what I said? It's hard to keep this straight! Each family lived in a longhouse. And what that would do is that would...that would...that would signal, what? That my group's big topic is...It means my whole group is studying communities, right? But I'm going to tell you about longhouses. That's kind of what I'm signaling to you, so I'm just going to write that. Let's see how I can do...

One, I want to mention communities, and then I also want to mention longhouses. Okay, I am going to try to make that in the first sentence.

(Ms. Young writing and reading text aloud) In Northwest Coast Native American, um, culture I'm going to say...People lived in communities called villages, right? But now I'm turning it into two sentences (laughs) so we have to try and fix this. In Northwest Coast Native American culture, people lived in communities called villages, comma, and each family in the village lived in a longhouse. Wooh! I did it, didn't I? We have a big, ol' long sentence, but I did it!

So I signaled my group's big topic and I also made up my sub topic, right? Now my job is going to be to go on and start describing the longhouses...I would want to take all that I know and teach it, explain it, put it together. So I want you to think about your sub-topic because you are going to give it a try. You are going to write an introductory sentence and a sub-topic sentence in this way. Naming your group's big topic and then your sub topic.

Ms. Young then solicited the class to identify their big topic and sub-topic by asking, “Does anyone want to give it a shot?” As students shared, Ms. Young identified the student’s big topic and sub-topic by affirming, revoicing, and/or adding-on to student answers. Often her responses provided students multiple options through a variety of sentence suggestions of how to frame their ideas using academic language—aligning student language with the academic structure of her model, supporting student ownership through choice. Ms. Young continued her instruction, soliciting another group’s topic for an additional example within this learning target.

Ms. Y.: Let’s take the example of the storytelling group.

Briyanna: Stories were told to teach history.

Ms. Y.: So Briyanna’s big...her group’s big topic is what? Storytelling right? And her sub-topic is that Northwest Coast Native Americans told stories. One reason they told stories was to explain their history, right? So, how could we put that in a sentence? Any ideas? What we do...we name our big topic, which is storytelling. And then we have to mention one reason they told stories was to teach history. What were you thinking, Briyanna?

Briyanna provided two different iterations of the thesis sentence. Ms. Young then solicits the whole group to craft a sentence. After two students respond, Ms. Young then summarizes:

Ms. Y.: Yes, it could start out with Northwest Coast. One thing...Northwest Coast...or it could be Northwest Coast Native Americans told stories a lot, and one reason they did was to teach the history of their people. What do you think Briyanna?

Ms. Young wrote down the sentence with Briyanna, dictating the words. After crafting the sentence with Briyanna, Ms. Young collaborated with three other students in front of and in

cooperation with the whole class to develop their thesis statements. Each time, Ms. Young emphasized the learning target (the big topic and sub-topic in one thesis statement), the purpose of this genre (to teach), and the process of trying different possibilities. At the conclusion of the mini-lesson, she revisited the learning target and provided questions the students could ask themselves to spur their writing. These questions served as strategies for students to employ in the composing process.

I want you to try this with your big topic and your sub-topic. I know you can do it. So, if you can think to yourself, “What am I going to write down? How am I, in my first sentence, mentioning the big topic and my sub-topic? How am I going to write an introductory sentence that can go with my paragraph?” And when you think you know what you are going to write, here’s what I want you to do. I want you to just get up and find a place where you can write this introductory sentence. Just go, no stopping for anything.

3.5.6 *Independent work time*

At the conclusion of the mini-lesson, Ms. Young would reiterate the learning target, provide next steps for independent work and ask students to choose whether they were prepared to return to their desks or would like to stay for additional support. Most days, the majority of students would leave the carpet to go write, while a small number would remain to ask Ms. Young a question or receive further support. Other days, Ms. Young would ask a few selected students to stay on the carpet to provide more instruction prior to their independent work time.

In sum, throughout the extended mini-lesson, the collaborative nature of the writing task was demonstrated through the use of the discourse markers “we,” “us,” and “our.” These

pronouns signaled a shared partnership between teacher and student in the creation of the text. Also, through the public solicitation of student thinking and partnering with students as they verbally crafted sentences, Ms. Young indicated her continued support, further identifying writing as a collaborative meaning-making activity. Ms. Young also repeated and reinforced the structure of a thesis statement and the purpose of informational text—to teach the reader. Students had access to academic discourses, where they negotiated and renegotiated meaning in collaboration with each other and their teacher. Due to the conversational nature of her mini-lesson, which included the solicitation of students' suggestions about writing and voice, this time was significantly longer than the typical instantiations of mini-lessons.

In the next two chapters, I zoom into each teacher's writing conferences to show how they brokered expository writing practices, providing students opportunities to appropriate academic writing practices and identities.

Chapter 4. MR. BRANSON'S WRITING CONFERENCES

As noted in the previous chapter, Mr. Branson positioned writing as an important job, a sports training camp where students needed to “work hard” and “practice” to learn how to “play the game” (i.e., learn to write specific rhetorical genre features, writing processes, language conventions, and purposes) to get to the “next level” of academic writing and proficiency, in order to effectively communicate with specific audiences. This positioning of writing as a training camp was evident throughout Mr. Branson’s conference discourse.

In this chapter, I examine how Mr. Branson supported students to “play the game” at the “next level” through reinforcing and reteaching in the writing conference. I first detail Mr. Branson’s conference routines and explain how within these conferences, he brokered understanding by reading and responding to the students’ writing—most often selecting to confer with the students who were in the greatest need of teacher support to enter in and participate in the classroom writing community. As Mr. Branson read, he responded with directive, discursive moves—explicitly naming genre features and standardized language conventions, while also drawing a focus to the audience and purposes for writing. Next, I provide an example of these conference routines in a transcript between Mr. Branson and a student, Serenity, a fourth grader, during the information unit in January. I then zoom into one distinctive and recurring discursive move in his conference storyline, his colloquialization of the authoritative discourse of academic writing, and discuss Mr. Branson’s connection of explicit naming of academic vernacular to a kid-friendly language. Next, I explain how through these brokering practices, Mr. Branson positioned himself in two ways, as *the* writing expert in the classroom and as his students’ writing coach, teaching and encouraging his students to play the game of writing in academic

settings. In turn, Mr. Branson dually positioned his students, as practicing writers, novices in the writing community, as well as knowers who could play at the “next level”—all in the service of brokering student understanding of expository writing in academic genres and thus, supporting his students’ identity as writers in the classroom. This chapter concludes with the students’ own words from their culminating interviews, and I discuss themes across their discourse—namely how they identified attributes of expository genres, their specific appropriation of Mr. Branson’s storyline, and their own identification as writers.

4.1 CONFERENCES AS A SITE FOR REINFORCING AND RETEACHING

In this section, I first describe Mr. Branson’s conference structure: a predictable routine of reading and responding to student work. In this conference structure, Mr. Branson would read students’ writing, and then respond in a number of ways. One response would be directive questions to ascertain the student’s understanding of his lesson. Other times, he would immediately commence his teaching—imbuing his directive questioning within his discourse of reinforcing instruction of genre features, responding to language conventions, and responding as the audience—to draw student’s attention to revisions necessary to make coherence for the reader. Following the reinforcing and reteaching of his instruction, Mr. Branson would then decide on the student’s next steps for writing and direct them to independently practice, affirming their efforts as he concluded the conference. In the following paragraphs, I provide in-depth examples of how he used conferences as a site for reinforcing and extending learning of expository genre features, language conventions, and audience and purpose through the context of the student’s own work. To further illustrate these routines, I provide an example of the conference in action between Mr. Branson and Serenity.

4.1.1 *Part 1: Read*

Mr. Branson would begin every conference reading student work. Although, this routine shifted slightly in January, after Mr. Branson participated in a book study on Carl Anderson's writing conference book, "*How's it Going?*" After reading the text, Mr. Branson began conferences with the question, "What are you working on as a writer?" where he encouraged students to respond with identifying specific practices or features related to the day's learning target. For example, in a conference with a fifth grader, Patrick, he asked, "What are you working on right now as a **researcher** or **writer**? Where are you in the **process**?" After this exchange, Mr. Branson would then revert to his previous conference routine of reading and responding.

4.1.2 *Part 2: Respond*

After reading students' writing, Mr. Branson would respond in a number of ways. Sometimes, Mr. Branson would immediately respond through directive questions to ascertain student understanding of his instruction, while in other instances, he would immediately commence his teaching of reinforcing instruction of genre features, responding to language conventions, or responding as the audience to draw student's attention to revisions necessary to make coherence for the reader.

4.1.2.1 Directive questions

The nature of questions within the conference often served as directives to the student to establish and focus his conference storyline on a particular feature or process of his mini-lesson instruction. Typically at the beginning of the conference, Mr. Branson would use questioning to quickly check in with the student, understand the content of their writing, and inform his instruction. After these initial questions, Mr. Branson then transitioned to more directive

questioning, while reading student work aloud, to support student uptake of the instructional storyline or orally highlight revision areas for the student. The most frequent revision during these exchanges would be a question about potential misunderstanding for the reader or a need for additional details. Finally, he used questioning at the close of a conference when attempting to get students to take up his instructional practices.

The following example illustrates Mr. Branson's directive questions in a conference during the information unit with Rohan, a fifth grader. He begins the conference asking Rohan what he is working on as a writer and then shifts to a more directive discourse, using questions to remind for him of that day's teaching point.

Mr. B.: Rohzone (his nickname for Rohan), how's it going, bro? What are you working on right now?

Rohan: My second chapter.

Mr. B.: But what are you working on as a writer, or a researcher right now?

Rohan: Oh, like I'm elaborating.

Mr. B.: You're elaborating? How are you doing that?

Rohan: I'm not just doing one part. I'm doing everything, like how he is and why he does it.

Mr. Branson's questioning then shifts from an assessment of Rohan's self-assessment of his writing work to a more directed series of questions to support Rohan's understanding and uptake of specific writing practices.

Mr. B.: Are you adding any of our elaborating helpful hints? Are you adding any facts, any details, and definitions? Do you have lots and lots of facts?

Rohan: Yeah.

Mr. B.: Do you want to try to mix it in a little bit? Do you want to maybe try to put a quite in there or plug some information from a source?

Mr. Branson's variation in questioning during the conference could be seen as an attempt to have students align with his desired instructional storyline for the conference and demonstrate his desired perlocutionary effects through appropriation of the instruction.

4.1.2.2 Directive wonderings

The second type of question appeared as a question, but in actuality signaled a different illocutionary intent: a directive to revise. One form of this question began with, "I'm wondering" and signaled a directive to students to revise their work. When reading students' work, Mr. Branson would often say, "I'm wondering." He would then follow with a suggestion or directive for the student to revise their work. An example of this directive wondering was present in an opinion conference with Osman, a fourth grader, who conferred quite frequently with Mr. Branson during the year, due to his need for teacher support in writing academic genres. As Mr. Branson, read and commented on Osman's opinion piece, he stopped for a teaching moment—Osman needing to use "I" instead of "you." Mr. Branson began, "**I'm wondering** if this might sound stronger if you say 'I think'?" and then began to teach about why the use of I is more powerful in an opinion piece. When Mr. Branson used the questioning language such as, "I'm wondering," he followed up with specific teaching points, thus signaling an expectation for the student to revise.

He also used directive questions when he transitioned students to independent practice following the conference. After instructing the student to engage in a practice to improve their writing, he would follow with a question, "**Do you want to try this out?**" or "**Would you like to**

go practice?” These questions were a directive for the student to try to enact what he had taught. Through the use of questioning, Mr. Branson attempted to shape the students writing agenda and make transparent language and processes of academic writing.

4.1.2.3 Reinforcing instruction of genre features

As Mr. Branson read student writing, he would sometimes forego the immediate directive questioning and instead begin his instruction—reinforcing his instruction of genre features. An example of Mr. Branson’s discursive routine was present in a conference during the opinion unit with Osman. For this conference, Mr. Branson began by reading Osman’s opinion essay about why students should have homework in schools. About two paragraphs into the essay, Mr. Branson pauses and turned to Osman, “First of all, you’re giving me a ton of **elaboration**. **Saying more, that’s called “elaboration.”** Boom! He then reads, “For example, you want to go to college,” quickly departing from the text to note, “**another super specific reason,**” and then dives back into reading, “And when you’re an adult [if you don’t do your homework], you are going to wake up in a roadside ditch.” In this quote, Mr. Branson identified genre features that Osman had taken up, using the specific language for opinion writing he had introduced in his mini-lessons. In this way, Mr. Branson both reinforced Osman’s learning and encouraged him by acknowledging his growth as a writer.

4.1.2.4 Responding to language conventions

As Mr. Branson read and offered a running commentary, he would also often highlight the role of audience in implicit and explicit ways. First, Mr. Branson contextualized and embedded instruction of language conventions through reading student work out loud. Explicitly, he identified spelling miscues, commented on handwriting, and identified grammatical and syntactical elements needing editing, but also implicitly taught conventions through these oral

readings. As he spoke, he would use varying vocal intonations and pauses to indicate where a comma or period was needed. For example, in an opinion conference with a fourth grader, Neveah (another student Mr. Branson frequently conferred with), on her opinion essay, he pauses from reading to note, “**Period here,**” and then continues reading, “You can have a cool team and cool people,” **pausing briefly to add a comma,** “and basketball can be awesome. Good. It looks good, it looks good.” In another example, during a conference in the informational unit with a fifth grader, Ibrahim, Mr. Branson notes, “Then we **capitalize** right? We **capitalize** the first letter of each word in the title. . .and I always use **comma**, like ‘According to the book’, **comma**. Bingo. Love that!”

In these read alouds, he not only highlighted where grammatical conventions were needed, but also how the student’s writing would be experienced by the reader, thus creating a focus for the students of an awareness of audience and purpose. Students would hear their work read aloud and hear where revisions and or edits were needed to make coherence for the reader.

4.1.2.5 Responding as the audience

Mr. Branson also demonstrated audience response for the students through vocal intonation. For example, he would often respond to students’ rhetorical decisions with laughter, affirmations, and questions. Hearing their teacher read and respond to their work provided students with the opportunity to develop an understanding of how their written words would be experienced by an audience, namely Mr. Branson. For example, later in the above referenced conference with Osman, Mr. Branson read Osman’s words aloud, “Don’t know if you are going to **end up in a roadside ditch?**” As he leaned back in laughter in response to this line, he was forced to pause his reading for a moment. Before returning attention back to the text, he turned to Osman and

exclaimed, “This is money, dude!” As he took up the language Osman used in his story, he identified his student’s language as an example in his own instruction for audience and purpose.

4.1.3 *Part 3: Direct, affirm, and write*

After reading and responding to the student’s writing, Mr. Branson narrows his focus to direct the student to the specific writing task he wanted them to practice from his preceding instruction and affirm either the effort they demonstrated (e.g., “You are doing good work!”) or any appropriation of his conference storyline in their writing (e.g., “You are giving me a ton of elaboration”). He then “invited” the student to go and write, often while remaining seated next to him.

4.1.4 *An example of the conference structure*

The following example illustrates Mr. Branson’s instructional storyline and his predictable routines of reading the students’ work aloud and responding by reinforcing and extending learning of expository genre features, language conventions, and audience and purpose through the context of the student’s own work. In this conference, Mr. Branson conferred with Serenity, a fourth grader. During the information unit, Mr. Branson taught a mini-lesson on how to add information from a source to “strengthen” students’ writing. He explicitly detailed and modeled how the students could do this in three ways: choose an informational source, find a relevant quote, and cite the source using “according to,” and then rewrite the information in their own words. He closed the mini-lesson “inviting student to practice” his instruction and to “write hard and strong for an hour.” As he sent the students to their desks to independently practice, he asked Serenity over to the back table to confer. He began the conference asking Serenity what she was

working on “as a writer” and proceeded to read her writing. After reading her work, he asked Serenity about how she decided to write her chapters.

Serenity: I wrote stuff that I really know about.

Mr. B.: Good, so you thought of the stuff you really, really knew about. Excellent. And what else did you think of the chapters? One of the ways was you thought of all of the stuff you knew, that’s a fantastic way. Was there any other way you thought of the chapters?

Serenity: No.

Mr. B.: No? That was it? Now let me ask you a question. How did you plan...or did you do any planning? About sort of how the chapters were going to go? Do you remember when we talked about, when I talked about in [my] chapters? The rules of the game, famous basketball players, college versus NBA, and equipment and the court? Then I thought about different ways that I might write them. Do you remember that?

Serenity: Kind of.

Mr. Branson responds to the reading of Serenity’s essay with a series of directive questions. Through these questions, Mr. Branson determined how Serenity was understanding the features and processes of this writing, as indicated by his questions about “chapters” and “planning”. After this line of questioning, Mr. Branson shifts to an even more directive question more tailored to his instruction, “So you remember what we talked about in my chapters?” This line of directive questions establishes the storyline of this conference: reteaching his mini-lesson on different informational structures in the essay.

Mr. B.: Kind of? Let's go take a look at it. (Mr. B. leads Serenity to the anchor chart on the back wall where his writing is located.) What's the way [plan my chapters]? So, instead of just writing everything I know, I'm going to choose like two or three players and I'm going to give them a little blurb, and I'll say Scotty Pippen and I'll give a little blurb. Then I will say Kobe Bryant and give a little blurb. [That's called] profiling. Do you see how that is different than just writing it all out? [Then what is my third chapter?] "College versus the NBA." What way would I choose to write that chapter? Compare and contrast—so you can see the difference between just writing everything I know, see how that's a little different? Then "Equipment and the Court," I am going back to informing, writing everything that I know and have a little diagram. You know there's another way that you learned the other day, that I didn't [put on here], do you remember that one?

Serenity: Pros and cons?

Mr. B.: I could have done pros and cons for one of my chapters. Does that make sense? So let's go back [and figure out your chapters], and think about [different ways] that your chapters could go. What do you think? Let's do it. Now you see how I did it. I want to see if you can plan your in terms of how they're built, right? How they're structured. Do you think you could do that?

Serenity: (Shrugs)

Mr. Branson brings Serenity to his modeled writing to reinforce his instruction of genre features. Through his anchor chart, he explicitly names the writing features from his lesson (e.g., profiling, informing) and provides multiple examples of how he employs those features in the

context of his own work. By highlighting a number of examples in his writing, Mr. Branson provides Serenity with access to various options of how she could potentially employ these features in her own writing.

Mr. B.: Do you want to give it a try?

Serenity: (Nods)

Mr. B.: Why don't you give it a try? Why don't you think about your chapters, and you can just make little notes about how you think you're going to build that. You can inform, you can do compare and contrast, you can do the good and the bad, you can do, um...uh...what am I thinking of...You can do profiles? Why don't you go and practice that?

Serenity: (Begins writing with Mr. Branson remaining next to her)

Mr. B.: Alright, what do you think, Serenity? (Reading her essay) Good. So, "Where is Pacific School?" You are going to do an inform chapters? Tell all about it? "How great is Pacific School?" Good, you'll do some more informing. "How great the teachers are," so you are going to do some profiles there?

Serenity: (Nods)

Mr. Branson then encourages Serenity to practice the instruction in the context of her own work. He directs Serenity to specific tasks, "Think about your chapters...and make little notes." As Serenity begins to write, Mr. Branson reads her work and provides further directives for action, "You are going to do inform chapters? Some profiles?" Through these directives he again reinforces his teaching of genre features. Mr. Branson then concludes the conference, with an affirmation of Serenity's planning and invitation to write.

Mr. B.: That's fantastic. What you did here Serenity, is you planned how you are going to build your different chapters. That is really, really next level. That is smart, smart writing. Now it's kind of time to do the writing. Do you think you are ready to go do that writing?

Serenity: (Nods)

Mr. B.: I think you are on your way, girl. Great job. I'll check in with you again maybe tomorrow, maybe the next day, okay?

As Mr. Branson read Serenity's work aloud, he responded with questions to determine her understanding of his instruction. He asked her how she "planned," about her "chapters," and if she "remembered" his instruction. Guided by her answers, he decided and directed his instruction to reteach and reinforce genre features from the mini-lesson (e.g., different organizational structures and features for writing chapters in information essays) through detailed explanations and models of his own writing. He closed his conference with an affirmation of her appropriation of his instruction and directed her to take up his instruction and engage in that specific writing.

In sum, through predictable routines of explicit instruction, Mr. Branson provided opportunities for his students to take up the instructional illocutions of the storyline by reinforcing rhetorical features, conventions, and audience and purpose. These pedagogical practices offered students opportunities to appropriate genre and take up particular writing practices in the context of self-selected writing tasks.

4.2 COLLOQUIALIZING THE AUTHORITATIVE DISCOURSE

Mr. Branson's conference storyline was predominantly teacher talk. Through his conference routines of reading aloud and responding to student work, Mr. Branson used language in many different ways. He would explicitly repeat and reinforce the authoritative, academic nomenclature and definitions typically associated with genres in school settings (e.g., thesis, elaboration, supporting details, conclusion). However, he also engaged in another distinct and recurring discursive move: the colloquialization of the authoritative discourse. Through colloquializing the traditional authoritative discourse of writing, Mr. Branson made writing talk as talk "among friends." This language usage offered a shared language for writing that attempted to bridge the "unofficial" discourse (teacher slang, student language) with the "official" discourse of school genres. These more colloquial versions of academic terms, along with an informal register, permeated his instruction as well as conferences. Through this relatable language he used exaggeration and humor to engage his students.

4.2.1 *Renaming rhetorical genre features*

Throughout Mr. Branson's instruction he mixed his use of academic with colloquialized versions of these terms to bridge the academic discourse of school with a more familiar register. First, in naming the academic language of writing, he identified the structure of the opinion piece as consisting of an introduction, supporting details, and a conclusion. He linked this instruction with an accompanying colloquial language of writing with terms such as a "zinger," his name for an engaging, memorable lead in the introduction to intrigue the reader or "rad reasons" to note supporting details, or a "killer conclusion" to name the feature to end their writing. In furthering understanding of genre features and rhetorical devices, he not only named the academic feature and linked it to the colloquial language; he also provided a definition and course of action of how

students would employ that feature in their own writing. For example, during his mini lesson and conference instruction, he instructed students that their supporting details or “rad reasons” be “crystal clear.” He named four ways of how to craft these “rad reasons” and listed the options on the board: “honest, real life examples; saying more, elaborating; specific details, saying exactly what you’re thinking; and being crystal clear.” He then would repeat the academic language, colloquial terms, and definitions at multiple times during the conference. For example, Neveah was having difficulty in crafting three distinct reasons to support her opinion of why basketball is the best sport to play. Her supporting details for her opinion piece on basketball all repeated the same reason in different words. Mr. Branson read her work aloud, paused for a moment and then explained,

So what I want you to do is, as you're writing, continue writing your **rad reasons, your supporting details**, I want you to stop and read that sentence to yourself, and ask yourself, “Is this making any sense? Is this **crystal clear, super specific**, or could I make it more clear? If you can make it more clear you might have to go back and do some revising. You want it, you want your writing to sound like you're talking.

In this example, Mr. Branson revisited the elements of opinion writing that he had previously taught, using his colloquialized version of writing talk. He instructed Neveah to be “crystal clear” and “super specific,” as opposed to repeatedly naming the academic language. Thus, providing Neveah accessible next steps for engagement in independent work.

4.2.2 *Colloquial instructional talk*

In addition, he employed a colloquial style throughout his instructional talk. For example, in the conference with Osman about using “I” instead of “you” in his writing, Mr. Branson stated, “If I

start saying ‘you,’ then your reader is going to start **freaking** out. You don't want to do that to your reader because if your reader starts **trippin,** he's **gonna diss** your essay and he's not gonna read it. But if you put the pressure on yourself, it'll be like, ‘**Yeah, dude, this guy's money!**’” In this example, Mr. Branson used colloquial language to emphasize his teaching point—the rhetorical impact of using “I” instead of “you” and the need to consider the audience and purpose when writing his opinion piece.

4.2.3 *Accessible examples and anecdotes*

Mr. Branson also used a colloquial discourse through kid-friendly, accessible examples or stories and anecdotes to further support his instructional storyline. In a conference with a fourth grader, Matty, Mr. Branson used the example of toys, something Matty potentially had an understanding with, to provide a connection to the academic task at hand. Prior to the conference, Matty had drafted an informational piece about the housing, food, clothing of a particular community of people with information about their life interspersed throughout his text. In reading Matty’s piece aloud, Mr. Branson noted Matty had not organized each sub-topic into three distinct groups. To support Matty’s understanding of creating three distinct reasons, he related Matty’s three sub-topics to a potentially more familiar topic—organizing bins of toys.

Awesome job. So you are using the strategy of [writing] a paragraph in your own words?
Dude, nice, that’s next-level. Can I just teach you one thing. . .that really good researchers do?. . .Housing, food, clothing...okay, so you have three chapters or three sub-topics to focus on. But, I’m just wondering, what I’m getting at is this. Why don’t we make these our three bins? Why don’t we go, G.I. Joes, Army guys, Legos? What do you think of that? So do you think that you could do that?

By providing a context that Matty may have familiarity with (e.g., sorting), Mr. Branson supported Matty's understanding of the structure of writing in this academic genre.

In another example, during a conference with Jaheem and Osman, for state test preparation, Mr. Branson again used kid-friendly topics to model how he might begin an opinion piece on three things he would change about the Earth,

I just want to think of three things I'd change. I'd bring the **dinosaurs** back because dinosaurs are awesome. . .there's a million things we can change right? Every kid gets a **Wii** (a video game console) on his birthday, **basketball hoops** on every corner?

Mr. Branson selected three topics (dinosaurs, Wii, and a basketball) to model details for an opinion piece, potentially supporting engagement in a responsive conference storyline and his students' interests and understanding of possibilities for their own writing in this genre. He stated this very point in his remarks following his example:

All right, guys. Do you see what I'm talking about here Osman? About how you don't have to sit there and make it the most perfect thing? What you do is you want to give yourself something you want to write about. Because, guys, see what happens when you write about stuff that you want to write about? You write better. Does that make sense? If you write about iPods and Nintendo Wiis...I can already tell you right off the bat that is what I want to write about, but I will still do my box and bullets. Go do your boxes and bullets.

In sum, this deviation from a more traditional, authoritative teacher discourse was a brokering practice that drew attention to the key ideas that undergirded this unit: relationships between genre features, rhetorical choices, audience, and purpose. Mr. Branson made his

instruction qualitatively unique, as compared to the normative, traditional classroom dialect through his use of a colloquial, non-academic vernacular discourse with his students. As Mr. Branson linked the academic genre writing language with more informal names and definitions, he provided a scaffold, or bridge, for his students to access a deeper understanding of opinion writing. As Newkirk (1995) notes, access to these deep understandings can be hindered through more traditional writing conference discourses, where students must present and perform an unfamiliar language. . .creating a more accessible, yet specific, language for naming genre/rhetorical features, Mr. Branson offered a common classroom language for writing. In addition to the work this did to provide students access to complex ideas about writing, it also served a relational purpose, which I discuss in a later section.

4.3 TEACHER POSITIONING: BROKERING WRITING EXPERTISE

In this next section, I discuss how through the discursive practices of his instructional storyline, Mr. Branson dually positioned himself as *the* writing expert, explicitly directing and defining conferences and the discourse employed in those settings, and also, in a more responsive, supportive position, as his students' writing coach. He positioned himself as *the* writing expert in the classroom through his use of "I statements" in his instruction—signaling his authority and expertise, the identification of himself as the audience to which his student's directed their writing, and through his explicit use of cultural tools as the model of exemplary writing to follow. He then positioned himself as the writing coach, supporting his students in taking their writing to the "next level" through his use of semiotic moves in guided practice, his discourse of a "coaching language"—encouraging "hard work," "trying," and "practicing," as well as his discourse affirming students' appropriation of academic genre writing, and finally, his attunement to the social emotional dimension of learning to write, demonstrated through his

attention to building relationships with his students. In turn, through these discursive brokering moves, Mr. Branson positioned many of his students as practicing writers, novices, who needed explicit instruction and coaching support to “play” (i.e., write) in the academic writing community, while also positioning students as players, writers, who could participate and write relatively independently from the teacher.

4.3.1 *The writing expert*

As the teacher, Mr. Branson inherently possessed the authority and power in the classroom over the instruction, content, assessment, and overall management of interactions within the academic community. This positioning as the authority or writing expert in the classroom was demonstrated throughout the conference discourse, as Mr. Branson employed directive discursive moves within the storyline that positioned himself as *the* writing expert in the classroom. In this section, I argue that Mr. Branson positioned himself as *the* writing expert, the person in the classroom who held the knowledge of academic writing and how to direct student learning, through three directive, discursive moves: the use of I throughout instruction, positioning himself as the audience for the students’ writing, and through models of his own writing for students to emulate. Through his explicit use of the discourse marker “I” in his instruction, he signaled his decision-making by directing student action within the conference, marking features he would evaluate, and identifying himself as the authority who could guide students within this academic space. Next, Mr. Branson positioned himself as the audience, both implicitly and explicitly, to whom the students needed to consider when writing their essays and finally, he positioned himself as *the* expert through his use of explicit models for students to utilize, and even copy, in their own academic writing. Through these moves, Mr. Branson reified his teacher authority.

4.3.1.1 I statements

Mr. Branson positioned himself as the writing expert in the classroom through his use of the discourse markers, “I” and “me.” Throughout his conference dialogue, he would use “I” statements in a number of ways to signal his expertise through directives in instruction, positioning himself as the evaluator, and by identifying himself as the one who could show them how to engage in the writing task. For example, as students transferred to their independent writing and conferring time from his mini-lesson, he reinforces his directive course of action,

What **I** want you to do is practice one paragraph for **me**. **I** want you to elaborate and say as much as you possibly can and use specific details. **I** want to walk around and check it out. **I** want one rad reason for whatever position you are supporting. Now don’t forget **I** am also looking for boxes and bullets, **I** am also looking for introduction, **I** am also looking for conclusion, but today the focus is really rad reasons.

The discourse marker, “I” was also used to signal his expertise by providing a model of how to engage in the academic work of writing in expository genres. In a conference with Jaheem and Osman, Mr. Branson identifies himself as the one who can show students how to engage in the writing task:

Can **I** teach you one thing?...Let me show you a trick that **I** do for any prompt...So, what **I’m** going to do, guys, **I** want to kind of step back because the whole point of planning is not to get ahead of ourselves. **I** don’t want to worry, **I** just what to think of three things...**I** just came up with different ideas...**I** tailor it to the prompt. All right guys, do you see what **I’m** talking about here?

In addition, Mr. Branson used I as a model to support students' writing processes. For example, at the end of one writing workshop, he addressed concerns students had brought up during conferences and whether or not they had enough information for their informational essay. He modeled thinking out-loud for students, demonstrating how they could assess what they needed to do, and modeling the recursive relationship between drafting and research in information writing.

If you were to like, think, “Maybe I don’t have enough for this chapter?” or “Maybe I need to specify my topic?” or “Maybe I need to make new things?”—you can always be a part of that process. So you went to the plan and you thought, “I don’t have the time. I don’t have a lot information!” It’s all about changing and pursuing as you go. It’s key to remember, “What am I trying to find out and why am I trying to find out.”

Through this use of “I” in his discourse, he gave directives for how writing looked in the classroom, signaling his position of power as the evaluator, but also by providing an explicit course of action and model to follow.

4.3.1.2 The “reader”

Mr. Branson also signaled his positioning as the expert through the explicit identification of “a reader” in his instructional storyline. Throughout the conference, Mr. Branson would alternate between identifying himself as the audience for his students’ writing or referenced an unnamed reader to consider when crafting their text, however in both cases, Mr. Branson was *the* audience the students were writing to. For example, during a conference with Tristan, a fourth grader, Mr. Branson asks him to elaborate and provide more details on his opinion piece about how an NFL football video game was educational.

You did a good job here, Tristan. Since you have time, can you do another draft and try to elaborate? Because Tristan, what I am seeing here is maybe one or two sentences, right? Could you **tell me** more about how Madden teaches you stuff? Dude, I think you can elaborate more with those reasons. Make them juicier and stronger.

Mr. Branson identifies himself as the audience for Tristan’s opinion writing when he asks, “Could you tell **me** more about Madden?” This question signaled to Tristan that Mr. Branson was his intended audience and provided a response to Tristan of how his writing would be understood. Thus this feedback informs his next steps for revision—the need to incorporate Mr. Branson’s request for elaboration.

In another example, Mr. Branson identifies a “reader” to support his instruction of writing purposes to Jaheem. Jaheem, a fourth grader, was working on his informational text, an essay on becoming an artist. He was developing a chapter on “pros and cons” and using transitional sentences. As Mr. Branson instructs Jaheem on how to craft his “pros and cons” chapter, he draws attention to the audience and purpose for his informational essay.

Pros and cons of what? You always want to give your **readers** a ton of information. . .boom, right! That’s a transitional sentence, “For example”. . .So, what you have done really well here is you’ve used a transitional sentence to sort of smooth your **reader** into the paragraph. You can do that anytime you’re writing some non-fiction. It just kind of lets your **readers** know, “Okay, here I go. I’m going down the waterslide right into the next paragraph,” right? Great job, Jaheem. Keep it up, bro.

In this conference example, Mr. Branson read Jaheem’s work, and responds by reinforcing his instruction of rhetorical genre features and audience and purpose. Specifically, he identifies a

“reader” to support Jaheem’s understanding of an audience when crafting a text and the purpose and impact of using specific rhetorical genre features in his writing.

4.3.1.3 “Copy me!”

Mr. Branson’s positionality as *the* expert was also demonstrated through his use of cultural tools. Mr. Branson displayed his writing onto a large piece of chart paper as a model of good writing. He referenced this mentor text throughout conferences, highlighting his own writing to reinforce his teaching points and provide another entry point into the academic genre for his students. When students appropriated his language and structure in their own writing, Mr. Branson demonstrated high enthusiasm. He even encouraged some students to copy him in support of their uptake of academic writing structures and language. Using his own example in practice and an enthusiastic reply in their appropriation signaled his expertise and mastery to the student and a “correct” way of demonstrating competency in opinion writing.

Mr. Branson’s use of cultural tools and his expert positioning was visible in his conference with Serenity, a fourth grader. This example occurred after the conference detailed previously in this paper. After Mr. Branson conferred with Serenity on chapters for her informational text—he checked back in with her to see how her writing was coming along. When Mr. Branson noticed that she was not writing, he engaged in another conference with her, drawing her attention back to the mentor texts on the back wall, encouraging her to copy his writing. Mr. Branson reads Serenity’s work and then responds,

Definitions, conclusion, details. So elaborate, right? . . . Give us some details about [the topic of her essay, the school]. Is it a big school? A small school? . . . Give me everything you can about it, right? And Serenity, go look at my charts, that’s why they are up there, **copy me!**

As Mr. Branson references his own work as *the* example for Serenity, he positions himself as the expert in two ways. First, by explicitly highlighting his own work as the exemplar to follow, paired with the detailed explanation of the rhetorical moves he made to compare and contrast college basketball from the NBA, demonstrates his writing expertise. Second, through his directive to Serenity to “copy” the organization and structure he used in his text in her own writing, he signals to Serenity that through imitating his rhetorical moves and organization, she will successfully write in this genre.

In sum, the use of his own writing as mentor texts throughout mini-lessons and conferences positioned Mr. Branson as an expert and provided students an explicit model and scaffold to follow when attempting to craft their own writing. As *the* writing expert in the classroom, Mr. Branson managed the instruction, content, assessment, and overall management of interactions within the academic community. He brokered writing understanding through three directive, discursive moves: the use of “I” throughout instruction, positioning himself as the audience for students to consider when writing, and through models of his own writing for the students to emulate.

4.3.2 “*You can do it. I can show you*”—*teacher as coach.*

While the very nature of the writing conference has an inherent power dynamic, where the locus over the content and instruction lie with the teacher, both teacher and student have stakes for success. When a student is able to take up the instruction in the storyline of the conference and demonstrate understanding through discursive acts, the teacher has, for all intents and purposes, been successful. If a student continues to struggle and is not able to demonstrate the perlocutionary effects of the teacher’s instruction, the teacher must continue to modify and differentiate instruction.

While Mr. Branson was explicit in his “rules of how to play the game” of academic writing in schools—demonstrated through his instructional discourse and modeling, he balanced this positioning as *the* expert, by positioning himself as a coach, through his attunement to students’ social-emotional needs and acknowledgment of the effort students needed and expended to get to the “next level” of writing in academic settings. I define “coach” for these purposes, as a supportive teacher who “conveyed the importance of strong relationships to create an environment that supported optimal skill development” (Nasir & Cooks, 2009, p.49). In conferences, Mr. Branson demonstrated his coach positioning through his use of semiotic moves in his guided practice, specific language of coaching, differentiation of his instruction, affirmations, and his explicit attention to the social emotional dimension of writing through the building of relationships. Through this positioning, he signaled to the students that they were in the conference together and he was there to support understanding and encourage the student to “try hard” and “practice” to get to the “next level.”

4.3.2.1 Semiotic moves

Mr. Branson’s use of semiotic moves, specifically his physical positioning and use of time, brokered understanding of writing practices for his students. These moves provided coaching support through his proximity for support and immediate direction while students were practicing academic writing. Mr. Branson alternated between meeting with students at their desks and having them sit next to him at a table. In both instances, he pulled up a chair and sat side-by-side with them, their writing notebook placed in between them. This physical positioning indicated a less-threatening, collaborative stance. By sitting next to the student, he mitigated some of the power differential and helped broker a more collegial writing space. Mr. Branson would stay next to the students as long as they needed to process his instruction—providing

students continued, coaching support while they reasoned and made sense of the conference storyline. This coaching support also afforded a space for students to share their questions and thinking with Mr. Branson during this guided practice, to “go out on the skinny branch,” and engage in the vulnerable space of writing in academic settings.

4.3.2.2 Language of coaching

Throughout the conference, Mr. Branson also employed various discourse markers to indicate his positioning as the coach to his students. For example, Mr. Branson would often use the phrase, “You can do it, I can show you” to signal his support for his students—that he would be working with them and had a shared ownership for their success in writing. Akin to a coach-athlete relationship, Mr. Branson also used the discourse markers, “try” and “practice” to position writing as a challenging, evolving endeavor where students had a responsibility to exert the effort needed to practice often and take risks by trying new or difficult tasks, in order to improve and get to the “next level” of their understanding of academic writing. In addition, he placed an explicit emphasis on writing as “an important job” and to “work hard” during the independent work time. These discourse markers identified Mr. Branson’s position as coach by setting an expectation that every student would be actively engaged in writing “practice.”

An example of this language is present in a conference between Mr. Branson and Neveah. After reading aloud Neveah’s opinion piece about why basketball was the best sport, Mr. Branson identified his teaching point; re-mediating an earlier mini-lesson on supporting details (Gutierrez, 2009). He brought her to his anchor chart which was posted on the bulletin board in the back of the classroom and drew attention to his use of distinct supporting details in his model. He identified to Neveah the model for writing in this genre, but with the discourse marker

“you,” he signaled to Neveah it is now her responsibility to try and replicate this expert practice in her own writing. He showed her how to play the game and she now has to play.

Mr. B.: So basically what we want to do in here, **you** can think to yourself, when **you’re** playing basketball with those new friends, what’s going on? Imagine in **your** mind so we can pick specific stuff. **You** can take a second. Take a second.

Mr. Branson uses the word “you” to signal to Neveah his support in her understanding of distinct supporting details and in how she would take up this rhetorical genre feature in her own work. He also employs a coaching move, as noted earlier in this section—he provides guided practice through his use of time in letting Neveah process his instruction while he remained close by for any clarification or support.

They returned to the back table to continue their conference. Neveah wrote as Mr. Branson remained next to her. She finished her writing and looked to Mr. Branson for her next moves and he responded,

That’s what I’m talking about. See what **you** did just there? You pictured in your mind and **you** started pulling out all of this specific stuff. Today I want **you** to do that, and every day when **you** write essays. **You** imagine and you pull out the specifics. Does that make sense? Fantastic job, keep it up.

As Mr. Branson closed his conference with Neveah, he affirmed her work, giving her credit for practicing and implementing his instruction, “See what you just did there? You. . .started pulling out all of the specific stuff.” He then continued, directing her to do this “every day when you write essays—imagine and pull out the specifics.” This reinforced his stance of writing

being an activity that required daily practice with particular routines and moves and affirmed her efforts of trying out his instruction with the response, “Fantastic job, keep it up.”

Mr. Branson also used his “language of coaching” to encourage students to take a personal responsibility and develop their “next level” of writing understanding. Patrick, a fifth grader, was beginning to write his informational piece when Mr. Branson stopped by to confer with him. Prior to this conference, Mr. Branson had taught a strategy of using different chapters organized by genre features to share information with the “reader.” For example, he instructed his students to have one chapter “comparing and contrasting” topics, and another on “profiling a character.” During this conference, Mr. Branson ascertained that Patrick had not done the prerequisite planning of “boxes and bullets” for his opinion piece. He then directed Patrick to his mentor text on the back wall and highlighted his own use of rhetorical features and writing processes which Patrick needed take up in his own writing.

Mr. B.: See, now you’re just jumping right into your reasons. Pat, we are missing two really big steps. Your boxes and bullets and introduction. The only reason I bring it up, this is not wrong, this is terrific. You got some really good writing here. Here is what I am going to tell you. There is a difference between good and great essays. Great essays have introductions. **So, it’s your choice.** If you want to write a great essay you can use an introduction...**I want to help you take this to the “next level,”** what **next-level** writers do.

Mr. Branson affirmed Patrick’s work, yet encouraged Patrick to take responsibility for his own writing to get it to the “next level,” indicated through the statement, “So, it’s your choice.” Through Mr. Branson’s identification of what “great writers do” in their own writing, and then framing his instruction for Patrick’s next steps as a “choice,” Mr. Branson presented Patrick

with the responsibility in deciding his next course of action, reinforcing Mr. Branson's positioning as coach. He identified how Patrick could take his writing to the "next level," encouraged Patrick to take up particular practices, but ultimately provided Patrick the choice in what writing practices he would take up to develop his practice, a move away from the directive, expert approach.

4.3.2.3 Differentiated discourse

Another way Mr. Branson demonstrated care for his students was through differentiation in his instruction to meet individual student's needs. During conferences, Mr. Branson would read aloud student work and then decide, somewhat instantaneously, what one area of instruction the student most needed feedback on to best support their academic writing understanding and continued engagement with the task. However, many times mid-conference, Mr. Branson would shift the instructional storyline he had established, to respond and attend to a different area of need to support the student. This divergence from his often directive, explicit approach with students all engaged in similar processes of genre writing, demonstrated Mr. Branson's responsive, attentiveness to his students needs as learners and people.

In an example of this responsive instruction, during the final two days of the opinion unit, with the Author's Celebration fast approaching, Mr. Branson met with Nyomi and Osman at a table in the classroom to help support them in completing their writing. He first asked Nyomi about how her opinion piece was coming along. She responded that she was having trouble writing, because of her very personal topic—her sister passing away. Mr. Branson quickly pivoted his instructional storyline he had been engaged in, supporting students in finishing their opinion pieces, and seemingly made a game-time decision to have Nyomi retrieve a topic from a selection of prompts he kept in a bowl in the front of the room and write an opinion from those

choices. Mr. Branson’s responsiveness to Nyomi was demonstrated through his direction for her to switch topics given where she was in the writing process, the gravity of her topic and the time constraints of the end of the unit—preventing that topic its’ due diligence and crucial teacher support.

During this same conference session, Mr. Branson also differentiated instruction for Osman. Osman became increasingly discouraged in trying to revise and complete his opinion piece, as evidenced by his lack of writing and his physical stance—slumped down in his chair. After multiple renegotiations of his instructional storyline, Mr. Branson abandoned his instruction on crafting conclusions and instead, asked Osman to finish out the writing time working on a task he could finish and find success with—practicing his handwriting.

Through his renegotiation of the storyline and differentiating his instruction to support diverse students’ needs can all be seen as attempts to operate within each students’ zone of proximal development and provide personalized instruction to best support students’ engagement with the demanding task of academic writing.

4.3.2.4 Affirmations

Mr. Branson employed affirmations across his conference storyline when students appropriated the desired genre and language conventions from his instruction. Every conference storyline began with affirmations: checking in with the student on how they were doing and then praising the student for their writing or for “working hard” on their writing; highlighting places of appropriation from his mini-lesson or past conference instruction. He would then engage in one teaching moment, i.e., one writing practice he wanted the student to work on during their guided work or independent time. He concluded his instructional time with more affirmations and encouragement for the student to complete the writing task. For example, in a conference

with Osman, Osman was lacking confidence in his writing and said, “I’m not good at introduction and reasons,” to which Mr. Branson replied, “I disagree; I think you are **good**. What I’m looking at here is really **good** stuff.”

In addition, during a conference with Neveah, as he read over her work, he kept providing affirmations to praise her appropriation in her writing,

You can play basketball with your friends and brothers and sisters,’ **good**. Reason two. ‘Another reason is you can have cool team and cool people in basketball.’ Okay, **good**. You can have cool team and cool people. . .basketball can be awesome. **Good**. It looks **good**, it looks **good**.”

This use of affirmations in his storyline positioned him as the coach through his ability to ascertain and evaluate when a student was engaging in “good” work, signaling to the student correct appropriation of the academic genre, while also demonstrating Mr. Branson’s understanding of the affective dimension of writing and the need to build a sense of competency with and for his students. In identifying a student as competent through affirmations, the student would be more confident and apt to take up the instructional content. Then, in closing with affirmations, he provided a can-do, motivation for students to engage with their writing. While the student needed to revise content or employ new writing practices, in ending with an affirmation, the student could feel potential encouragement of continued coaching to support engagement in the difficult task.

4.3.2.5 Building relationships

There were also other social emotional dimensions across much of Mr. Branson’s discourse in the conference. He consistently attended to his students’ personal needs alongside their

instructional needs through his use of semiotic moves in guided practice, his employment of a “coaching language” to broker understanding and encourage personal responsibility and uptake of academic writing, affirmations, and two other moves which I focus on in this section: questioning the student about how they were doing emotionally, and attending to possible feelings for some students around remediation. His attention to the social and emotional dimension of learning to write demonstrated care to students, thus creating a supportive space for student learning.

4.3.2.6 Checking in

Mr. Branson spent instructional time at the beginning of conferences with students he met with frequently, to solicit students’ response about how they were feeling and doing. This attunement to the social emotional development of his students was especially evident in an example when Mr. Branson was speaking to Osman. Throughout all of the conferences, Osman demonstrated self-doubt and reluctance in writing through his body language and talk, and Mr. Branson consistently worked to counteract that self-doubt and reluctance. For example, on day three, Mr. Branson had Osman sitting at a back table with three other students. He noticed Osman had his head down on his arms and was not writing. Mr. Branson turned his attention to Osman:

Mr. B.: Okay, **homeboy, what’s going on?** Because your body is telling me that you’re frustrated. Can you communicate to me what you need help with? Are you struggling?

Osman: (responding quietly, with his head still on his arms) Like...maybe, it is everything. Like I’m not good at introductions and reasons, and...(trailing off, not finishing his sentence).

Mr. B.: Okay, well, I disagree. I think you are good because what I am looking at right now is some really good stuff. All you have to do is make it look like this (shows Osman an example of his own writing as a mentor text).

In this example, Mr. Branson began the conference by trying to understand his students' emotional state and academic struggles. He demonstrated genuine concern by using the familiar, relational term "homeboy," a move he would use with many of his students—calling them by a term of endearment. In so doing, he fostered their interpersonal relationship and drew students back into the writing work and thus, the storyline of the conference.

4.3.2.7 Getting help

Mr. Branson also demonstrated care for his students through his anticipation, whether correctly or not, of students' stigma about the amount of help they received. In an opinion conference with Osman, Mr. Branson had completed his mini-lesson and instructed students to self-select a seat to begin writing. All students could self-select except for a group of 5, which he asked to have a seat at a table in the back of the room. Mr. Branson began his conference time with another student and then transitioned to the back table with Osman. As he pulled up his chair alongside Osman, he began his predictable routine of reading Osman's work aloud and responded, "This is good!" He then looked up and noticed Osman had not been writing and seemed physically withdrawn, as demonstrated through his slumped shoulders and downcast gaze. He questioned, "Your face is saying you're frustrated. **Are you upset because you are in this group?**" This attunement to Osman's non-verbal body language, signaled Mr. Branson's awareness of his student's feelings and demonstrated to Osman his care for him as a person.

In another conference, Neveah approached Mr. Branson to receive feedback and direction on her latest draft of her opinion piece. As he read her work aloud, Mr. Branson took his pencil

and began making notations on her piece. As he wrote, he told her to not be upset because he was editing her paper by writing on it. “**Don't think just because I mark on it and stuff, that it's wrong**, we're just trying to make it better and better and better. This is good work, okay? Don't worry, this is good work, we're just trying to get better and better and better.” Although the students did not signal their own negative associations with their experience of remediation, Mr. Branson’s anticipation of and responsiveness to their potential feelings of being stigmatized as struggling writers demonstrated care.

Through discursive acts that solicited and responded to the social and emotional dimensions of learning to write, Mr. Branson made connections with his students, linking academic and social worlds. By building these relationships, he offered the social emotional support that these writers needed to meet the rigorous expectations.

4.4 POSITIONING AS WRITERS

As Mr. Branson took up positions of a coach and writing expert, he, in turn, positioned his students in two ways, as novices—practicing writers who required Mr. Branson’s individualized instruction to engage in writing and participate in the academic writing community, and as writers—students who could take up his instruction and employ the rhetorical decision-making skills and writing processes needed to write in academic genres in their own text. In this section, I show how due to the proportion of instructional time Mr. Branson spent with a selected group of students, his language usage within the conference, and the directive, explicit nature of the instruction—he positioned many of his students as novices, who needed directed support to be able to “play the game” of writing in academic settings. At the same time, however, Mr. Branson positioned students as writers. He demonstrated this positioning through his vocalized expectation of every student writing and their capability of becoming a “strong

writer” by affirming appropriations, “reminding” students about what they knew (but were not consistently demonstrating in their writing), taking up students’ language and valuing students’ ideas in his own instructional storyline, and by providing the students choice in the content of their writing as “knowers” of their world and, sometimes, choice in what writing practices they would engage in to achieve writing at the “next level.” By positioning students as writers, Mr. Branson elevated student status through acknowledging their growing competencies. I argue that Mr. Branson’s moves to position students as writers helped to mitigate the potentially negative impact of particular students’ positioning as novices on students’ self-efficacy and supported all students in their development of an identity as a writer in the academic setting of the classroom.

4.4.1 *Remediation for novices*

Mr. Branson conferred with a selected group of 6 students, individually and in a small group, far more than any number of other students in the class due to their need for additional support. Thus, the language of instruction in the conferences for these selected students included many references to previous mini-lessons in which he remediated the content. For example, throughout a conference with Neveah, the content of Mr. Branson’s instructional storyline was about supporting details. He named the genre feature with both academic and colloquial language, he provided an explicit definition, he gave examples both anecdotally through oral storytelling and also through his own modeled writing, and even used gestures to physically demonstrate how details support the opinion writing. This repeated reference to one genre feature indicated Neveah was having difficulty exhibiting this understanding in her own writing, necessitating multiple instructional moves and thus positioning her as a novice writer.

In connection to the remediation of the mini-lesson instruction throughout one of the opinion conferences, Mr. Branson also repeatedly requested students to practice and revise the

same, one genre feature in their own writing. For example, Osman was guided to change pronoun usage in his piece from “you” to “I” in two conferences and Neveah had three conferences about differentiating between her supporting details. Again, the repetitive nature of his writing conference storyline demonstrated a focused pedagogy for students who were exhibiting difficulty in taking up the writing practices and required multiple exposures to instruction.

Finally, students were positioned as novice, practicing writers, through Mr. Branson’s identification of himself as the expert writer by telling many of his students, not just the selected group he met with frequently, that he could show them how to revise and strengthen their writing and in providing examples through anecdotes or physical models of his writing. Students needed to follow a prescriptive expository structure with an introduction, thesis, three distinct supporting details, and a conclusion to demonstrate competency. When students did not adhere to this structure in their own writing, Mr. Branson would tell students verbally “I can show you” and proceed to talk through an example or he would show students a model of his writing and point out places in his writing that exemplified the instructional feature. This practice positioned the student as a novice and the teacher as the expert. The frequency, duration, and re-teaching of the writing conference positioned his students as novices and indicated the students’ reliance on Mr. Branson for academic support and success.

4.4.2 *Affirmations of performance*

Mr. Branson also positioned students as writers, “knowers” of how to engage in the academic writing community in a number of ways. He frequently vocalized his expectations of every student being capable to write at the “next level” and encouraged them to work hard to achieve this expectation. He also affirmed students’ appropriation of his instructional storyline, telling

students specific pieces of their writing were “so good” or “this is so money.” Next, he used the discourse maker, “remember” in his instruction, “reminding” students about what they knew (but were not consistently demonstrating in their writing) signaling a previous understanding about a feature of the writing instruction. Mr. Branson also took up students’ language and valued students’ ideas in his own instructional storyline, indicating the students’ rhetorical competence. Finally, he provided the students choice in the content of their writing, positioning students as “knowers” of their world and in some cases, choice over what writing practices they would engage in to take their own writing to the “next level.” This positioning move diminished Mr. Branson’s expert authority and positioned students as the “knowers” over their own rhetorical decision-making in their writing.

4.4.2.1 Affirmations of appropriations.

Mr. Branson identified students as writers through the explicit highlighting of the student’s appropriation of his instructional storyline by naming the writing practices the students employed in their own writing. In a conference with Khalid, a fifth grader, Mr. Branson reads Khalid’s informational essay. As he reads, he affirms and names Khalid’s appropriation of multiple genre features: the importance of planning, big topics and subtopics, citing sources, elaboration, and the referring to mentor charts to support writing.

Can I take a look at your plan? Excellent. Now big topic, “Daggers”. . .and you’ll put an index. **Awesome plan, dude.** . . You’ve got a big topic, and you’ve got some small sub-topics. . .Fantastic. Oooh and **I see an “according to,” that makes me so happy.** So you’re doing lots of good stuff here, you’re using your information from a source to support your text. “The Sudanese dagger has another name, called the Jimbaya.” That’s a

fact... You are **doing lots of good stuff from our elaboration** chart. Excellent job, Khalid.

As Mr. Branson reads Khalid's writing, he responds with affirmations connected to specific rhetorical moves and writing processes Khalid appropriated from earlier instruction. This discursive move reinforced Mr. Branson's instruction by signaling to Khalid that he had engaged in "good" writing practices and also positioned Khalid as a writer. He appropriated Mr. Branson's instruction, in multiple ways through writing—thus, eliciting a positive response from Mr. Branson, demonstrating Khalid's success in relaying intended message to his desired audience.

4.4.2.2 Remember

As seen in the example above, as students took up Mr. Branson's instructional storyline in their own practice, Mr. Branson in turn positioned them as capable and knowledgeable. However, when a student did not take up the instructional storyline and did not exhibit writing understanding in their own prose, Mr. Branson would also use the word "remember." In an example with Neveah, he read her writing aloud and then responded, "Now **remember** the word is just, "kind," it's actually not "kindful," but that is just a really small thing." Later he added, "This is excellent, just remember at the end of the sentence, we put a period." Mr. Branson's use of "remember" with Neveah quickly corrected her language use and need for conventions in a manner that positioned her as a knower, that she had previously been taught these features, but had an oversight.

In another conference with Tommy, a fifth grader, he began, "Tommy, you got a plan bro? Like a boxes and bullets?" Tommy responded that he did and Mr. Branson continued, "Because **remember** if we are heading to Albuquerque, I need a road map!" Mr. Branson used

“remember” paired with the analogy of needing a road map to signal to Tommy the need for planning his essay prior to writing. The use of “remember” in both cases implied the student obtained previously taught information, but forgot to recall this knowledge in practice, and positioned the student as competent “knower” of writing.

4.4.3 *Student language in teacher talk*

Mr. Branson also positioned his students as knowers with his use of student language because of its rhetorical effectiveness within his instruction. When he first sat down with a student for a conference, he read the student’s work aloud, responding as a reader (e.g., nodding, smiling, questioning, and laughing) at humorous excerpts. In one illustration of this practice, Mr. Branson was reading Osman’s draft where Osman included the line, “in a roadside ditch.” This was in reference to acknowledgement of the audience when crafting strong reasons in his opinion piece. Mr. Branson laughed out loud and then proceeded to use “in a roadside ditch” when teaching Osman about pronoun usage, selecting “I” instead of “you” when writing an opinion.

Boom! This is money, dude. I just want to make one suggestion to make it even more money. What I think is when you say “you” every time. You can say “I”. Because you know it brings it back to what is real life, your life. You don't want to pressure your reader; if your reader feels pressured he's going to **throw your essay in a roadside ditch.**

This move validated the Osman’s use of language and positioned him, as someone who could begin to be innovative or adept with language—language worth taking up even by the expert in the classroom.

4.4.4 *Student choice*

Finally, Mr. Branson positioned students as knowers about their own worlds in their ability to choose what topic they would write about in their essays. While Mr. Branson provided the instruction around the genre form and models of his own opinion writing for his students, the students were able to select what opinion and informational topic they would like to write about. Students were also occasionally afforded choice over what writing practices they would engage in to take their own writing to the “next level.” In many of the conferences, Mr. Branson would provide different action items for students to act upon, to take their writing to the “next level.” After his suggestions, he would say a variation of the phrase, “You don’t have to do this, but if you want to take your writing to the next level, it’s up to you.” This positioning moved diminished Mr. Branson’s expert authority and positioned students as the “knower” over their own rhetorical decision-making in their writing. Through these discursive moves, students made choices of about what was being said and in some ways, how it was being said, giving them a small amount of autonomy and authority within the school setting, as a writer.

In sum, teacher discourse positions students within the writing conference and thus, constructs student identity, especially the identity of emergent writers. “How one is viewed determines his or her identity. Identity is temporary, changeable, and unstable,” in identifying how identity is constructed through positioning and teacher interactions, we can move away from “static and essentialist approaches” of engagement (Yamakawa, Forman, & Ansell, 2005, p.20). While students are aware of their novice positioning through their frequency, duration, and remediation of their conferencing, Mr. Branson’s positioning his students as writers, as the authority in the classroom, afforded students the support to engage in higher-order, more

challenging writing tasks and supports the mindset that they are in fact legitimate participants within this academic community.

4.5 STUDENT UNDERSTANDING AND POSITIONING

Student interviews provided a window into students' appropriation of writing practices across the units of study and thus, their identities as academic writers in this context. Through the interviews, students articulated their conceptualization of expository writing genres, identifying their rhetorical decision-making processes, and their awareness of the audiences and purposes for writing in this academic genre. Students also identified and appropriated features of Mr. Branson's instructional storyline, as well as features they employed in their own writing—sharing their thoughts about specific texts they wrote or feelings they had about writing or being a writer. These three findings: the naming of the features, processes, and purposes of expository writing; the identification and appropriation of particular attributes of Mr. Branson's storyline; and in the articulation of their own writing and feelings about writing—identified students' understandings of writing academic genres, and potentially, signaled the development of their own identities as writers in the school settings.

4.5.1 *Rhetorical choices and thinking processes*

Throughout this section, I provide transcripts from student interviews to represent the themes that emerged across students' discourse. During the interview, students defined expository genres through the naming of rhetorical features of the genre, their writing processes, use of language conventions, and strategies they used to engage in academic writing. In naming features of expository writing and articulating their process and strategy use, students made visible their understandings of expository writing. Students in Mr. Branson's class consistently

named writing processes and defined features of expository genres—providing examples of these features in their own writing. For example, students spoke frequently about the use of a “zinger” in their introduction and the use of “boxes and bullets” to plan and structure their writing. In the example below, Melisa shared her understanding and writing of the opinion genre. She first highlighted her perceived purposes for opinion essays, and then shared the processes to enact when writing an essay.

[I think] essays, especially opinion essays, I get to share my opinion with other people that might think differently from me and I might prove them wrong. I don't want to be like that but show them the truth.

The first thing you should do is plan and generate ideas that are important to you. Then you do boxes and bullets and start with a first draft. A really rough draft, you want to get a paragraph down, there should be at least five indents in each essay, like introductions, reason one, reason two, reason three, There should always be paragraphs and more “for examples,”—why you think this and why you think that.

Melisa understood opinion essays as a vehicle for her to share her thoughts and her “truth” with an audience who may have differing points of view. She explained the writing processes of opinion writing (which aligned to Mr. Branson’s instruction discourse) as planning, drafting, revising, and indenting. Melisa also explained the rhetorical genre features of opinion writing, (i.e., thesis statement, supporting details, or “reasons” and the importance of elaboration, and “for example”). She continued, sharing a piece of her own opinion writing on why there should be funding to research a meteor on a path to collide with Earth, to further support her explanation of writing in this genre.

(Reading her text aloud) Many people think that we shouldn't spend money trying to figure out about the meteor. They would spend it on food, rent, clothes and other things. I understand those things are important, most of them; however, what's more important? Food or staying alive? What I'm trying to say is if another meteor comes, we won't be able to stop it and were all going to die.

In her writing, Melisa demonstrated her understanding of the opinion genre through her use of rhetorical moves. For example, in her first statement, "Many people think that we shouldn't spend money trying to figure out about the meteor," Melisa began with a counter-argument to support her opinion—that money should be spent on research so that everyone will be able to stay alive. Her explanation and the example of her own writing points to Melisa's understanding of writing in this academic genre and her identification as a writer.

Rohan shared that his understanding of the purposes for writing informational essays, "because you actually get to learning something, like you get to teach people." In the example below, he identifies his use of text features used for writing in this genre (e.g., forecasting, pros and cons, elaborating). Rohan then concludes with his writing processes for information essays, noting the audience and purpose throughout his discourse.

For information, you actually get to learn something like you get to teach people what you learned. You can draw diagrams and it's not really just the words it's diagrams and charts and stuff.

Like forecasting, in one of your reasons [supporting details] you talk about another reason but you don't say much about it, it is just a little hint. And I learned about pros and cons, like the good and bad things about it. [Pros and cons are] like you are trying to convince someone that something is really good, you can say the good things about it.

Then they'll know it's good, and then you could say the bad things so they'll know what's bad, so it is easier for them to choose. All the things, those are elaborating things, to help you say more.

Good writers plan, draft and go through the writing process. You generate ideas, plan, draft, revise, edit and then do a clean copy. First, they want to elaborate because if they just said the reasons people would get bored. It is important to write about something that people actually care about.

Rohan cited a number of rhetorical genre features (e.g., forecasting, pros and cons, elaborating) and connected these rhetorical genre features to writing processes. His consideration of the audience and purpose was woven throughout his discourse providing a reason for his particular feature choice (e.g., you don't want "people to get bored"). Rohan's discourse demonstrated his understanding and employment of the storyline of Mr. Branson's instruction.

As demonstrated in the examples above, how students took up rhetorical genre features and writing processes in their writing talk was characterized in similar and different ways. Both Melisa and Rohan identified processes for writing (e.g., planning, drafting, and generating ideas) and made frequent connections to audience and purpose. In her commentary about rhetorical features, Melisa identified a "zinger," as well as a counter argument in her introduction, while Rohan identified elaboration, forecasting and "pros and cons." Through this discourse, the students made visible some of their understandings of the features and processes needed for writing in these academic genres.

4.5.2 *Ventriloquation of Mr. Branson's storyline*

Students signaled their understanding and appropriation of the authoritative discourse, Mr. Branson's storyline, by referencing and explaining Mr. Branson's specific language and instruction in their interviews. Namely, students highlighted Mr. Branson's explicit focus on writing features, and processes with a consideration of an audience and purpose and his specific language use for academic genre writing (e.g., his colloquialization of the authoritative discourse).

In the example below, Tristan names a number of rhetorical features and purposes for opinion writing, even directly quoting instruction from his teacher to share his thinking of writing in this genre. Tristan explains his understanding of the purpose of opinion essays and how to compose one.

Opinion essays are easy for me because I get to write my opinion, and if it's a fact essay then I have to research and look up for books on the internet and stuff, but if it is an opinion essay then I use my own opinion. For opinion you need to just use your opinion, but you also can give evidence. Like if I said, "Chicken is good," I could say, "they make it with this," to make it sound even better to the reader and convince them that chicken is good. To convince the reader is the purpose of an opinion piece because you want to convince the reader that what you think is right. You convince a reader by giving **real life things and strong reasons**. If you are writing a box and bullets, your thesis is "Chicken is good," but you have to write **bullets and they have to be strong**.

Tristan described and supported his definition of opinion writing by providing many rhetorical features present in Mr. Branson's instructional storyline. He stated the need for

evidence to “convince the reader,” drawing attention to rhetorical features of evidence and supporting arguments and an awareness of the audience and purpose. Tristan also provided examples to explain his own discourse, “Like if I said,” a rhetorical move he learned from writing in Mr. Branson’s classroom. He also identified another feature of Mr. Branson’s instructional storyline, quoting directly from Mr. Branson’s instruction, “You convince a reader by giving real life things and strong reasons” and “You have to write bullets and they have to be strong.”

Students also appropriated Mr. Branson’s instruction and his colloquialized discourse in their recognition of potential audiences and purposes for their writing. Through their use of the colloquialized language “juicy,” “killer,” and “catchy,” students spoke to the importance of making their essays cohesive, clear, and interesting through organization and language choice. Additionally, students highlighted their consideration of audience with their comments about audience interest and engagement. For example, “You have to have a good thesis, so that your reader won’t be bored” or “if your argument doesn’t make sense, your reader will think your opinion is fake and throw [it] in the garbage.” The language and concepts the students characterized in their responses were direct appropriations of Mr. Branson’s instructional discourse.

Another example of student appropriation of Mr. Branson’s storyline is visible in interviews from Patrick and Tommy. Patrick and Tommy recalled specific strategies and instruction on features and audience and purpose from Mr. Branson. Patrick notes the use of boxes and bullets for planning and the importance of organization for clarity for the reader.

Patrick: **Mr. Branson taught me how to do boxes and bullets** so I can plan out my writing and drafting before writing my final draft. If I didn't learn these things, then my sentences and stories **wouldn't make sense for the reader.**

Tommy also highlights Mr. Branson's attention to audience by identifying the use of "voice" in his writing to make a "good essay" and need for appropriate language conventions to make "sense for the reader."

Tommy: **Mr. Branson read this the part he thought was funny** and said what makes essays good is to **add voice**. This is voice—that's what makes a good essay. He said good writers use capitals and their punctuation. If there was no periods, it would be like reading, reading, reading and **you're out of breath search for a period.**

In this next example, Tyler shares his understanding of elaboration, a feature Mr. Branson often highlighted in his instruction. As Tyler define elaboration, he then quotes Mr. Branson's colloquialized discourse with, "a killer essay" and draws attention to the audience and purpose, quoting Mr. Branson again, "the reader [needs] to believe you and if they don't, [they'll] be like, "this is fake and throw it in the garbage."

Tyler: Elaboration is like it's not just spitting words on paper, it's like writing what you know, and just getting the floodgates out and writing as much as you know. But after you're done with that, that's when revising and editing [comes in]. Because you take all of the revising and editing and you say, does this make sense or not? If it does make sense, you fix it all up then it turns out to be a really **killer essay** ... You need your reader

to believe you if they don't they're going to be like, "this is fake" and **throw it in the garbage.**

Ibrahim also quotes Mr. Branson's instructional discourse, when he explains his understanding of the need for a good thesis, [an introduction needs to be] "juicy" so that the reader "won't get bored." The audiences' engagement with the writing was a frequent topic during Mr. Branson's instruction, and thus, not a surprising focus in Ibrahim's interview.

Ibrahim: They have a good thesis, a good introduction one that is really **juicy** so that the **reader won't get bored.**

Across these examples, students highlighted specific practices and guidance from Mr. Branson, for example, practices of efficient writers and the focus on audience and purpose to improve their writing quality (Matsumura, Patthey-Chaves, Valdes, 2002). These specific practices and guidance were explicitly identified through student language and their employment of Mr. Branson's colloquialization of the authoritative discourse. Students ventriloquized Mr. Branson's colloquialized discourse, both in observations, conference discourse and interviews, which showed a strong uptake of language to describe writing practice and may be seen as students appropriating the language of schooling—supporting students' understanding and development as academic writers. Mr. Branson's colloquialization of the academic discourse provided his students access and with the students' strong uptake, one could argue and attribute that uptake, in part to the colloquialization.

4.5.3 *Being a writer*

Students communicated their participation in the learning community and development of an identity as a writer through their discourse in the interviews: identifying and discussing their

rhetorical decision-making in their own writing, through I statements (i.e., reflecting on the affective dimension of writing), and through the positioning of themselves as experts (i.e., knowledgeable about the traits of effective writing and processes for composing). Through these three dimensions, we see students identify what it means to be a writer in these academic settings.

4.5.3.1 Rhetorical decision making in their own writing

For an example of student agency in rhetorical decision-making, I provide two examples below of students' articulating their practices of expository writing. Tommy and Osman both identified their use of rhetorical genre features, processes they engaged in, the consideration of their audience, and shared their feelings of efficacy.

As his "best" piece of writing, Tommy selected an opinion piece written from a prompt from Mr. Branson. Tommy begins, stating that he did well on his, "handwriting, introduction, and sound effects," further commenting, "I really hooked the reader." His focus on the introduction and "hooking the reader" was a central feature in Mr. Branson's instruction across the year.

Tommy: I chose this one [as an example of my best writing], there was this prompt Mr. Branson gave me, "What don't you like about the playground, what would you change?" I said I would change the wood chips. I felt that I did well on my handwriting, and my introduction, sound effects. I think I really hooked the reader.

Tommy then reads his introduction.

Yeah. “Ooh, ugh, not again. This is the fourth time I get a little wood chip stuck in my shoe! Did you hear that? That’s the sound of a kid not liking wood chips in the school’s playground.” The reader might think the same, he might think, “Ugh. That’s how I sounded when I got my first wood chip stuck in my shoe.”

In reading his thesis statement, Tommy displays his understanding of rhetorical genre features and the consideration of the audience through his use of inner thinking and questioning in his introduction. After reading, he pauses, noting, “I think the reader might have a connection to his experience.” He then shares a story about his own experience with a wood chip in his shoe, demonstrating how his motivation to write stemmed from his interest in the topic.

When I got my first wood chip stuck in my shoe, it blistered. I couldn’t focus on class, I just had to tell my teacher it was an emergency...then I took off my shoe and my toe was all red. That is why I think wood chips should not be in the school playground. And I got two more reasons... I think I did well elaborating. The way I elaborate, my secret to elaborating is you get what you—like the facts, your reasons and then you do your thinking.

In this quote, Tommy noted that he “did well on elaborating.” He named the rhetorical genre move and provides an example of how he took up that move in his own writing. By using the discourse marker “you,” and “my secret,” Tommy positioned himself as writer, providing instruction to another person on how to take up these expert practices in their own writing.

Another example of agency in rhetorical decision-making was present in Osman’s interview, where he states his affinity for information essays, the purpose for information essays, his writing processes and his perseverance through the “hard part.”

I kind of like information essays, like the Seahawks one, because it gives information from what I know to other people that don't know about the topic...I feel okay [when I write expository texts], I feel like when I do the planning I kind of get stuck, it's kind of generating ideas. First, I generate ideas then I plan it. That's the hard part, but then after that I just go on. And after the planning and stuff, nothing is hard from there.

In this quote Osman relates his preference for information writing to the purposes for writing in this genre (e.g., "I like information essays because it gives people information"). He also highlights the effort needed to engage in the writing process, sharing that although he gets "stuck," generating ideas and planning help support his perseverance to write in academic settings.

I chose this [essay on the Seahawks] as my best writing because it is really organized and it gives information on one topic each time. Like players, the best players on the team and then after that it goes straight to the equipment and the field. I gave information for the players, for example what kind of position Richard Sherman is, he is a cornerback. Just some basic stuff. I also like the way I gave facts because for example the running back is Marshawn Lynch. I said, "He is the second in the NFL rushing," and I just gave a little fact.

In this example, Osman explained the example of his best writing and noted his organization within in the essay. He also brought attention to how he gave "information on one topic at a time"—a nod to Mr. Branson's instruction on strong, distinct details or "chapters" used in this genre. And although he did not explicitly name profiling and elaboration, he stated that this essay was organized and described the nature of the organization for these sections.

Tristan and Osman both demonstrated their writing identity through their identification and discussion of the rhetorical features and writing processes they employed in their writing. They “manipulated the words on the page in order to accomplish a particular kind of social work” required in the academic writing of school (Dyson, 1993, p.17) and made visible their appropriation and ventriloquation of Mr. Branson’s instructional storyline for expository writing.

4.5.3.2 I statements

Students in Mr. Branson’s class identified as being writers through their ability to define the features and processes for academic expository writing and appropriation of his instructional storyline, but also through their identification of what it means to be a writer on an individual level—reflecting on their development through the year.

In this first example, Melisa shared her feelings of the affective nature of academic writing in the school settings—frustration, effort, comparison to her peers, and then identifies her growth as a writer, highlighting her stamina in finishing her work and practicing.

Melisa: Sometimes in the beginning it was frustrating to me because I couldn’t get this done. I worked so hard on it and it just didn’t come out how I thought it would. Then I tried and tried and I finally got it. It was a hard position for me to be there. The hard part that I overcame was the frustration of not being able to do this, while other people wouldn’t have that much hard time doing it because they just got it in a snap. I also got it before other people, but it took me a while to catch on. The frustration was like I couldn’t get this done. Sometimes you just want to give up like, “Oh I can’t finish this or I’ll never finish it,” but somehow they always get it and always finish it...Writers workshop makes me feel happy like

you're proud that you're done with this, I did my best work, but I know you can improve it. I keep practicing.

With this quote Melisa illuminated the vulnerability of writing in schools and learning to write academic discourses, where within this space students' "security issues, anxieties, and self-concept" are on full display as they share their understanding of writing with their teachers and peers (Bazerman, 2001, p.185). She reflected on her writing processes, identified her difficulties, and then spoke about how she persevered. Other students also reflected on their feelings of self-efficacy through I statements and their conceptions of areas of difficulty or growth. As students spoke to what they were doing well and areas of development, they signaled their understanding of various writing practices and engaged in reflection of their practice.

Neveah: Opinion is easier for me because you are talking about something you already did...I feel like I'm the master of it.

Ibrahim: I have been practicing a bunch and I got better at elaborating and picking good reasons and not making my reasons the same.

Nyomi: I like opinion essays because all of the things are already swimming in your head. If it is an opinion essay...opinion writing is *my* thing.

As students spoke to the affective dimension of writing—the difficulties and perseverance needed to write in academic settings, through reflection of their own processes and what they did well—students identified their strengths and highlighted their competence and feelings about writing. Students also displayed their understandings and the employment of the features of genre knowledge, thus supporting ownership of writing tasks, their understanding of what it means to be an author, and their development of a writing identity in academic settings.

4.5.3.3 Advice from the expert

Throughout the interviews, students identified the complexities of writing expository texts in academic settings. Students mentioned the need for research, citing sources, using graphic organizers, word choice, text structure, and consideration of audience. During the interviews, students were also questioned on characteristics of “what good writers do?” With this question, students took on the mantle of “knower” and noted practices they deemed more important in identifying understandings of genre knowledge.

Jaheem: My first draft was **killer** and then I did some revisions... Good writers give much effort and they use all they know, and what’s in their heart to put down on the paper and their thinking, and elaboration by using “for examples.” Boxes and bullets, forecasting your reasons, using elaborations for your reasons and trying to make it **catchy**, and a conclusion. Like a little **bit catchy** with your conclusion.

Matty: Writers practice a lot! You have to **use all of your skills**, like your writing skills and if you’re going to have to read through it, so your reading skills.”

Osman: First of all you have to think about what to do and not jump to conclusions, you have to slow down and plan. I **get more strategies from my teacher** and he helps give my writing the **boost**. He gave me humor so I can get a **boost** and people want to read my essay. Writers have to work hard and not give up, try and try again. Good writers add a **zinger** and do their best reasons. Writers make a lot of drafts, lots and lots of drafts and they think through it.

Students took up positions of an expert through the naming and identification of the “expert writing practice” academic writers must engage in. In their articulations of the different facets of

expository writing, students further demonstrated their understanding of expository genre writing and thus, their identity as a writer.

Through student answers, we see students communicate their participation in the learning community and their identity development as an academic writer. In being able to identify and discuss their rhetorical decision-making in their own writing, we see how students appropriated the authoritative discourse of school—ventriloquizing Mr. Branson’s instruction and their potential agency in writing by speaking about their own work. Through “I” statements, we see students’ speak to the affective dimension of learning to write—their feelings of efficacy and identification of areas of growth. Finally, through their explanation of what “good writers do,” students position themselves as experts, assuming the identity of a writer, and thus supporting their conception of self as a participant in academic writing communities.

4.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I discussed Mr. Branson and how he brokered writing understanding for his students through a coaching approach to conferring. In summary, through the instructional storyline of his conference, Mr. Branson positioned himself as *the* expert and coach, supporting students in being able to “play the game” at the “next level” through discursive interactions in the conference, reinforcing and reteaching through his instructional storyline. He mediated opportunities to learn and become academic writers through his brokering of rhetorical tools—explicit naming, defining, and modeling of genres; his colloquialization of the authoritative discourse, and his attunement to the relational dimension of teaching. His focus on writing as an important, focused “job,” dually positioned his students as novices and writers, and also supported students in taking up “next level” practices and being able to all play the game of writing in academic genres.

Chapter 5. WRITING CONFERENCES WITH MS. YOUNG

In the previous chapter, I described how Ms. Young positioned writing as a collaborative meaning making activity—“a focused beehive.” This collaborative writing positioning was evident throughout Ms. Young’s independent work and conferencing time through her facilitation of cooperative learning and community building (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ms. Young constructed a hybrid space which privileged individual writing, as well as the promotion of collective work. With Ms. Young at the helm, leading and facilitating the writing and communication of expository genres, each student was responsible for composing their own individual piece of text, but also, as a member of the writing community, to engage with Ms. Young during conferences and serve as resources to one another.

In this chapter, I examine Ms. Young’s instructional discourse in the conference, specifically how she taught expository genre features and the rhetorical decision making needed to write in academic genres, and how she supported the negotiation and development of students’ writing identities. In the sections that follow, I first explain Ms. Young’s conference structure and pattern of discourse. I illustrate these patterns through a transcript of a conference between Ms. Young and a student she met with frequently. I then zoom into one prevalent and central attribute of her conferencing practice—questioning and detail the many ways Ms. Young used questioning to broker understanding of academic writing. Next, I shift to explain Ms. Young’s dual positioning as the most expert writer in the classroom and as a collaborator—decentralizing her position as the authority in the classroom. I then provide three examples of Ms. Young’s collaboration in conferencing and how that positioning mediated student learning of academic genres in the conference and positioned students as writers. I conclude with the students’ own

words from their culminating interviews and discuss themes across their discourse—namely how they identified attributes of expository genres, their specific appropriation of Ms. Young’s instructional storyline, and their own identification as writers.

5.1 CONFERENCE STRUCTURE: A SITE FOR COLLABORATIVE MEANING MAKING

In this section, I first detail Ms. Young’s conference structure, her pattern of discourse. There were distinct dialogic moves Ms. Young used in her conference storyline to broker understanding of academic writing practices. Specifically, Ms. Young engaged in iterations of eliciting students’ understanding through various questions, listened to the students’ responses, provided suggestions for the students next steps, affirmed some aspect of their writing or effort, and closed with a promise to return and check-in. To illustrate these patterns of discourse, I provide an example of a conference in action.

5.1.1 Part 1: Read and elicit thinking

When Ms. Young began a conference, she would crouch or sit down next to a student, and ask a question about what they were working on. Students typically responded to this question with a referent to their writing topic. As they spoke, Ms. Young would listen and nod, and then ask about reading the text aloud. In this exchange, Ms. Young offered two choices: either the student or Ms. Young could read their writing aloud. If the student read, she would lean in, attentively listening to the student read. Alternatively, if she was reading, she would read with expression, as a reader would experience the text, and would often smile. After the read-aloud, Ms. Young questioned the student about specific attributes of their writing. As the student spoke, Ms. Young would again nod and listen. This exchange of questioning and responding was often repeated a number of times in this beginning phase of the conference. During this line of questioning, Ms.

Young would not immediately provide instruction or feedback. Rather, Ms. Young would continue this line of questioning to gain a better understanding of the student's thinking, the student's understanding of the learning targets from the mini-lessons, and through the student's articulation of their writing—possibly for the students to consider their own next steps for writing.

5.1.2 *Part 2: Negotiate next steps*

After reading and some questioning, Ms. Young would listen and suggest potential next steps for their writing to progress. These next steps included the student's language and ideas gleaned from the student's text and their conversation thus far, but Ms. Young revoiced them using academic language for writing. For example in a conference with Shaniyah, Ms. Young supports her writing of an introduction paragraph for her opinion essay. She begins the conference checking in with her and proceeds to ask Shaniyah about what would go in the “box” (i.e., What is her thesis?) and then asks her about her “reasons” (i.e., supporting details).

Ms.Y.: So, take a peek, take a minute to look at your pet essay and see what your boxes are and then your theme. So Shaniyah, on your essay, what would go in this box from your pet essay?

Shaniyah: The snake would make a good classroom pet.

Ms.Y.: What would your first reason be, for you? What was the first reason that you gave?

Shaniyah: I think it would be good for, like, to study it.

The next steps would often take the form of a sentence stem—using the student’s content and ideas, but with genre specific structure or language accompanied by a modal verb (e.g., You **could** add another reason).

Ms.Y.: Okay, then the reasons, you say—you **could** say, “My first reason is you could study it for science.” . . .What is your second reason?

Shaniyah: I already have two reasons.

Ms.Y.: Oh, that’s right, okay. So, what was reason two for you? I’m seeing it here.

Shaniyah: Feeding your pet would be interesting.

Ms.Y.: Okay, you know what I was noticing about yours, Shaniyah? (Ms. Young reads Shaniyah’s piece aloud.) So I what I think what you really meant was that we could study it for science right? I think you forgot to say that. So, it would be like, “A snake would be a great pet because we could study it.” Right?. . .You have everything there.

In this example, Ms. Young questioned Shaniyah on her understanding of writing introductions for opinion essays . She took Shaniyah’s answers and content ideas to shape her instruction, thus negotiating with Shaniyah in aligning her ideas within an academic frame. As Ms. Young revoiced Shaniyah’s ideas in an academic language, she supported Shaniyah’s continued authorship of her text, while also providing Shaniyah access to the authoritative discourse of genre writing in schools.

5.1.3 *Part 3: Affirm and write*

Ms. Young then affirmed the student’s ideas or work—a statement that the student was “right on” or a comment on their ability to tackle the next step, for example in the conference Ms.

Young concluded her feedback saying to Shaniyah, “You have everything there,” letting her know she wrote the necessary elements in her essay. At the conclusion of the conference, Ms. Young frequently closed with an affirmation, e.g., “You can totally do this!” and then a phrase, like, “I will be right back to check on you”, signaling to the student the conference had ended and that they now were accountable for their independent work and needed to write.

Additionally, “I’ll be right back” also signaled a collaborative move. This comment that Ms. Young would soon return to check back in communicated to the student that they were not without support to complete the rigorous task of taking up the next moves in their writing.

5.1.4 An example of the conference structure

In this conference, Ms. Young supports Gustavo with writing a thesis statement and how to craft the rest of his opinion text. To do this, she draws on a cultural tools that are part of the writing discourse in this classroom: the graphic organizer, “Box and Bullets.” Students used the graphic organizer, “Boxes and Bullets,” to plan their opinion essays. In a large rectangle at the of the page, “the box,” students would write their thesis statement. Underneath the box, were the “bullets,” a bulleted list for three strong, distinct, supporting details (i.e., “reasons”). For an example of this cultural tool, I provide an example below from a student’s opinion essay identifying his stance on chocolate milk in schools.

Prior to this conference, Ms. Young conducted a mini-lesson on writing engaging leads (i.e., “zingers”), and forecasting sentences, which signal what is ahead in a text. Ms. Young begins the conference with a clarifying question, eliciting a response from Gustavo what his is working on and in response, Gustavo reads his work aloud. She then asked Gustavo about his next steps for writing and he shares more of his opinion essay on “the best season.”

Ms.Y.: Okay, Gustavo, what is going on here?

(Gustavo begins reading his essay on “the best season” out loud.)

Ms. Y.: So what’s your next step? What’s the first thing you write?

Gustavo: The holiday.

Ms.Y.: Ooh, does that mean you have another reason?

Gustavo: Yeah, the holiday.

After a series of questions eliciting Gustavo’s thinking and listening to Gustavo’s read his text aloud and respond, Ms. Young determines her instructional storyline—supporting Gustavo in writing an introduction. She begins this instruction again with a question to determine what Gustavo can recall from her instruction of this genre feature.

Ms.Y.: You know what I was thinking? If you’re ready to write this up, you’d be ready to write an introduction. Do you remember what goes into an introduction?

Gustavo: Yup, a zinger.

Ms.Y.: A zinger, what else?

Gustavo: Uh.

Ms.Y.: For...

Gustavo: Forecasting.

Ms.Y.: A forecasting sentence. Yup, forecast the reasons. Let’s look at your pet essay and see how you did this.

Ms. Young then negotiates her next steps for the conference storyline by recalling her previous instruction of genre elements for an introduction. Ms. Young uses the academic

language “forecasting” and then directs Gustavo to a previous piece of writing to inform his writing of the introduction on this essay.

Gustavo: (Reading his previous opinion essay on pets) “Do you wonder what would make the perfect classroom pet?”

Ms.Y.: Yeah, so how could you make an introductory sentence like that about summertime?

Gustavo: What would make the perfect summer?

Ms.Y.: Or, let’s see, your **thesis** is, “Summer is the best season.” So yeah, how about you **could** say, “Have you ever wondered what the best season of the year is?”

Gustavo: Okay.

Ms.Y.: Or you **could** say, do you have a favorite season? Well, I do...or...

Gustavo: Look. (Signals to his introduction on his current essay).

Ms.Y.: (Reading Gustavo’s current essay) “Do you have a favorite?” Yes, that is what I was saying. Do you like how that sounds?

Gustavo: Yes.

Ms. Young listens to Gustavo’s response and then revoices his language and ideas using the academic language (i.e., thesis) and sentence structure with an accompanying modal verb indicating Gustavo’s choice in which sentence to take up in his own writing. Gustavo writes his zinger, “Have you ever wondered what the best season of the year is?” and follows this with his thesis, “Summer is the best season.” Ms. Young continues her questioning, shifting her conference storyline to now focus on supporting details (i.e., reasons).

Ms.Y.: And then what would you say? Then you have to say what your box is right?

Then you would say...

Gustavo: “Summer is the best season because the teacher doesn’t give you homework.”

Ms.Y.: Okay.

(Gustavo is writing.)

Ms.Y.: Okay, so you are going to list your three reasons now, Gustavo?

(While remaining next to Gustavo, Ms. Young redirects and answers a few questions from students in the class.)

Ms.Y.: You are a writer, isn’t it cool? Okay, now you are going to write “my first reason”. You are going to write the first paragraph, right? Your first reason paragraph.

During this conference Ms. Young begins with a question and reading to understand what Gustavo is trying to say. Through the use of questioning, Ms. Young ascertains Gustavo’s understanding of how to present his ideas in this academic genre. As Ms. Young and Gustavo continue to engage in discourse to understand Gustavo’s supporting details (i.e., “reasons”), she questions Gustavo to understand his desire for the content of his details and to confirm his understanding of the genre feature that each supporting detail needed to be a distinct argument. He then articulates that one reason he loved summer was due to the lack of homework. After this exchange, Ms. Young concludes her conference with Gustavo, affirming his work and indicating he should now engage in independent practice—with the statement that she will be right back to check in with him.

Ms.Y.: (Ms. Young reading Gustavo’s writing) “So if you don’t have homework in the summer, that’s”...I like how you explain that. I would take all that time then

when you don't have homework in the summer and give an example of what you like to do. What would you like to do instead?

Gustavo: I like going to the park and...

Ms.Y.: So, I think if you put those things in this **paragraph**, that would make a strong, good **reason**, don't you?

Gustavo: (Nods)

Ms.Y.: So that is your job. I'll be back in a minute.

In this segment, Ms. Young's discourse is a balance of exploration and explicitness—highlighting academic language, genre structure, and audience and purpose while supporting student understanding and student ownership of the text. For example, in the beginning of the conference, Ms. Young did not explicitly dictate to Gustavo what to write for an introduction. Instead, she first asks questions to ascertain Gustavo's understanding of an introduction, his lead (i.e. “zinger”), and a forecasting sentence—some of the elements of an introduction.

Ms. Young then directed Gustavo to read his first piece of his opinion writing from earlier in the unit. The reading aloud of Gustavo's first piece served multiple purposes. First, in rereading his previous writing, Gustavo had a model to follow for his current writing. With this move, Ms. Young positioned Gustavo as a competent writer by using his writing as a model to emulate. Secondly, in asking Gustavo to read his past work, Ms. Young supported Gustavo's development of the skills needed to write independently—using other texts for ideas in his own writing.

In her concluding statements, Ms. Young employed academic language, while maintaining a focus on ideas. “So, I think if you put those things in this paragraph, that would make a strong, good reason, don't you?” She concluded the conference with, “I'll be back.” Signaling, two things: First, “I'll be back” indicated the end of the conference and that Gustavo was now to take

up the action of the conference storyline and elaborate on his reason. Second, “I’ll be back” signaled the collaborative nature of writing—that Ms. Young and Gustavo were in this writing task together and he is not alone as he engaged in his opinion writing. This brokering move further illuminates the interconnectivity of talk and writing to Gustavo, positioning writing as a talk-centered, collaborative meaning-making activity in the classroom. This structure was an anchor for work in collaboration. Throughout each section, I will thread her collaborative structure of reading and eliciting thinking, negotiating next steps, and affirmations to support independent writing, to identify how she positions herself, her students, and brokers writing understanding.

5.1.5 *A focus on questioning*

A central feature of Ms. Young’s collaborative conference storyline was her use of questioning. Questioning was used in varied ways as a brokering move throughout the conference storyline to support student understanding and uptake of the academic writing tasks. Questions in the beginning of the conference were most often used to establish and tailor the storyline and as a formative assessment to determine how the student was taking up instruction in their own writing. Ms. Young then used questioning to negotiate her instructional storyline to align with the student’s line of thinking about writing. As the conference continued, Ms. Young used questions that engaged students in collaborative meaning-making, determined students’ understanding for their next steps for writing, and modeled the thinking practices of a writer. In the sections that follow, I show how these brokering moves supported Ms. Young in using talk to collaborate with students in building upon the students’ primary communicative repertoires to provide next steps for taking up academic writing discourses, and decentering her authority as the writing expert in the classroom by positioning students as collaborators and knowers.

5.1.5.1 Questions to establish and tailor the instructional storyline

Ms. Young's initial questions in the conference served as a brokering move to establish her instructional storyline, with subsequent questions further tailoring her instructional storyline to meet students' needs and thus, collaborate with them. She began the conference by asking the student a "check-in" question. This first question would ask students how they were doing or what they were working on. Students responded to this question by naming the writing practices they were engaged in or by identifying areas of confusion, thus indicating the conference as a shared space for collaborative meaning-making with Ms. Young. They would tell her what they were doing and she, in turn, would become a thought partner with them. This exchange also afforded the opportunity for Ms. Young to gain a glimpse into the student's understanding of the current writing unit and focus her storyline on a particular aspect of writing, if needed. These questions established the context for the instructional storyline of the conference. After establishing the students writing goals and current challenges, Ms. Young read the text aloud. With this move, Ms. Young would first ask the student if they would like to read their work aloud or have Ms. Young read it aloud. Through these questions, she was also able to use the student's writing and their ideas as the central content for the conference discourse storyline. Both of these questions (solicitation of what the student was working on and read aloud) served as an instructional move for Ms. Young to modify or create the discourse of her instructional storyline in real-time to be able to use the language needed to support individual student uptake of the academic genres. Questions were subsequently employed throughout the conference to check for student understanding and support the development of the student's thoughts and ideas in an academic frame with academic language through collaboration with Ms. Young.

5.1.5.2 Questions to determine and direct next steps

At the conclusion of the conference, Ms. Young would use questions to determine students' understanding or feelings regarding the instructional storyline and then to point students to their next steps for writing. For example, in the conference with Iris, Ms. Young asked, "So, you got this, right?" This question is an example of understanding the student's feeling of the instructional storyline, a "check-in" with Iris—did she understand Ms. Young's instruction and would she be able to move forward with her independent writing. With another student, Destiny, a fourth grader with whom Mrs. Young often conferred, Ms. Young asked, "Can you try something like that?" Or in other instantiations of the conference, Ms. Young asked, "You are going to write that down in a little bit, right?" "That would make a strong, good reason, don't you think?" "Do you think you could do that?" or "Are you willing to rewrite this?" Dependent on student response to these types of question, Ms. Young would either ask the student to provide their next steps based on their understanding or direct students to their next steps, or if a student indicated they did not understand, she would engage in an alternative instructional storyline through by providing a different set of explanations and examples—again positioning writing as a collaborative meaning-making process.

5.1.5.3 Questions to support thinking practices of writers

Finally, Ms. Young's questioning sometimes served as a model for students to begin to develop awareness of their own writing, strategy use, and purpose. Ms. Young would often model how students could use questions to support their writing process. In the example below, during the information unit, Ms. Young had just finished a conference with Meghan and turns to address the whole class—modeling how to question their own writing.

Can I interrupt you guys for a second? Will you kind of take a look at your graphic organizer right now and see how you are doing? I think most of you are really cooking along, there. If you're finding yourself getting stuck and you are kind of daydreaming, bring your focus back to that organizer and say, "Where was I again? Oh yeah." Get back to your reading and keep going. Because once you get up...once you get through with those first two pages, there might be more information on the other pages that go in some of your first categories, right? So keep searching. Keep thinking.

In this example, Ms. Young modeled a line of questioning in an effort to redirect attention and highlight practices of academic writers—stamina and rereading. Through modeling a question she wanted students to ask themselves during writing, Ms. Young drew attention to essential habit of effective writers—reflection on their practice.

Through the use of questioning, Ms. Young assessed students' understanding and uptake of the academic writing tasks, aligned her instructional discourse to collaborate with students, provided next steps for taking up academic writing discourses, and supported the development of self-regulatory writing practices.

5.1.5.4 An example of questioning in the conference

The example below illustrates Ms. Young's varied use of questioning in the conferencing. In this conference, Iris, a fourth grader, is crafting an opinion piece in preparation for the state assessment. Previous to this writing, Ms. Young taught a mini-lesson with the learning target, "I can edit my essay draft." In preparation for the state test, Ms. Young focused much of her discourse on the language conventions and the structure of opinion pieces—thesis statement or introduction (i.e., "the box"), supporting details (i.e., "the bullets"), and a conclusion. Ms. Young begins her conference by asking Iris questions to establish and tailor her instructional storyline in

an effort to collaborate with Iris and build upon her previous understanding and meet her specific needs for support.

Ms. Y.: How about you, Iris? I'm going to check in on you. What are you working on?

Iris: I put my reasons, but should I write something else or should I just leave this?

Ms. Y.: Well, this is your introduction, right?

Iris: Mmmhmm.

Ms. Y.: So, what you need in there is, do you remember the parts of the introduction that you have to have? You start with a zinger and then what?

Iris: Reasons.

Ms. Y.: Yep. So, let's read it and see if you have all of those things. Do you want to read it or want me to?

Iris: I'll read it.

Ms. Y.: Okay.

Iris: (Reading her essay aloud) "I like going to the water park and gliding on the water.

There are two reasons why it's fun because you get to go down the waterslide and you get exercise and strength."

Ms. Y.: Excellent, so you got the zinger, you are saying what you want to do on the weekend and you have the three reasons. So, now you just start in on your first bullet. The one that says my first reason or one reason. **So, you got this, right?**

In this feedback, Ms. Young affirms Iris's appropriation of the instructional storyline by highlighting her employment of a zinger and three reasons. Ms. Young then asks, "So, you got this right?" This question is used to determine Iris's understanding of the instructional content and direct Iris's next steps for her essay.

Ms. Y.: Yes, Okay? And then you are just going to indent and write one reason why, okay? Good job.

Ms. Young concluded the conference by providing Iris with a directive for her next steps for writing and affirmed her work. This discursive move signaled the end of the conference and provided Iris with a plan for her next steps for writing.

Ms. Young used questioning in a variety of ways as a brokering move throughout the conference storyline to support student understanding and uptake of the academic writing tasks. She used questioning to establish and tailor her instructional storyline—ascertaining her students’ understanding of writing and their desired content and then aligning her instructional storyline to collaborate with her students. Through this discursive move, Ms. Young built upon the students’ ideas to further support their understanding of academic genre writing. As the conference continued, Ms. Young used questions that engaged students in collaborative meaning-making, determining students’ understanding for their next steps for writing, and modeling the thinking practices of a writer.

5.2 TEACHER POSITIONING: BROKERING WRITING EXPERTISE

In the next sections, I discuss how through the discursive practices of her instructional storyline, Ms. Young dually positioned herself as the most expert writer in the classroom, as well as decentered this authority and thus, positioned herself as a collaborator with her students. In positioning herself, Ms. Young, in turn, positioned her students as practicing writers and fellow collaborators, brokering writing understanding and reinforced learning about what it meant to be a writer.

5.2.1 *The most expert writer*

As the teacher, Ms. Young inherently possessed the authority and power in the classroom over the instruction, content, assessment, and overall management and interactions within the academic community. This positioning as the writing expert in the classroom was demonstrated throughout the conference discourse through particular discursive moves. In this section, I argue that Ms. Young positioned herself as the writing expert in three ways: through providing next steps for students to take up in their writing, her brokering of academic language, and the through the students' actions which reified her positioned as the expert and evaluator.

5.2.1.1 Next steps

At the culmination of every conference, Ms. Young provided all students with directions for the “next steps” in their writing. These next steps served as directives for the student’s impending independent work and were tailored to individual student needs from the discourse in the conference. These next steps identified Ms. Young as the expert in the classroom, both in providing directives for a course of action, but also in having a scope of where the student was in their academic writing trajectory and ascertaining the next steps that would support the students in their development. Examples of these directives were evident in every conference across every unity of study. In the opinion unit from the beginning of the school year, Ms. Young provided next steps in her conference with Gustavo to support his understanding of the structure for his writing.

Oh, in your introduction, you can **list your reasons**. “Bones are interesting because they do this, they do that, and they do that,” and **then you write the three sections**, like three reason paragraphs. You can do that. **Okay, give it a try**. Gustavo, **I think you should go**

ahead and write those boxes and bullets and see if you can come up with an introduction.

In this example, Ms. Young directed Gustavo with explicit steps, highlighting the structure of his opinion text. She concluded the conference with a course of action for Gustavo—to complete the graphic organizer.

In another example from the Northwest Coast Native American informational unit, Ms. Young was working with three students whose big topic was “masks.” Each student was crafting their individual piece, but in reading one of the student’s drafts, she realized he was copying the text—having some difficulty in translating the research into his own words. She brought the three boys together, complimented the students on all of the “really awesome information” they had found, and provided directives to the students by stating she was going to, “teach them what to do.” In this example, Ms. Young first gives the boys an affirmation for finding the needed research on their topic and also affirms their choices of what specific details they chose to add to their informational writing. She then provides the three boys a purpose for why they need to put resources in their own words and followed with directives—their next steps for writing.

That is so cool. You should totally write that. And I love the way you said that in your own words. That is so amazing. So, I mean the reason that this is so important is that when you go to middle school and stuff like that, your teachers will talk to you at length about when you get information off the Internet, you have to read it, understand it, and then you have to use it in your own words.

I’m going to require you guys to each write something from your notes, you are going to read it, cover it, and say, “What does this mean?” . . .and then you can write

the piece in your own words. Does that make sense? That's your job and you guys can totally do it. Do you think you can do it?

The students then asked Ms. Young a number of clarifying questions, she answered their solicitations and then concluded.

So you guys, this is going to be awesome when you pull this off. So **you are going to make a box and bullets. It is going to be in your own words. You're going to process in your brains,** your awesome brains, all this information that you've got. And **you can share information too,** like, "I need an idea from yours. Can I read yours?," Okay? And tell me if you need me. I think you are going to do great.

Ms. Young concluded the conference encouraging her students to take up her instructional storyline by using the graphic organizer to structure their informational writing, as well as encouraging students to work collaboratively together to make meaning and engage in the task. Ms. Young's directives or "next steps" summarized features or structures of the genre, the audience and purpose for the writing, action steps to take up the language of the genre, and provided affirmations for continued effort in the challenging work of academic writing.

5.2.1.2 Brokering academic language

During the mini-lesson and conference, Ms. Young's use of language and cultural tools highlighted her understanding of academic writing genres, and thus her expertise (Wertsch, 1998). Throughout Ms. Young's instructional discourse, she often referred to writing practices by their academic nomenclature (e.g., information and opinion genres, drafts, paragraphs, thesis statements, forecasting, elaborate, supporting details, etc.). Ms. Young would also intersperse more informal terms, for example, "reasons" or "bullets" for supporting details. As Ms. Young

introduced academic language, she would often pair the language with a definition and repeat the word throughout her instructional discourse.

You are going to take your ideas that you have collected in your notes and you are going to put them together in a paragraph and **elaborate. You are going to explain what you know.** You are not going to just copy every sentence down from your notes, and then go to the other part. . .you want to put it in your own words and be your own ideas.

In another example during a conference in the opinion unit with Meghan, Ms. Young's talk contained a high density of academic writing terms. Meghan initiated a conference with Ms. Young, approaching Ms. Young after she had just finished speaking with another group. Meghan solicits Ms. Young for support on her introduction paragraph.

Ms. Y.: What did we say your **thesis** was going to be? Something about bones are important? I think you were going to write something like, "Have you ever wondered what bones are? Do you wonder what keeps you up, what keeps you from falling down?"

Meghan responds that she has her thesis and has stated her reasons, but is still unclear about any additional information she needs to include in her introduction. Ms. Young continues,

Ms. Y.: Your **introduction**. . .you can then just start in on a **paragraph** and list three clear reasons. Then you write your three **sections** as reason **paragraphs**.

Meghan: So the intro is just pretty short, right?

Ms. Y.: It can be kinda short, yeah. And if you want to, if you have three clear sections you can list them. You can say something like, " Bones are interesting because

they do this, they do that, and they do that,” and then you write the three sections like reason paragraphs. You can do that.

This use of academic language in the writing conference provided Meghan repeated exposure to the language in the context of her own writing. Through Ms. Young’s teaching and repetition of the language for academic writing practices, she reinforced a shared discourse for academic writing. These terms were an important tool for communicating expectations and scaffolding students uptake of writing practices.

5.2.1.3 Student positioning of Ms. Young

Finally, Ms. Young’s authority was reified through classroom routines and practices. Naturally as the teacher, she orchestrated these units of study, and unsurprisingly, students positioned her as an expert. Students solicited Ms. Young for support during independent work time and to ascertain their progress of meeting the day’s learning objective. While Ms. Young fostered student collaboration, many students continued to solicit her for feedback, signaling her expertise and position as the authority in the classroom.

During independent work time many students would wait for Ms. Young to finish a conference and provide them support in their writing, bypassing feedback from their peers, and positioning Ms. Young as the “writing expert” who could provide the most generative feedback. There was also an implicit routine established in the classroom where students would solicit Ms. Young’s approval to measure or affirm their attainment of the writing objective for the day. Toward the culmination of the writing time, students would either raise their hands to “check-off” their progress or they would come and share their work with Ms. Young to call attention to their understanding of the writing task. In seeking Ms. Young’s approval, students positioned her as the authority or gatekeeper, to move forward or revisit and revise, in their writing process.

As the “most expert” writer in the classroom Ms. Young managed the instruction, content, assessment, and overall management and interactions within the academic community. Through directive actions, the brokering of academic language, and the reification of classrooms and practices, Ms. Young explicitly directed students in their writing trajectories and understandings of what it meant to be a participant in the classroom’s writing community.

5.2.2 *Decentered authority to be a collaborator*

In this next section, I discuss how Ms. Young made a departure from the more traditional authoritative role a teacher assumes and decentralized her authority in the classroom by positioning herself as a collaborator with her students. She positioned herself as a collaborator in the conference in three ways: through semiotic moves, emphasizing student choice in her instructional discourse, and the creation and facilitation of structures and scaffolds for collaborative talk. I provide examples to illustrate the nature of collaboration in the conference and through these examples, I show how with Ms. Young’s positioning as a collaborator, she “recast children’s ideas in the language of the discipline they were studying, thereby linking their worlds to the wider worlds” (Dyson, 1993, p.38) and supported their growth into “the intellectual life around them” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.88).

5.2.2.1 Semiotic moves

Throughout conferencing, Ms. Young would crouch or sit down next to students at their desk—either facing the student, but most often side-by-side. As Ms. Young conferenced with her students, she would stay beside them as they tried on the different writing tasks, which emerged from the conversations in the conference—guiding their practice and providing support as needed. With this physical positioning, students could receive immediate feedback on their writing and persevere through difficult spots to continue writing. Through semiotic moves in

guided practice, Ms. Young demonstrated her collaborative positioning, as a support to engage in writing and be a think-partner as the students attempted rigorous academic writing tasks.

5.2.2.2 Emphasizing student choice

As mentioned in a previous section, Ms. Young engaged in distinct patterns of discourse during her conferencing. As students answered her solicitations and shared their thoughts and understandings, Ms. Young would listen, providing students ample time to explain their thinking. When the student was finished, Ms. Young would use the student's ideas and recast their content within academic structures of expository genre writing—using the academic language and structure employed by the specific genre. These sentence frames were accompanied by a modal (e.g., could, might, may). The use of modals provide students choice in their content of their essay, maintaining authorship through decision making, thus positioning them as writers, and decentering Ms. Young's authority in scripting their writing. In an example of this use of modals during the conference, Ms. Young met with Destiny and discussed her introduction during the informational unit on Northwest Coast Native Americans. Ms. Young first asked Destiny what she was working on and listened to Destiny's read her text out loud. Ms. Young then engaged in a conversation, asking Destiny questions about her topic and her next moves for her paragraph, using modals to emphasize Destiny's decision-making in what academic language she would use in her essay.

Ms. Y.: Okay, Destiny, what is your big topic?

Destiny: Totem poles.

Ms. Y.: Okay, totem poles. What is your sub-topic?

Destiny: Wait, no, my big topic is carving and my sub-topic is totem poles.

Ms. Y.: Okay, so how **could** you do that? How **could** you say...how **could** you? How **could** you start it off? If you started it like this, what would it say.

Destiny: Different types of carving was important to Northwest Coast Native Americans because...because it tells a story about their lives.

Ms. Y.: Oh, that's why totem poles were important, right?

Destiny: Oh, yeah.

Ms. Y.: So you **could** say, "Carving was important to Northwest Coast Native Americans," hmm or you could say "Northwest Coast Native Americans carved many things..."

Destiny: Mmmhmm.

Ms. Y.: Including...

Destiny: Totem poles?

Ms. Y.: Mmmhmm. Something like that. **Could** you use something like that?

Destiny: Mmmhmm.

Ms. Y.: Or, "Northwest Coast Native Americans carved many things out of cedar, and one of those things was..."

Destiny: Totem poles.

Ms. Y.: Yeah. Can you try something like that? Go do it, Destiny. You are on the right track.

Through this line of questioning, Ms. Young acted as a thought partner with Destiny, taking Destiny's topics and ideas and then providing the academic frames for the genre through sentence stems. Ms. Young then offered Destiny choices in which of the sentences she would take up in her own writing. The use of the student's ideas and language paired with a modal verb

provided the student access, as a model to the authoritative discourse of academic genre writing, as well as ownership, choice, and control over what sentences they would and could use in their own writing.

5.2.2.3 Structures and scaffolds for talk

Ms. Young also decentralized her role as the authority in the classroom through her creation of structures and scaffolds to facilitate collaboration, decentering herself as the only expert of writing in the classroom. First, Ms. Young structured her curriculum and writing tasks to support students working together. Next, Ms. Young positioned writing as a social interaction, where she “encouraged active participation in learning and creating a classroom environment where all voices could be heard” (Cornelius &Herrenkohl, 2004, p.468). She urged students to work together—using each other as resources to answer questions, as an audience for one another, to make meaning of academic writing tasks. Finally, Ms. Young welcomed students to join in and contribute to individual conferences she was having with other students—further signaling to the classroom community that the conference was a collaborative space. As students engaged in collaboration with one another, Ms. Young would then facilitate their discursive interactions and move the conversation forward through questions and revoicing students, drawing attention to classmates’ sense-making and insights into the writing.

5.2.2.4 Structured curriculum

As an example of structuring her curriculum to support collaboration, Ms. Young intentionally planned for group work and collaboration through her adoption and implementation of the Northwest Coast Native American Unit. In this unit, students worked together in groups, collaboratively sharing resources, and negotiated how one another could speak and write on their individual sub-topic. Additionally, Ms. Young’s expansive view of what could constitute as an

informational piece of writing supported collaboration. Through discourse with student, she supported the negotiation of processes and structures for information academic writing. For example, Javonte and Akamai's group topic were tools and weapons the Northwest Coast Native American people used. To support her students' writing, Ms. Young decided to have these students write individual cards on each tool and weapon they researched instead of an individual essay. As the two boys wrote together, they collaborated on what research to cite and what details to include in each card. At the conclusion of this unit, Ms. Young remarked in her debriefing interview that she had never seen these two students write so much and be so excited to share, thus illuminating the potential benefits of collaborative work in the conference.

5.2.2.5 Facilitation and promotion of collaboration in group conferences

During independent writing time, Ms. Young would walk around the classroom to conference with students. While conferring individually with one student, Ms. Young would frequently invite other students, who were sitting in close proximity, to contribute their thoughts and collaborate. She facilitated this group conference through questioning, often deferring to the group, encouraging talk between students to make sense of one another's contributions. Ms. Young's instructional storyline would consist of questions and revoicing answers to keep students' focus on the writing processes for the genre, but also to facilitate students' collaborative meaning-making and response to one another to make sense of the task.

In the following example, Ms. Young conferred with a group of four students with the same opinion topic—why President Obama is a better selection for president than the candidate Romney. She initiated this conference speaking to a student, Connor, but then expanded her discourse to address the group. While speaking with the group, she employed her predictable conference structure to solicit students' understanding—using student ideas to govern and guide

the conference discussion. To begin this conference, Ms. Young checked in with Connor. She and Connor discussed his introduction of his opinion essay. She concluded her conference with Connor, asking him if he wanted to “try” her instruction of creating a box and bullet to support his organization of his introduction and as she was sharing this with him, she paused and turned to the other students sitting at his table group and addressed them. Ms. Young then engaged in a conference with three additional students, facilitating a group conference between Connor, Shaniyah, Akamai, Ashley, and herself.

Ms. Y.: Did you hear what I just said to Connor? Does that make sense? So, your introduction should say what your idea is. . . You guys are going to need to have them in your paragraph, your reason paragraph about the good laws. You are going to have to give some examples of what you think a good law is. Something that you think is a good law, somebody else might not agree with, right? Does that make sense? So does anybody know of an example of what you think a good law is that Obama does?

Shaniyah: Obama is like, he...I'm not really sure, but I think he like, like Mitt Romney, he doesn't, well, I don't know how to say this, but he like, he doesn't know what is right for us.

Ms. Y.: Obama does?

Shaniyah: Yeah.

Ms. Y.: So he cares about you, you think?

Shaniyah: He cares about America

Ms. Y.: About America? Can you give me an example?

Akamai: Like he worked for a long time to give everybody health insurance.

In the example above, Ms. Young begins the conference by first establishing the storyline of the conference by questioning them on their topic. She then directs the students to the structure and needed content (i.e., “your reason paragraph and some examples”) for their opinion piece on Obama. She then transitions to her facilitator role through her use of questions and revoicing student answers. She begins with, “Does anybody know of an example of what you think a good law is that Obama does?” and follows with a line of questioning to further understand student reasoning. For example, she asks Shaniyah a series of questions, then revoices Shaniyah’s answer, and finally, questions the group, where Akamai responds. These moves support students in constructing a collective understanding by allowing for agency in their rhetorical decision making by Ms. Young continuing to facilitate the conference.

Ms. Y.: Okay, so there’s a good specific one. So, I love what Shaniyah said, you could say in your paragraph, “President Obama works”—what did you say? Cares about?

Akamai: Gave everyone good health insurance.

Ms. Y.: He worked to give everyone good health insurance. That’s a great example. That is a really good example. Does that make sense? Connor, what were you thinking?

Connor: [What were] the laws he made?

Ms. Y.: You’re not sure what good laws he did actually make? What else do you know?

Akamai: Taking troops out of Iraq.

Ms. Y.: Did you hear that? Akamai has another example. He said that um...

Akamai: He got the troops out of Iraq.

Ms. Y.: Did you hear that? Akamai has another example. He said that...(points to Akamai)

Akamai: He got the troops out of Iraq.

Connor: Is that a law though?

Ms. Y.: Well that's not exactly a law, but it's something that he did. You could put it in a different paragraph.

Ms. Young continues to facilitate the conference by questioning and redirecting students through the phrase “did you hear that?”—signaling to students to listen to one another. She also acts as a sounding board for student dissonance, as seen in the example above when Connor challenged Akamai’s statement regarding the removal of troops from Iraq being a law and what that meant for the ideas organizing their essay. Ms. Young steps in with a response that continues the conversation forward and provides a suggestion that the information can be placed, “in a different paragraph.” Through this facilitation, the students are able to continue with their collaborating and not be stymied by disagreement or confusion. In the next part of the conference, Ms. Young revoices Connor’s response and provides a suggestion to the group of how to get back on track writing about the laws, signaling the structure through the graphic organizer, “you could change your bullet,” while continuing to solicit student input and collaboration.

Ms. Y.: Okay, so that is a good reason? So you were saying, “but those things are not laws,” so maybe you could always change your bullet to be instead [if you’re working on something like laws], you could say he works to make life better for us, and then you could give examples, like he made...one of the examples could be...

Shaniyah: So he makes like...

Ms. Y.: He works to make life better for us, for example...like [Akamai] said, for example he worked to get good health insurance for everybody.

Akamai: Another I think that he said is that he would give women jobs so they can get more, um, some money.

Ms. Y.: Oh yeah that's true, he did say that, that he would help to make equal pay for equal work for women. . .So you know what? You guys have some really good ideas together here, I'm wondering are you guys trying to get the exact same boxes and bullets here?

All 4 students: Yeah.

Ms. Y.: Oh, okay, so maybe we should work on making sure those are clear. Would that help you?

Ashley: We still don't know how to write our introduction.

Ms. Y.: Oh okay.

Akamai: I think I know.

Connor: I do.

Shaniyah: First we have to see if we got all the same [idea].

Connor: Well, I'm writing [to someone], so I just [wrote] the introduction part.

Ms. Y.: Okay, read what you got.

Connor: "Do you want Obama for president? Well, I do. This is why." And then I just state my reasons.

Ms. Y.: That's good, isn't it? That's really good. "Do you want Obama to be president? Well, I do and this is why." And then boom, boom, boom. You have your three

reasons like one, he cares, he's trying to make life better for us. You said that he is not a racist, you could give examples of that. Um, what was the other one? . . .Guys, I think that's going to work, I think that's totally going to work. What do you think of Connor's introduction idea? (Students all nod) Yeah! Go team go! Everyone start writing an introduction and then launching it.

In this conference, Ms. Young affirmed her students' idea generation and paused to ask the students if they are all trying to write the same piece. When they responded affirmatively, she responded, "Okay, so maybe we should work on making those ideas clear, would that help you?" Her discourse marker "we" signaled her collaboration and mutual engagement while soliciting students if her idea would help them, placed students in the driver's seat in discerning what help they would like and if the help would be at all supportive to their learning. In the conclusion of her conference, Ms. Young affirmed Connor's response and revoiced his ideas in an academic frame for group members to then take up in their own writing. She left the students with words of encouragement and next steps for action.

5.2.2.6 Joining in

Ms. Young welcomed students to join in and contribute during individual conferences she was having with other students—further signaling to the classroom community that the conference was a collaborative space. During the Northwest Coast Native American informational unit, Meghan, a fifth grade student, initiated a conference with Ms. Young. Ms. Young was sitting at Meghan's table group supporting another student with his writing. As Meghan was working on her piece independently at her table group, she began to have some confusion with some of her research and how she could incorporate the facts into her own writing—specifically, who became chief in a tribe and how they became chief. During the conference, two students, Ashley

and Rahwa, who were sitting next to Meghan join the conference and participate in making sense of Meghan's confusion and writing.

Meghan: I have a question. It says here a group of people who believe they have a common ancestry, sometimes the ancestor was an animal spirit, but here it says, it was a human or an animal, but here I have it's a human.

Ms. Y.: Oh, interesting, yeah. I think though it kind of implies it in this text. I think somewhere in there in a different part of it, if you read the whole thing, because it talks about how in order to be a chief you have to be a noble, right? Doesn't it say that some ancestor of yours had to be a noble or chief?

Meghan: Yeah.

Ashley, who sits across from Meghan, listens to the exchange between Ms. Young and Meghan and without prompting from Ms. Young or Meghan, decides to give her input, "joining in" to the conference.

Ashley: In this sentence, it says something about the chief and the ranking. Can we put this into either place? (Referring to different paragraphs in her information draft and looks to Ms. Young).

Ms. Y.: Ooh, that's a great question. What do you think?

(Ms. Young looks up and directs this question to three of the students in the table group).

Instead of chiding Ashley for joining into the conference uninvited, Ms. Young facilitates the collaborative nature of her classroom community by affirming Ashley's response and looks to Meghan for a response with the question "What do you think?" Through this discursive move,

Ms. Young positions Ashley, Meghan, and herself as collaborators with one another engaged in making sense of Meghan's question.

Ms. Y.: She found a sentence. Show Meghan the sentence. See what you guys decide about that. Tell her what you asked me. That's an interesting question.

Ashley: In this sentence it says something about the chief and the ranking, so where do we put it?

Meghan: I think you put the part about the ranking and the chief with the chief.

Rahwa: I think...

Ms. Y.: Could you put it in...what did you think? (Ms. Young turns toward Rahwa).

Rahwa: Both things. Put the chief where it tells you about the chief.

Ms. Y.: Ah, she could put it in both. What would you...how would you say it here? (Ms. Young turns back to Meghan to answer the question).

As the conference continues, another student, Rahwa, "joins in" to the conversation, offering her thoughts on how Meghan might take up the information and answer her question with her research and writing—collaboratively making meaning of Meghan's information essay. Similarly to Ashley, Ms. Young welcomes the additional voice and validates her response by stopping her instructional storyline mid question and turning back toward Rahwa to hear her response. Thus, this discursive move values Rahwa as a participant in the conversation and an important voice in the writing community. Meghan listens to her peers and answers Ms. Young's question.

Meghan: You could say um, "In the village the chief is the highest ranking person."

Ms. Y.: Yup, because that is the most important information of a chief for sure. And then
in social rank, what could you say?

Meghan: You could say the same thing.

Ms. Y.: Yeah, you could because it is definitely related to both things.

Meghan: But does it mean that the chief is who ranks you? Or does it mean that the chief
is like the highest person there?

Ms. Y.: It means that he was the highest ranking person in the whole village...but that's a
really interesting point. Ashley, that idea is really related to both things...and it is
understanding what you guys were just talking about...understanding [how the
two subjects are] intertwined [when you are writing your essay].

Ms. Young encouraged and facilitated these collaborative interactions. As facilitator, she supported students' understanding and use of the rhetorical features and writing processes needed for writing in academic genres through the use of questions, affirmations, and re-voicing of student comments in group conferences—moving the conversation and student thinking forward to a more comprehensive and shared understanding of academic writing. Ms. Young embraced the complexity in negotiating collaboration, in privileging all voices whether in consensus or contradiction. She decentered her authority by positioning students as experts to one another, acting as the communicative conduit to further support student choice and agency in the writing process.

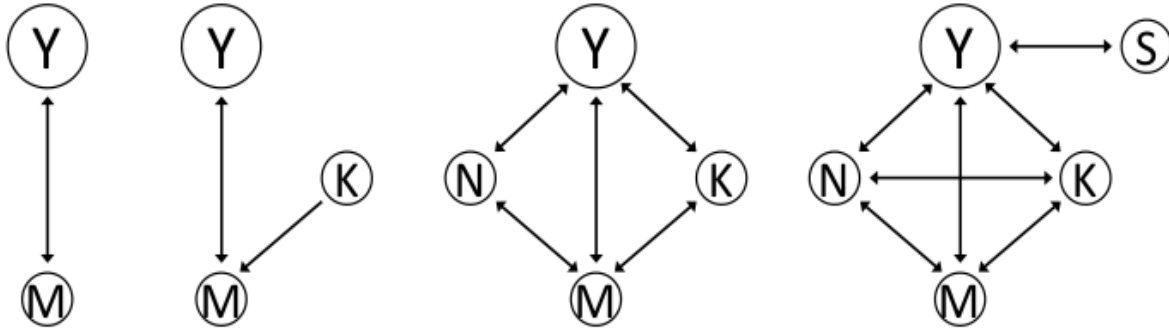


Figure 5.1. Conference structure for group conferring

5.3 POSITIONING AS WRITERS

As Ms. Young took up positions of a coach and writing expert, she, in turn, positioned her students in ways to support the cultivation of their rhetorical decision-making and thus, their very identities as writers in the classroom. Across the conferences, Ms. Young positioned her students as writers in two ways: with titles of expertise and through choice of their writing content during collaboration in the conference. In this section, I argue that Ms. Young’s moves to position students as writing authorities provided students opportunities to engage with the writing community in the classroom, access the authoritative discourses, and subsequently develop the rhetorical decision making skills to act on their writing decisions, interests, and choices.

5.3.1 Titles of expertise and affirmations.

Ms. Young consistently referred to her students with titles of expertise, such as “researchers,” “teachers,” “experts,” “editors,” and “writers,” throughout each unit of study positioning students as competent participants in the classroom writing community. Titles of expertise identified to students the multiple roles, purposes, and potential audiences to consider when writing and also

provided students the academic language for writing roles connected to identity. I provide two examples below of Ms. Young's employment of titles of expertise.

I want you to think about how did this help you as a **researcher**? How did this idea of taking notes in this meaningful way? How did this help you? What could this help you do with the next step you take with this research?

You have to keep in mind we are **teachers**. We are teaching these information paragraphs because we learned some stuff about the Northwest Coast Native American culture and we want to teach it to others.

These quotations are representative of how Ms. Young refers to her students with titles of expertise and connects these titles to the accompanying action related to that title. Through her discourse, Ms. Young identifies to students that researchers take notes in meaningful ways and teachers learn material and share information with others—practices and purposes for students to appropriate.

Ms. Young used a generous amount of encouraging talk, both in modeling positive self-talk for her students to take up in reflection of their own work and through affirmations to her students. For example, as Ms. Young modeled her own writing, she thought aloud to students, making her rhetorical decision-making and understanding of writing processes visible to students, and would often stop and reflect on what she had written, affirming herself with an “I did it!” or “Yes! That sounds good!” She would also affirm the students on their stamina, knowledge of writing processes, and their rhetorical decision-making. She would affirm the class, as well as students in individual conferences. In an example to the whole class, noting their knowledge of writing in expository genres, she offered these words of encouragement, “Show what you really, really actually know, because you guys know a lot!” She also provided

affirmations to students individually, “You’re so good at it, it just flows” and “Excellent, so you’ve got the zinger, you have the three reasons.”

By providing titles of expertise and affirmations for her students, Ms. Young positioned students as competent participants in the classroom writing community, while also signaling impending action for the student (e.g., researchers go and research their topic) or the purpose for their writing (e.g., to teach).

5.3.2 Student choice

As mentioned previously, Ms. Young reinforced students’ expert writing identities through choice with the selection for their writing topic content through their collaboration in the conference. Ms. Young supported student choice through her conference storylines with the use of sentence stems as scaffolds and modals—taking up the students’ ideas, providing an academic language frame, and then pairing that scaffold with modals. This move offered students choice in what and how to take up their own ideas, within academic contexts, in their own writing of academic genres.

In this conference example, within the informational unit, Ms. Young confers with Cassandra to develop her understanding of writing processes, specifically about her word choice and her connection to an audience and purpose. Prior to this conversation, Ms. Young taught a mini-lesson on how students can select pertinent research on their big topic and then use that research to craft a meaningful paragraph. Ms. Young focused on student interest and questions driving the selection of what research and information an audience would most want to read and then using their own words to relay the information. During independent work time, Ms. Young circled the classroom conferring with different students when she stopped to check in with Cassandra. She and Cassandra have a conference about her writing and the research she is citing

in her essay. As the conference is ending, Cassandra asks Ms. Young one more question about the information she is including in her paragraph and questions that may come up from a reader.

Cassandra: Um, one last question...since mine is about masks, and I put in “They use masks for ceremonial dances and stuff”...So, like you’re saying [that] to someone, and they’re like, “Why did they use it for ceremonial dances?” and then I said, “They used it for telling stories,” and then the other person who’s reading, it is like, “Well, why did they use it to tell stories?” and then I just keep writing?

Ms. Y.: **Could** you answer those questions as your write? **Could** you say, “Okay, well, why did they do ceremonies?” Okay, let me look that. (Reading Cassandra’s piece) You could write, “They do ceremonies to celebrate when someone died...and when someone was born.... They did ceremonies to celebrate when there was a lot of salmon caught that year.” **You just keep answering the whys and hows as much as you can and that’s what makes your writing interesting.**

In this example, Ms. Young offered Cassandra choice through the use of modals of how she could incorporate her research into two sentences, but also highlighted academic writing processes for Cassandra. By drawing attention to Cassandra’s use of rhetorical genre features elaboration (e.g., “you just keep answering the whys and hows as much as you can”), as well as audience and purpose (e.g., “that’s what makes your writing interesting”), Ms. Young identified Cassandra’s appropriation of instruction, positioning Cassandra as a writer. With choice, Ms. Young signaled to students they were in control of their writing and knowledgeable participants in the writing community—capable of selecting content within these academic genres.

In sum, Ms. Young's use of collaboration influenced many facets of writing life in the classroom. With Ms. Young's self-positioning as a collaborator, she, in turn, positioned students' ideas and voices as valuable contributions in the writing community and worth taking up, even by the expert through collaboration in the mini-lesson and conferences. During the mini-lesson, Ms. Young consistently solicited student ideas and feedback to take up in her own writing. Through these discursive exchanges, students received models for writing practices, as well as models for collaboration and engagement with one another. In the conference, writing was further positioned as a communicative process with Ms. Young referring to her students with titles of expertise and providing access to academic language through collaboration and choice in the uptake of feedback, thus empowering students to be positioned as the expert the classroom community.

5.4 STUDENT UNDERSTANDING AND POSITIONING

Student interviews conducted at the culmination of the study provided a window into the students' conceptualization of writing practices across the units of study. Through the interviews, students articulated their understanding of expository genres, identifying their rhetorical decision-making, writing processes, and the awareness of the audience and purposes for writing in this academic genre. Students also identified and appropriated features of Ms. Young's instructional storyline, as they spoke about their writing—sharing their thoughts about specific texts they wrote or feelings they had about writing or being a writer. These three findings: naming features, processes, and purposes for expository writing; the identification and appropriation of unique features of their teacher's discourse; and speaking about their own writing and feelings around writing—identified students' writing understandings, and signaled their developing identities as writers in academic settings.

5.4.1 *Rhetorical choices, thinking processes, and collaboration*

Students defined expository genres through the naming of rhetorical features of the genre, their writing processes, use of language conventions, and strategies they used to engage in academic writing. By naming features of expository writing and articulating their processes and strategy use, students made visible their understandings of expository writing. In answer to questions about writing in expository genres, most students emphasized various rhetorical features and processes—beginning with planning, often with the support of a graphic organizer, an introduction with a thesis, elaboration of three strong reasons or details, and a conclusion. Below, I provide representative examples from the student interviews, illustrating how students named and defined the rhetorical features and writing processes employed in expository writing genres.

Briyanna and Karlie’s answers regarding the question, “What is part of a good essay?” highlights their understanding of rhetorical features and purposes of expository writing. In this example, Briyanna notes that for writing an opinion piece, first she has to plan by figuring out her “thesis.” She then provides an example of a thesis, the counter argument, names supporting details, a conclusion and ends with citing the audience and purpose.

Briyanna: For an opinion essay, first I’d figure out what my thesis was going to be and think about my opinion on that thesis. A thesis is a main idea of the whole essay. Like your opinion on how the school is, or how safe you feel on your bus. Some people might say they feel really safe and some might say they don’t...And then three bullets, do multiple boxes and bullets so you have choice to choose from...the bullets are your little examples, like three examples...Then there is a conclusion...You need to have choices so that we can come up with our best thinking...You know it is a good paper at the end if you are agreeing with it.

Karlie explains that essays have supporting details that persuade the reader and mentioned a “zinger,” the name for an engaging lead. These features, thesis, “reasons,” and a “zinger,” were all learning targets during the expository units and central in conversations around features needed to write in this genre.

Karlie: Good essays have a clear, imaginable reasons that persuade the reader. And something catchy we call a zinger. A zinger is like...Imagine...something about the essay, like “Imagine swimming in a nice fresh pool in the summertime?”

Student responses also featured effective writing processes, which supported these practices, such as, planning, drafting, revising.

Ashley: Good writers plan and brainstorm by doing three boxes and bullets and then write your ideas there and in the end when you’re done you see which one is the best and then whisper them and if you don’t have enough to talk about then it’s not a good essay.

Javonte: Opinion writers plan what they are going to write about and then they write it. They do drafts and fix their writing and have people revise it. They have people read it and see if it is good enough. You draft to see if your ideas were good and if you want to add stuff. You have to write two to three drafts, your writing changes a lot.

Ashley and Javonte’s discourse call attention to a number of writing processes taught in Ms. Young’s writing class: that writers plan, draft, consider audience, and elaborate. Ashley specifically named the use of the graphic organizer, “boxes and bullets” to support her planning and also mentions the strategy of “whisper talking”. For this strategy, students write out three

distinct “boxes and bullets” for three essay options and then “whisper talk” through each option and see which one they can most elaborate on—selecting that topic for their essay.

In Javonte’s answer, he emphasized multiple drafts and revisions. He stated that in writing multiple drafts, “your writing changes a lot,” and also nods to the collaborative nature of his writing classroom with his statement, “Writers do drafts...and have people revise it. They have people read it and see if it is good enough.” In accentuating “people” revising and reading text, he drew attentions to the collaborative practice of sharing work with others and receiving feedback.

Through the naming of expository types, rhetorical features, writing processes, strategy and convention use, students shared their understanding of the attributes of expository writing. In being able speak to the different components of academic writing, students “take control of that language...giving those words their own accent, to infuse them in some way to their own intention...to render it an option among options, a world among worlds” (Holquist, 1981, pp.426-427). In naming and discussing the features and processes as parts of composing expository writing, and taking that academic language up in their own words, students potentially may be able to identify and transfer this understanding to their future writing.

5.4.2 *Ventriloquation of Ms. Young’s storyline*

Students signaled their appropriation of the authoritative discourse, Ms. Young’s storyline, by ventriloquizing her language demonstrated through their use specific language and practices from their teacher in their interviews. Students referred to Ms. Young’s conference structure, specifically, noting her use of modals for choice in their writing, Ms. Young’s varied use of questioning, and her focus on writing as a collaborative meaning-making activity.

Students appropriated the use of choice and modals in their own collaborative storylines with one another. In an example from the information unit, Meghan engages in a conference with Ms. Young, Ashley, and Rahwa on possibilities for where she can include specific information on the chief and ranking in her writing. Meghan uses modals to indicate choice and the multiplicity of options for word choice to convey information. (During this example, Meghan uses the pronoun “you,” but is referring to her own work and potential possibilities for her writing).

Meghan: I said you could put it in both. You could say, “In the village, the chief is the most highest ranking person”.

Ms. Y.: Yes, because that is important information for a chief and then in social rank what **could** you say?

Meghan: You **could** say the same thing.

This instructional storyline and pattern of providing scaffolds paired with modals, highlights student choice, both in writing on topics that matter to them and in maintaining authority in their writing.

In another example, Ashley speaks about Ms. Young and her instructional storyline and how Ms. Young supported her individual understanding through her patterns of practice, reading her work aloud and then questioning her writing, and then the focus on collaborative meaning-making by noting her collaboration with a classmate in having her friend reading her draft and asking questions. Ashley’s employment of the discourse marker “maybe” is also an appropriation of Ms. Young’s use of modals in her instructional storyline.

Ashley: Ms. Young taught us more strategies this year. Like on the essays she taught me more about those because she would tell me how to make my reasons stronger.

She would **read it**, and **then ask questions** about it and then tell me to fix it—she would say “**What if people want to know more? Maybe** you should put why.” Then with my examples, she said we can have more examples. She said some of my examples weren’t that powerful, but to me they looked fine. Then **when I told my friend to read it**, she was like, “What does this example mean?” She didn’t really get it because it wasn’t strong enough, so I had to fix it.

Meghan identified similar attributes of Ms. Young’s storyline in mentioning both “we can ask a neighbor to help”, signaling the collaborative nature of the writing space with the discourse markers “we” as well as asking a neighbor for support and “she gives me hints instead of just telling me”—noting Ms. Young’s use of questions, modals, and choice to guide instruction rather than explicitly dictating to the student the writing move they should take up to write in expository genres.

Meghan: I’ve gotten better as a writer because Ms. Young taught us things to help us if **we’re stuck**, She taught us tricks to keep on going and she taught us to be independent or **we can ask a neighbor to help**. She and I talk about how to make my writing better and **she just gives me hints to help me through, instead of just telling me write this**, write that.

In specifically stating Ms. Young’s discursive patterns of collaborative focus of writing, students ventriloquized Ms. Young’s authoritative discourse and signaled their appropriation of her instructional storyline. Ms. Young taught writing features, processes, and purposes through questions and the use of modals for academic sentence possibilities. During her instruction, she also emphasized the collaborative interactional dimension of writing (e.g., how to provide

feedback, question, listen, and write to a specific audience). In turn, students gained a comprehensive view of writing and the way it can operate in academic settings, as seen in the examples above where each student indicates turning to a “neighbor” for support as an audience or collaborator.

5.4.3 *Being a writer*

Students communicated their participation in the learning community and development of an identity as a writer through their discourse in the interviews: identifying and discussing their rhetorical decision-making in their own writing, with I statements, and in their answers to questions about writing, where they positioned themselves as knowledgeable about the traits of effective writing and processes for composing.

5.4.3.1 Rhetorical decision making in their own writing

In an example of identifying and discussing rhetorical decision-making in their own writing, Javonte selected his opinion writing, why a bulldog is the best pet, as an exemplar of his best writing due to his introduction having reasons and “tells everything and why”—drawing attention to his understanding and focus on elaboration and audience and purpose.

Javonte: I think this one about my bulldog shows my best writing, I think it shows the best because...the introduction is good. (*He begins to read*). “Have you ever wanted a bulldog for a class pet? Well, I do and let me tell you why. It can watch over the class when kids are not supposed to come in. It can play with you at recess and it wouldn’t take up a lot of room. Bulldogs are the best classroom pets.”

Javonte noted that this was a strong introduction, “because it lists all my reasons, it tells you my reasons and everything and why I want it.” Later in the interview, Javonte reflected on what he could have improved in this piece, “I could have added more words because authors—they have long books. The books are really good because they [are long], so [that means those books are] better.” The conversation then shifted to ask Javonte about what good writers do. He shared that they plan and draft and have people read their work to see if it is “good enough.” When further questioned on planning, Javonte stated,

Like three boxes and bullets, and then you would make more because you might not like those ones and you might make more...It’s like you write a square on a piece of paper and then three dots. Wait, three boxes and then three dots on each. Then you write your ideas there and then you write it out on your first draft, and then you get to your first draft and then you write it out. You’re done planning and all that. You want to plan to see if it was good and plus you might want to add stuff.

Javonte demonstrated his rhetorical decision making in his own writing through his identification and discussion of rhetorical features and writing processes he employed in his own writing. Specifically his naming of academic language “introduction”, employment of a zinger, use of the cultural tools available in the class (i.e., graphic organizer), and identification of an audience and purpose for his writing. Through this discourse he displays his ventriloquation of the academic discourse of expository writing genres and presents this understanding in his own words.

5.4.4 *I statements*

The structure of the interview and the nature of the interview questions offered opportunities for students to identify purposes for writing and areas of their own strength, proficiency, and growth. The interviews began with a question, asking student to select an example of their best work. Following this question, students were asked what they did well in writing and what they might do to improve the piece. We also asked them about their goals to improve their writing for next year. Students' answers to these questions displayed their feelings of self-efficacy through I statements and their conception of areas of difficulty or growth. As students spoke to what they were doing well and areas of development, they signaled their understanding of various writing practices and engaged in reflection of their practice.

Karlie: I think it is fun to write an essay and be like, oh I could persuade someone or in non-fiction, I can tell someone a story about something.

Briyanna: I'm good at explaining my thinking and persuading people to agree with me. Kind of like a kid lawyer. [Essays] are easy for me to write because I already have a lot of ideas in my mind. When Ms. Young is talking to us...ideas are already going through my mind. I like the process of doing [writing]. I'm really good at explaining my examples and stretching out my thinking...I [stretch my thinking] trying to think of more examples of what I'm saying.

Akamai: This year, I am really trying my hardest to try hard and you have to think super hard about what you are going to write and think about—everything you are putting on the page and make it your best.

Ashley: I like writing because sometimes, when I was younger, I saw my brother writing and I didn't know what it was and then I wanted to write too, but I didn't come up

with anything, But then when I started to know how to write, I like it because it was fun to write stories and other genres.

In these excerpts, students identified their strengths and growth opportunities through the use of “I” statements and in the naming features of expository genre writing, such as ideas, reasons, persuading, and informing. Students also identified strengths in writing by stating what they know and their effort (i.e., “trying hard” and “making their writing their best”). As Spaulding (1989) notes, “students who do not perceive themselves as competent writers... may be unwilling or even unable to take ownership of their writing task” (p.417). Therefore, these examples, where students used “I” statements, highlight the students’ competence and feelings about writing, as well as their understanding and employment of features of genre knowledge, thus supporting their ownership in writing tasks and the development of their writing identity.

5.4.4.1 Advice from the expert

Throughout the interviews, students identified the complexities of writing expository texts in academic settings. Students mentioned the need for research, citing sources, using graphic organizers, word choice, text structure, and considerations of audience. During the interview, students were also questioned on characteristics of “what good writers do?” With this question, students took on the mantle of “knower” and noted practices they deemed most important in identifying understandings of genre knowledge.

Annie: Writers want to start off with a good beginning. A good beginning, in like an essay. Essays are like opinion pieces. It’s like, “Dear Mom, do you want your daughter to be happy? I think you should let them go to their friend’s house and here are my reasons why”...and be sure to have reasons and strong examples.

Javonte: Good writers make their writing really strong because if it is strong, then people will look at it and know it is a good story. It will pull the reader in and they will have to read it.

Students take up positions of an expert writer through the naming and identification of the “expert writing practices” good writers must engage in. In their articulation of the different facets of expository writing students further demonstrate their understanding of expository genre writing and thus, their identity as a writer.

Students’ answers to the interview questions begin to illuminate their participation in the learning community and their identity development as academic writers. As students named and discussed their rhetorical decision making in their own writing, we see how they ventriloquized Ms. Young’s instruction and took up the academic language of school. In addition, through this discourse, we also see students’ potential agency in writing when speaking about their employment of genre features and writing processes in the context of their own work. Through “I” statements, we see students’ speak to the affective dimension of learning to write—their feelings of efficacy and identification of areas of growth. Finally, through their explanation of what “good writers do,” students position themselves as experts, assuming the identity of a writer, and thus supporting their conception of self as a participant in academic writing communities.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In summary, through her role as collaborator, Ms. Young mediated students’ opportunities to learn and become academic writers. Her instructional storyline offered support to understand and take up the rhetorical decision-making needed to write in these academic genres by positioning

writing as a collaborative, meaning making practice facilitated through questioning, listening, and sharing. Her discourse was balanced between exploration and explicitness, signaling her dual positioning as the expert and the facilitator in the classroom writing community. This created opportunities for students to appropriate writing process strategies, rhetorical moves in texts, and academic language for talking about their work as writers.

Chapter 6. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

By exploring and identifying key features of two teachers' writing conference storylines, this study shows how the teachers' discourses positioned themselves and students and thus mediated opportunities for learning. This study illuminates how teacher talk, demonstrated through pedagogical practices, positions the teacher and student, and thus impacts access to and support for learning academic genres for elementary writers.

Mr. Branson mediated opportunities for learning through his explicit teacher discourse, creation of a shared language, attunement to students' social and emotional development, and positioning students as writers. These discursive moves served the purpose of getting and keeping students on a storyline that supported student learning. And for the most part, he was successful. Conversely, Ms. Young took up a more dialogic teacher discourse, through her use of questioning. She elicited student understanding and used student responses as a guide for her instruction; decentered her authority; positioned writing as a collaborative endeavor; and positioned students as authors. These discursive moves also served the purpose of getting and keeping students on a storyline and, though her approach differed significantly from that of Mr. Branson, Ms. Young was successful as well.

The instructional and relational content of these teachers' storylines provided an opportunity for learning in the academic genres of school in comparable and contrasting ways. In this chapter, I discuss the affordances of the different pedagogical approaches and explain how these two cases contribute to our understanding of the complex process of teaching and learning in elementary writing conferences. I then provide key implications for theory, research, and practice.

6.1 EXPLICIT AND DIALOGIC PEDAGOGIES

Mr. Branson and Ms. Young had many similarities across their classroom and practice. They taught the same curriculum at the same grade-level, in the same school, and they both employed a process approach to writing through a writer's workshop model. They used similar academic language to identify genre features and writing processes in their instruction and, during two units, they used similar prompts for student writing. However, their language of instruction was qualitatively different.

Through their different pedagogical approaches, the teachers framed what it meant to write and participate in the writing conference in different ways, and thus created different norms for engagement in the classroom community. These approaches, I argue, were linked in part to the school context and teachers' positionalities as veteran and early-career teachers—as well as to their teaching stances more broadly. Mr. Branson's relatively newcomer status as a third-year teacher may have mediated his commitment to being a “good soldier” with regard to curriculum fidelity and his explicit approach. This approach framed writing as a high-stakes activity where practicing to reach the standards was central to the writing work in his classroom.

Alternatively, Ms. Young was a seasoned teacher with an expressed affinity for writing and familiarity with the content. She framed writing as a collaborative, communicative endeavor. Her positionality as a veteran teacher may have allowed her to take an autonomous stance that pushed back on the principal's expectations for grade-level cohesion and curriculum implementation. This stance allowed her to lead with her own instructional commitments, weaving in content from the required writing curriculum as a support for—rather than driver of—her planning. These two approaches offered different affordances for student learning and development as academic writers in school.

6.1.1 *Standards driving practice*

A number of studies have addressed the impact of testing on writing instruction (Bomer, 2005; Dutro et al., 2013; Dyson, 2006; Hillocks, 2002). Dutro et al., note, “Although pressures around testing may be more or less intensive...the discourse of proficiency and what counts as successful teaching and learning is tied to test scores” (p.132). Mr. Branson is a case of an early-career teacher whose notions of proficiency and what counts as “successful teaching” were closely tied to curriculum, standards and state test scores.

Mr. Branson wanted to be a successful teacher and wanted his students to demonstrate success as well. He expressed his identity as a “good soldier” and followed “with fidelity” the school and district mandates (i.e., the standards and the curriculum) as directives for his own teaching. Therefore, the pressures associated with test-taking could be seen as an influential factor on Mr. Branson’s teaching. His instructional discourse contained a comparatively high amount of teacher talk as compared to Ms. Young. Through this talk, he reinforced and repeated curricular foci through explicit instruction of rhetorical genre features, writing processes, and language conventions and coached his students to work hard to arrive at the “next level” of writing proficiency. To further support his instruction and uptake, he encouraged students to appropriate specific rhetorical language and writing practices from models of expert writers (the expert most often being identified as himself) when needed.

The standards guided Mr. Branson’s practice in his efforts to support students’ academic success. Yet Dyson (2006) cautions that “[if] explicit institutional value is not placed on the practices for guiding teachers’ and children’s composing, then teachers may have trouble allowing for, building on, and indeed hearing children’s landscape of voices—their foundational resource” (p.37). Dyson notes how teaching to the test can stifle students’ voices, the very voices

that give rise to appropriation. But Mr. Branson’s case suggests that writing identities may still bloom in the teacher-dominated discourse of a writing “training camp.” Throughout interviews, Mr. Branson’s students demonstrated appropriation of and agency in rhetorical decision-making and writing process strategies.

One explanation for this surprising finding may be Mr. Branson’s relational work with his students. As their writing “coach,” his relentless instructional *and* relational support may have opened up a different avenue for students to take up practices and identities as academic writers. These findings underscore the importance of relational dimension of the writing conference, and of writing instruction more broadly. Teacher and administrators should consider the impacts of a testing culture and mandated curriculum can have on teachers’ practice and student learning. Moreover, they might explore ways at the classroom and school levels to mitigate these circumstances. Mr. Branson’s case shows how building relationships are an important component of this work.

6.1.2 *Participation structure: Individualized practice*

In his classroom, Mr. Branson positioned writing as an individualized practice. Students were tasked to “work hard” on their own writing and complete as many pieces as possible during the writing unit in an effort to “practice” to proficiency and develop their academic writing skills. After the mini-lesson, Mr. Branson would often transition to independent work time by noting that, while students may be engaged in different writing tasks, they needed to return to their desks and independently “work hard” to practice what they were learning. This highlights the individualized nature of writing in his class.

During this independent work time, Mr. Branson selected individual students to confer with whom he determined to be in the most need of support. He supported their writing development

through his explicit discourse, reinforcing and reteaching writing practices while maintaining focus on audience and purpose—all within the context of students’ writing. With few opportunities to share their work with each other, students wrote to Mr. Branson as their audience, as evidenced in their uptake of his instructional discourse and language and in the “reader” reactions they regularly anticipated. A focus on the individual was also demonstrated in his dyadic conference structure, extended conference sessions, and time for the student to process his instruction while remaining close by for further support and direction.

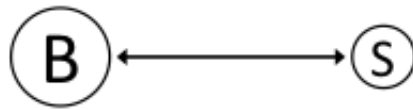


Figure 6.1. Mr. Branson’s participation structure for conferring

The explicit nature of Mr. Branson’s instructional discourse, framing of writing as a largely independent process, and focus on the teacher as audience could be seen as a reification of traditional classroom patterns filled with teacher talk and I-R-E models of interaction (Broadkey, 1987; Ede & Lundsford, 1990; Florio-Ruane & Dunn, 1985). However, Mr. Branson’s individualized support, through the teacher-student dyad, provided important affordances for learning. First, this conference structure afforded his students frequent, explicit, and individualized support emphasizing his expertise to broker students’ understanding of the features, processes, conventions, audiences and purposes of writing in the academic genres of school.

As Dudley-Marling and Paugh (2004) point out, this support can help students to negotiate and take up the linguistic demands of academic writing. Additionally, by electing to confer with students who most needed his support over an extended period of time, Mr. Branson provided opportunities for these students to engage in a more in-depth conversation with an expert to

support their writing development around not only basic skills, but also their rhetorical decision-making—an opportunity not often afforded students who may need more directive support (Gutiérrez, 1994).

6.1.3 *Practice guiding standards*

Writing in Ms. Young’s class was positioned in a different way from Mr. Branson. Ms. Young’s practice was guided by her many years of experience in the classroom across a number of grade levels. This experience, paired with her expressed affinity for writing, informed her fluid sense of student development, permeable orientation to writing as a subject, and her dialogic approach to writing instruction. In her classroom, Ms. Young positioned writing as a collaborative, communicative event—an amalgamation of reading, writing, and oral language that literature suggests is important for supporting literacy development (Au, 1998). These extended periods of talk during writing time supported students’ writing development and their active participation in the dynamic community of learners (Dyson, 1997).

Through her extensive experience teaching in the elementary setting, Ms. Young expressed a measure of autonomy from fidelity to the school and district curricular mandates. This autonomy was especially evident in her planning and instruction of the informational writing unit. During this unit, Ms. Young deviated from the curriculum and taught a cross-disciplinary unit, using social studies as the content focus for her writing instruction. In previous years, Ms. Young had taught a unit on the Northwest Coast Native American people and found the information to be interesting and civically important for her students. Ms. Y was able to think flexibly and creatively across subject-matter curricula to create an engaging, collaborative writing unit. Her familiarity with the content supported her ability to develop a unit that also helped students to meet the state writing standards—without feeling the need to adhere closely to

the curriculum guide. In this way, her practice guided her use of the standards, as opposed to standards dictating her instruction.

6.1.4 *Participation structure: Collaborative meaning-making*

Ms. Young framed writing as a “social practice” (Larson & Maier, 2000, p.470), a communicative space filled with talk and “multiple opportunities to co-manage the discourse—to select when to speak, build on previous utterances, engage others in interaction, negotiate the ongoing subtopics of classroom discussion and in some instances, define the official activity” (Gutiérrez, 1994, p.345). Opportunities for students to negotiate the classroom discourse is of particular importance for students’ meaning-making and participation in the classroom community, especially for minoritized youth to engage in linguistic practices and genre understandings at the intersection of their social and school worlds (Delpit, 1995; Dyson, 1997; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

Ms. Young supported this negotiation and participation of the classroom discourse through structuring her extended mini-lessons and conference structure as a participatory event. During her instruction, Ms. Young would engage in extended talk turns with her students, soliciting their understanding and feedback for her own modeled writing, providing the time and space for students to verbally organize, process, and demonstrate their understanding in the shared classroom space. Through these various pedagogical approaches, Ms. Young modeled “authorship as a meaningful writing practice constructed in interaction” (Larson & Maier, 2000, p.477). As Ms. Young excused students to their desks to write, she encouraged them to function independently, but turn to peers and talk with one another as needed for support: to problem solve and share—positioning one another as valuable resources for authorship. Through this

structure, Ms. Young simultaneously positioned writing as an individual and social practice (Shultz, 1997; Bakhtin, 1986).

During independent writing time, Ms. Young would select students to confer with—checking in with any number of students to ascertain progress, writing understanding, or to provide support to students whom she determined needed her assistance to engage in the academic writing task. While Ms. Young frequently determined with whom she would confer, students often requested her support or feedback. As such, there was a degree of agency regarding who met with Ms. Young. In addition, Ms. Young’s collaborative discourse approach offered both implicit and explicit invitations for students to join the conference storyline. In one such instance, Ms. Young was engaged in a conference with another student in close proximity to Meghan, and Meghan initiated a conference. Without prompting from Ms. Young or Megan, two of Meghan’s tablemates joined the conversation around Meghan’s question, with Ms. Young acting as the facilitator through guided questions and affirmations.

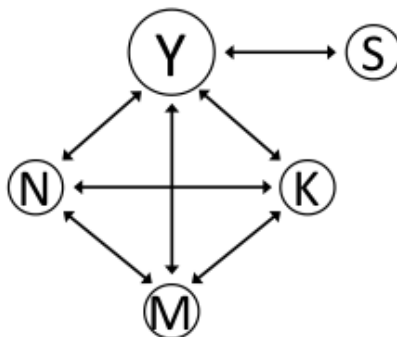


Figure 6.2. An example of Ms. Young’s collaborative participation structure

By participation in the learning community, through the authorship and discussion of their text, students learned how to become writers through interactions with one another. Ms. Young’s curriculum design choices also provided students authentic reasons to write and “particular opportunities to acquire a situated understanding of what counts as literacy in a

particular classroom (Gutiérrez, 1994, p. 338; Dyson, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Students took up writing as a collaborative event with a multiplicity of meanings and practices including, “acts of sharing, copying, correcting, disagreeing, adding, advising, listening and writing alone— with and for other people, working across real and imagined boundaries in which they become members of a community” (Shultz, 1997, p.282). As Shultz (1997) points out, this type of work is important because collaboration affords students the opportunities to invent and accomplish tasks through motivation and support, learning from one another, and through these interactions gain “power and authority” over their own writing tasks (p.279)

6.1.5 *Comparison of the conference approaches*

While Mr. Branson and Ms. Young differed on particular pedagogical features of teaching process writing, both afforded opportunities for student learning. Mr. Branson provided the frequent, explicit, individualized support he deemed his students needed through extended one-on-one conferences, affording students time and support to engage in not only conversations that revisited previous instruction, but also begin to have discussions about rhetorical decision-making. This afforded students opportunities to “move beyond the familiar and become more conscious of their authorial choices . . . and the social consequences of what they [chose] to say” (Dyson, 1997, p.184). Conversely, Ms. Young employed a distributed conference structure to apprentice students into participation in a “dynamic community of writers” (Larson & Maier, 2000, p.477), reinforcing writing as not an individual process of text ownership, but rather a dialogic interaction, a collaboration in the “often implicit act of acquiring and developing written language understanding” (Sperling & Freedman, 1987, p.282). These conferences often occurred at the intersection of the academic writing curriculum and students’ lives and interests and were

spaces of focused, differentiated discourse rich with language support. As Bakhtin (1981) notes, such spaces offer opportunities for the dialogic process of learning to occur.

As students conferred with their teachers, we see the students' appropriation of the instruction as they ventriloquized the authoritative discourse in their talk and writing. Through this process, the authoritative discourse of school may be transformed in the student's own words and become more "open" (Cazden, 1988, p.76). In this way, the students may have opportunities beyond simply mimicking—and in so doing potentially become oppressed by—the authoritative discourse, using it instead in transformative ways that give rise to spaces for student agency with the "official" writing discourse (Dyson, 2008).

In addition, these two variations on standards-based instruction and conference structure provide a number of implications for teacher learning and conceptualization of instruction in future classrooms. First, a consideration of how curriculum and standards inform teachers' pedagogies may provide insight into instructional practices. By providing flexibility in the curriculum for teachers to select the content of their instruction, writing in the classroom may prove to be a more authentic, purposeful task for all in the writing community, thus resulting in higher student engagement and understanding of writing in academic settings. In addition, these findings call into question different participation structures within the writing classroom. While much of the research and practitioner literature focus on the one-to-one conference that Mr. Branson's conferences were modeled after, Ms. Young's findings open affordances for other conference structure possibilities. In Mr. Branson's case, the individualized, teacher driven instruction questions the opportunities to hear the elaboration of student thinking in the conference and student-to-student talk in writing time. Conversely in Ms. Young's class, Shultz (1994) notes the complexity of the term "collaboration" and its often positive connotation to

student learning. However, she encourages consideration of how collaboration is implemented in classrooms, and the space for “difference and alterity for multiple voices” (Clifford, 1992, p.176). This comparative case highlights the affordances of a quieter, individualized focused class as well as the affordances of a collaborative, dynamic environment. Future research might explore the different impact of these two environments for students with different cultural backgrounds, linguistic repertoires and learning preferences.

6.2 ROUTES TO ACCESS THE “LANGUAGE OF POWER”

Mr. Branson and Ms. Young both used distinctive discursive moves to support students’ access to the academic language of school. Through the colloquializing of the authoritative discourse and varied use of questioning, each teacher provided students opportunities to engage with the authoritative discourses used in academic genre writing and participate—creating accessible language and building upon cultural and linguistic repertoires.

6.2.1 *Colloquializing the authoritative discourse*

Mr. Branson’s instruction can be seen as one instantiation of Delpit’s (1996) charge to provide non-dominant students with explicit instruction in the “language of power.” As the broker of writing knowledge, Mr. Branson’s conference storyline contained predictable routines of interaction- offering affirmations to highlight appropriation, reading, and responding to student work. His pedagogical discourse also bridged the academic “official” language of school with a more informal, colloquial language, making it more accessible to students. This move to redefine the authoritative Discourse of school writing and invite students to talk about their writing through this Discourse repositioned them as competent participants in the writing community. He also used a colloquial style, and slang in particular, as a pedagogical move to draw students’

attention to the key ideas in opinion writing. Furthermore, through this explicit naming he supported struggling writers to engage in this academic work by helping them to develop their control of academic language—specifically, the genre features and rhetorical moves associated with expository writing. Through Mr. Branson’s reinforcing and re-teaching, he explicitly identified and highlighted genre features and language conventions and connected them to audience and purpose. Through his colloquialized instructional discourse, he created opportunities for students to align their language to that of the instructional storyline and, through this alignment, take up academic writing practices.

Adopting this pedagogical approach of bridging academic language with an informal discourse for instruction has implications for teacher preparation programs, as well as for practicing teachers. Further exploration and identification of the language ideologies present in current curricula would serve teachers’ understanding of how the “official” language of school, and the power associated with it, affords or constrains opportunities to learn. Through this identification, teachers could then create and employ an accessible, student-friendly language which would bridge understanding and thus provide opportunities for students to engage in and take up complex academic genres in varied ways. In addition, taking up a pedagogy that draws explicit attention to key ideas in genre writing through multiple discourses would afford students an explicit understanding of genre and how to speak about that genre, thus expanding current definitions of what it means to be a competent participant in school.

6.2.2 *Questioning*

As a broker of writing knowledge, Ms. Young used questioning in her conference storyline to support student understanding and uptake of academic writing in a variety of ways. Her use of questioning could be seen as one instantiation of Nystrand et al.’s (2001) employment of

authentic questioning, asking questions for which the “asker has not prespecified an answer, allowing for a range of responses, inviting students to contribute something new to the class interaction, which in turn holds the potential for altering the trajectory of discourse in the classroom” (p.14). Through the use of this authentic questioning, Ms. Young established and tailored her instructional storyline to meet an array of diverse students’ needs (Bauer & Garcia, 2002). Ms. Young used questioning to draw students into the work of writing, soliciting their understanding and finding points of access for their engagement in writing. Her use of questioning further supported collaboration with students—building upon their primary communicative discourses and ideas to provide next steps for taking up the language of academic writing (Gee, 1996). Additionally, Ms. Young scaffolded revision processes for her students through questioning (Palincsar, Brown, & Campione, 1993). With strategic, authentic questioning, Ms. Young created opportunities for a dialogic discourse to emerge—supporting students’ substantive and sustained engagement and learning in this academic setting.

Ms. Young’s use of questioning has implications for teaching. In particular, her case suggests that teachers consider the multiplicity of ways questioning can be used in the conference settings. Namely, teachers may consider how questions can be employed to build upon students’ cultural and linguistic repertoires, to support their understanding of features and processes for writing in academic genres, and support ownership of writing.

6.3 THE TEACHER’S ROLE: BALANCING POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY AND COLLABORATION

In the cases of Mr. Branson and Ms. Young, both teachers took up dual positionings in their classrooms—as authorities, experts of academic writing, and in a more facilitative roles, as a coach and collaborator. These dual positions mediated how students were able to take up the

expressed conference storyline and engage with academic writing. With both teachers, their positioning as an expert of writing offered students an explicit model for academic writing practices and provided reassurance that the teachers had the expertise to support them. In addition, their positions as a coach and collaborator signaled the teachers' shared stake in and commitment to their students' development as writers. Thus, their dual positioning as an expert and collaborator communicated to students that, if they became stuck with the storyline, the teachers would provide the knowledge and support they needed.

Despite calls to transform teachers' power and authority in the classroom, pressures from federal and state mandates, curricula, class sizes, testing, and the like can pressure teachers to try to teach as much as they can, as fast as they can—especially with writers who may need more support. As a teacher in a school where testing pressures and preparation for middle school writing weighed heavily on curricular and pedagogical choices across the school, Mr. Branson's and Ms. Young's circumstances were certainly no exception. Given these pressures, the teachers' dual positioning can be seen as one successful way to keep writers engaged in the challenging work of writing within academic settings. However, as Newkirk cautions, when teachers take up positions as the authority in the writing conference, their efforts to scaffold student learning may eclipse the writer's opportunities for sense-making and ownership, thereby “preventing students in full participation of meaningful communication” (Newkirk, 1995, p.212).

The findings suggest that, through the teachers' dual positioning, they were able to provide a highly scaffolded instruction while signaling a shared stake in student success. Thus, for teachers and teacher educators, an understanding of positioning and a cognizance of how discourse is used to self-position in the storyline of instruction is crucial to examine. Moreover, as writing is an inherently social act, the language used within that discursive space has implications for

student connection, motivation, engagement, and identity with the academic setting (Dyson & Freedman, 2003). Therefore, teachers should support students' opportunities to engage in rigorous and meaningful academic settings through a balance of direct, explicit instruction and collaborative meaning-making, to mediate learning—and thus encourage students to demonstrate and expand that learning through “questions, proposals, challenges, and other intellectual contributions” (Engel & Conant, 2002, p.404). Continuing the examination of positioning through discourse in the elementary classroom provides a frame for discussions around learning and reflections around issues of culture and literacy. In particular, a limitation of this research is that it only examines two teachers and the two dominant positions in their discourse. Future research that examines multiple teachers and positions across different grade-levels may yield a more comprehensive understanding of teacher positioning in the elementary setting and the impacts of that positioning on student learning.

6.4 BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

These cases also provide an example of how two teachers sought to position students as knowers, as authors in the classroom writing community. As van Lagenhove and Harré (1999) note, people assign themselves positions which can only be appropriated from resources available in the culture. Given the frequency and remedial nature of support that some writers receive, their available positions are often limited to “struggling” or “poor writers.” Mr. Branson did in fact meet with students who he thought needed more support far more than other students. And he engaged in a dialogue of repetition and remediation of previous lessons, he attempted to mitigate the stigma of the increased support by highlighting students' appropriation and validating their rhetorical savvy—for example, by appropriating student language into his own talk. In so doing, he showed students that they were in fact competent communicators whose writing should not be

relegated to a “roadside ditch.” Furthermore, Mr. Branson demonstrated his attunement to the affective nature of writing by checking in with students about their responses regarding writing in academic settings.

Alternatively, Ms. Young built relationships with her students through her pace of instruction, providing students a “multi-temporal setting” with the socio-linguistic flexibility to make sense of their ideas, share their stories, and receive support to engage in academic genre writing (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p.139). As Genishi and Dyson (2009) note, much of the instruction in elementary schools are governed by a regimented use of “adult” time. Students must align their processing and practicing times for writing within a fixed time constraint dictated by their teacher. Genishi and Dyson call for a conceptualization and utilization of a “multi-temporal” classroom, one that allows for flexible and negotiated spaces, where students are provided time to process and build upon their own literacy practices and understanding. The time Ms. Young afforded each student through her elicit and share conference routine, where she asked authentic questions and listened as the students make sense of their thinking out loud, can be seen as an instantiation of a “multi-temporal” setting. As Ms. Young questioned students about various aspects of their writing, she would listen to and affirm their responses, signaling to her students how their ideas were valued contributions to the classroom writing community. By treating students as the “primary source of information,” Ms. Young positioned students as knowers of their own worlds and supported their understanding of academic writing within their own frame of reference (Beach, 1989; Gutiérrez, 1994). She further supported this positioning of her students through her use of modals and suggestions during the conference. By providing the option to the students to employ their own ideas and voices within the academic frame Ms. Young provided, she let students maintain ownership of their writing (Freedman, 1995) and

identified students as competent in being able to have ideas to use in the writing community—to be experts in their own writing. While a limitation of this study, was due to the extended nature of these conferences, there was not an opportunity to hear from all of the students, thus further research where a multiplicity of voices are heard could further add to theory around the use of time in elementary settings and the affordance for student learning.

Teacher-student relationships are never neutral, and these interactions “employ coercive or collaborative power relations within school and home communities” (Reeves, 2009, p.21). While teachers are constrained by institutional factors, some choice and autonomy does exist within the walls of the classroom, specifically in how language is used in the instructional storyline. With a focus on building relationships and by “using a variety of texts and providing ample opportunity for discussion and reflection,” Mr. Branson and Ms. Young created spaces “where learning takes precedence over teaching and instruction is consciously local, contingent, and situated” (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Turner, 1997, p.372). Mr. Branson and Ms. Young found opportunities to position students as writers capable of engaging in complex writing tasks, and they built relationships that offered support to take up the conference storyline—and to ultimately take up academic writing practices and identities.

In particular, this study highlights the importance of teacher-student relationships—of students being seen as emotional beings and writing as an emotional work. The teachers’ conference storyline is a poignant illustration of the emotion in these instructional interactions and how the teacher’s positioning, through body language and talk, may help students feel supported and valued in these settings—willing to engage and display their thinking. The teachers’ discourse responds to that emotion, while also continuing to drive instruction forward. While we know that writers feel vulnerable and that there is a connection between getting

writing critique and identity (Bazerman, 2001), we have few empirical accounts that show how teachers balance relational and academic work with writers in high-stakes settings. Thus, this study helps us to understand the importance of attention to all facets of the student's experience within the writing classroom. Moreover, these findings call for further research regarding the discourse of instruction and how teachers can support academic understandings while also recognizing and fostering students' social emotional development.

6.5 IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

It is important to explore the multiplicity of ways that teachers support and cultivate an understanding of writing and potential development of identities as knowers in the academic spaces of the classroom; as “learning creates identity and identity creates learning...as members change identities, they come to learn new skills and facilitate new ways of participation” (Nasir, 2002). Students' appropriation of cultural tools or the ability to “do” the writing is not necessarily indicative of assuming an identity—identity is tied to understanding, engagement, and seeing oneself as effective (Boaler, 1999; Boaler & Greeno, 2000; Herrenkohl, 2001; Wertsch, 1998).

Developing identities in practice requires support from a “more knowledgeable other” in the community, one who can navigate and negotiate the learning practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The more knowledgeable other provides access to the domain, in this case the domain of academic writing, through instruction, feedback, and encouragement that sustains the novice's engagement (Nasir & Hand, 2002). Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) note that “substantive engagement depends not just on the teacher's transmission of knowledge and presenting good lessons. . .it depends on what teachers and students do *together* and how they work in terms of each other” (p.284). Thus, mutual engagement between teacher and student is a core principle of

sustaining practice and developing identity over time. Through mutual engagement, [in this case, the writing conference] teachers can sustain student's motivation through difficult tasks and, as the student's engagement shifts to take up more challenging practices (Nasir, 2002).

This study's findings illuminate how, through the writing conference, teachers can support students' academic writing, writing identities, and participation in the classroom writing community in different ways. Student identity development, and the means by which it is supported by teachers, is a crucial element of writing instruction to consider, as "students, who do not perceive themselves as being competent writers, may be unwilling or even unable to take ownership of their writing tasks" (Spaulding, 1989, p.471). Furthermore, Nasir and Hand (2008) note that when students sense a connection between themselves and the practice they are learning, they are more likely to be engaged and participate more extensively and intensely. Therefore, an examination of the storylines of conferences and the positioning of the teacher, student, and text are helpful to further understand "the intertwining of the cognitive and socio-emotional dimensions of learning to be a writer" (Bomer & Laman, 2004, p.450).

Theories of identity development in practice put forth by Wenger (1998) and Nasir and Hand (2008) are particularly helpful to understand how teachers support opportunities for students' engagement, learning, and identity. Wenger (1998) describes a mutually constitutive connection between identity and practice. Through participation in practice—in this case, the writing conference—students learn ways of speaking and writing in academic settings, and thus negotiate and cultivate different identities. Learning therefore is not just the acquisition of skills, but the process of engagement in practice and participation.

Nasir and Hand (2008) expand upon Wenger's theories, stating that students need three dimensions to support engagement: access to the domain (the tasks, skills, and subskills of a

practice), integral roles (accountability and expectations for roles within the community), and opportunities to engage in self-expression (the ability to incorporate aspects of themselves into practice). Ms. Young and Mr. Branson each did this in different ways. They provided access to the domain of expository writing a number of ways. Mr. Branson used explicit, colloquialized discourse to reinforce and reteach prior lessons. While, Ms. Young provided access through her use of questioning, aligning her instruction with students' ideas to co-construct academic writing. Furthermore, access to the domain was fostered through feedback on learning during practice to correct or encourage student understanding and make the domain transparent through explicit attention to specific skills and moves. Both teachers provided students integral roles as writers to take up in the community, expressed to students through the affirmation of their work, or through titles of expertise, and in implicit ways through their uptake of student language in their own instructional discourse. The teachers also provided spaces for students to engage in self-expression through choices about topic, writing process and rhetorical moves. The extended opportunities to practice with access to the domain, take up integral roles, and engage in self-expression, I argue, suggests that their instruction supported students' to develop identities as writers—at least in the context of these two academic writing spaces.

Throughout the student interview transcripts, students' ventriloquation of the teacher's authoritative discourse supports this claim. Ventriloquizing is of particular interest because of the key role language plays in the process of identity construction—signaling membership in particular groups or bringing to light struggles or conflicts of the alignment of sub-identities in these academic spaces (Gee, 1990; McCarthy, 2001). Mr. Branson's students conceptualized writing through explicit language use, appropriating many of Mr. Branson's colloquialisms in their own discourse. In contrast, Ms. Young's students spoke about writing as a broader

communicative endeavor, highlighting Ms. Young's discourse through their use of modals, indicating choice in uptake and positioning themselves as writers in control of decision making for their own text.

Through the interviews, students named features, processes, and purposes for expository writing. In addition, they had a lot to say about the choices they made as writers—from topics to rhetorical moves, their sense of growth and directions as writers, and their feelings about writing. This extended discourse about their own work as writers offers insight into their developing identities. There are also parallels with the dimensions of developing identities in practice. Their fairly elaborated ways of talking about rhetorical moves and writing process strategies in their own writing suggests high-quality opportunities to access the domain of expository writing. They showed an uptake of their roles as writing experts and—in the case of Ms. Young's students—writing community members. Finally, their affinity for the writing topics they chose and the audiences they wrote for showed the opportunity for self-expression through the intersectionality of their social and cultural identities and academic writing tasks.

The figure below presents an emerging model, based on this study's findings, to describe the mutually constitutive dimensions through which students' writing identity may be expressed. This model may support teachers to consider the different dimension of the student's experience with academic writing and explore ways to support students' engagement, learning and identity development within the classroom setting.

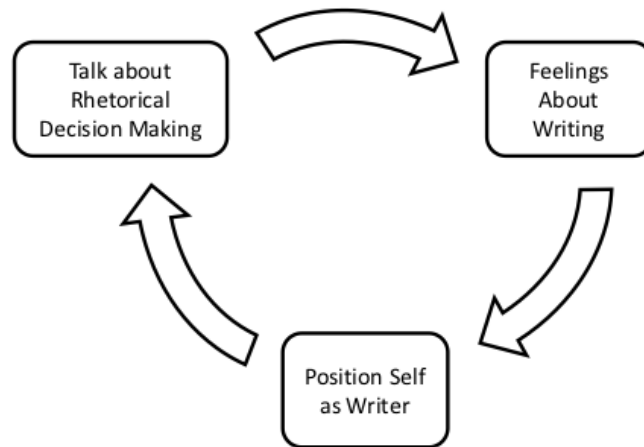


Figure 6.3. Identity dimensions from student interview findings

This study's findings suggest that both teachers supported learning and identity development. Future research might consider ways to better understand the students' experience. For example, interviews conducted immediately post-conference (or shortly thereafter) may provide a better understanding of how students experience writing in academic settings, particularly with approaches like Mr. Branson's where there is less student talk. In addition, as this work contributes to theories of how students develop identities as writers in the classroom, future work may also use position theory in different contexts to examine how the individualized and collaborative teaching discourses and myriad ways of relationship building can support learning of academic genres and students' identity development as writers in these academic settings.

Chapter 7. CONCLUSION

This qualitative case study of two exemplar teachers' writing conferences in a diverse public elementary school setting adds insight to our understanding of high-quality writing pedagogy for learners with a range of cultural, linguistic, and economic resources. This research examined the interplay of the pedagogical, rhetorical, and relational dimension of the writing conference and how teachers' discursive practices mediate learning and support students with diverse communicative repertoires—offering a rich description of the teacher-student interactions and the nature and impact of feedback on student uptake and development of academic writing identities.

In drawing on ideas of discourse from sociocultural theories of Gee and Bakhtin to conceptualize teacher-student interactions, Lave and Wenger's concepts of communities of practice and brokering, and positioning theories, I examined the teachers' pedagogical decisions about what to teach and how to engage with students to mediate their opportunities to learn. Through two different pedagogical approaches, explicit and dialogic, the teachers positioned in writing two ways: as an intense, focused, independent activity where students modeled their writing after their teacher and a collaborative meaning-making activity where students worked in partnership with their teacher and one another as resources to support writing understanding.

Each teacher's discourse and conference structure provided particular affordances for student learning. Mr. Branson provided frequent, explicit, individualized support through conference dyads, reinforcing and repeating curricular foci—coaching his students to work hard to arrive at the “next level” of writing proficiency. While Ms. Young's distributed conference structure illuminated how she apprenticed students into participation in the writing community as

a collaborator, through her use of guided questions, affirmations, and facilitation of group talk—positioning writing as a social act. Both teachers found opportunities to position students as writers capable of engaging in complex writing tasks, and built relationships that offered support to take up the conference storyline—and to ultimately take up academic writing practices and identities.

This study helps to understand the importance of attending to all facets of the student's experience within the classroom and supports further dialogue within education about how to support and cultivate academic and social-emotional dimensions of learning for students. Furthermore, this study may also contribute to theories of teacher discourse and student learning more broadly. Together, the theoretical and pedagogical insights from this work can be leveraged to support elementary writing teachers to improve their practice.

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APPENDIX A

TRANSCRIPTS FOR VIDEO OBSERVATIONS:

Date:

Teacher:

Audience:

Start time:

End time:

Unit:

Classroom setting:

Potential Codes:

Reflexive/Interactive Positioning

Student Positioning

Teacher Positioning

Text Positioning

Teacher as Apprentice/Broker- Brokering moves

Writing Processes/Practices

Pedagogy of Writing Processes/Practices

Interpersonal relationships builders

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATION FORM

Observation/Video Details:

Date:

Unit:

Lesson Focus/Session #:

Mini-Lesson

Start Time:

Finish Time:

Notes:

Independent Writing

Start Time:

Finish Time:

Notes:

Conference

Start Time:

Finish Time:

Notes:

Artifacts to be collected:

Duration of Writing Workshop time:

Independent time:

Number of Conferences:

Total time spent Conferring:

APPENDIX C

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Start with a specific example of something positive exhibited in the lesson. For example: The students seemed engaged in the lesson or the students seemed to be giving each other helpful feedback.
2. What did you try that seemed successful, why would you call it successful? Why were you excited to see XXX happen? Is there something that you would have liked to have seen that didn't happen?
3. How did you plan today's lesson? Probe for collaboration, materials, innovation.
4. Since I am not here every day, tell me about the lessons that came before this lesson and the lessons that will follow it, or what are you teaching next?
5. What are the main things that you are working on in the unit right now? Probe for: skills, knowledge, strategies, or practices/processes.
6. What did you notice about students' writing and working today? Probe: Students' successes, struggles, partial understandings and teacher's reasoning (i.e., why they think certain students struggled or did well).
7. In thinking for next year, how do you think you would modify this, or not?
8. Anything else you'd like to share?

APPENDIX D

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Before we look at your writing, I just want to ask you what kind of writing you like to do at home, school, anywhere?
2. Tell me why do you like that writing? Probe for students to say more—provide a description of why.
3. How about other kinds of writing that you have done this year?
4. How do you feel when you write?
5. Are there any kinds that make you feel less excited about writing?
6. Let's take a look at your writing. Can you look through your portfolio and pick your best piece?
7. Which did you choose as your best? Can you say some of the things you did well when you wrote this? Probe for multiple reasons.
8. What is it about?
9. Is there anything you think, if you were going to revise, that you would do better to improve it?
10. Let's think about writing this year, how do you think you are better as a writer? Or something you learned to do that you didn't know before? Probe for examples or multiple answers—strategy usage.
11. Now we are going to switch gears and get your thoughts about what you think of writers generally. What would you say that good writers do? Probe for multiple answers.
12. Let's focus on opinion writing. If a good writer is going to write an opinion essay, what are some things that they would definitely want to do? Probe for multiple answers.
13. You have been in writers' workshop all year, I'm wondering what are your thoughts about writers' workshop?
14. Anything else you'd like to share?

APPENDIX E

WRITING PRACTICES

Audience and Purpose	The teacher identifies or the student writes for real world purposes: to teach, persuade, or entertain.
Genre Features	Any speech utterance that reflects awareness of the unique attributes of the genre for the unit of study.
Language Conventions	Attention to grammar, spelling, punctuation, formatting, and or handwriting
Rhetorical moves	Attention to introduction, theses, details, sub topics, information, elaboration, quality of ideas, transitions, conclusions, or apparent student voice

APPENDIX F

BROKERING CODES

Verbal- Affirmation/Encouragement	The teacher used compliments and or positive reinforcement to engage students with the content.
Verbal- Co-construction of sentences/ideas	Teacher participates in problem solving, developing ideas in conjunction with the student, collaboration on text.
Verbal- Cognitive modeling	Teacher conducts think aloud to model thinking/strategy for students to see how to apply use in their own writing.
Verbal- Context	Teacher refers to what student is doing within the larger writing process, genre, audience/purpose; links to future goals and or activities.
Verbal- Explain/Examples	Teacher provides explanation of practice accompanied by examples.
Verbal- Next steps	Teacher identifies explicit next steps for student action.
Verbal- Questioning	Any questioning employed by the teacher to solicit student understanding.
Non-verbal- Think time	The wait time in between questioning or instruction.
Non-verbal- Use of artifacts/tools	The notebook is in a shared space, teacher identifies and or uses anchor charts and or modeled writing.

APPENDIX G

TEACHER POSITIONING

Decision Maker/Authority/Evaluator	Teacher makes decisions, takes over, uses formal academic language. Discourse marker, “you”.
Practicing writer/Author	Teacher makes references to own attempt at writing.
Audience	Teacher provides an authentic response to writing.
Collaborator	Teacher co-constructs using student input to craft, exhibits use of colloquial language, mediating pronouns “we and us”.
Coach ³	Teacher sets personal goals for the student and engage with the student in purposeful, often authentic activity through consistent cycles of performance, observation, feedback, and refinement- there is an inter-personal relationship focus.

³ *The coach definition was adapted from literature in teacher education research. Coaching relationships exist in education to help teachers refine their practice and have qualitative differences from teaching practices. I identified attributes of the coaches in the literature to the teacher of inquiry.*

APPENDIX H

STUDENT POSTIONING CODES

Persistent writer	Teacher identifies that the student is working hard, is persistent, or capable.
Knower	Teacher identifies the existence and or value of student knowledge.
Not-knower	Teacher identifies that student lacked a knowledge of how to engage in a writing practice.
Problem-solver/collaborator	Teacher and student work together to create a text.
Decision maker	Student has the opportunity to make decisions on their own practice.
Risk taker	Student was willing to try something new

APPENDIX I

EVIDENCE OF STUDENT UPTAKE CODES

Appropriation	Student used language/writes in ways directed from the teacher
Acquiescence	Student complied with teacher directives, but seems to be complying due to power dynamic of the teacher relationship
Attunement	Practice that multilingual writers engaged in to adapt rhetorical strategies to depend on, integrate with, and construct meaning available in the communicative context.
Performance	Student appropriated teacher language and without prompting wants to share with the teacher.
Generation	Student created new ideas/content that is expanded upon the teacher directive.
Negotiation	Students questioned teacher about writing practice and understanding.
Resistance	Student decided to take action different from the writing practices expected of the class.

APPENDIX J

TRANSCRIPT CONVENTIONS

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
[]	information added from the author for context
()	non-verbal actions from the participants
...	Omitted words
...	pause in the speaker's discourse

VITA

Erin M. Bird received her undergraduate education at Brigham Young University, where she obtained a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. After the completion of her undergraduate degree, Erin was a public, elementary school teacher for seven years, spanning a number of grade levels. Following her tenure as an elementary school teacher, Erin graduated from University of California, Davis with a Master of Arts in Education in Curriculum and Instruction: Language, Literacy, and Culture. For her Master's thesis, Erin investigated how primary-aged children conceptualized narrative writing in the elementary setting. Erin continued her graduate studies at the University of Washington, Seattle, where she obtained her Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction: Language, Literacy, and Culture. During her doctoral studies at the University of Washington, Erin was a research assistant for a two year study on writing instruction at the elementary level. Erin was also a Literacy Methods instructor for the Seattle Teacher Residency Program and worked for the Elementary Teacher Education Program as a Teaching Assistant for Literacy instruction and an Instructional Coach—supporting teacher candidates' learning in field-based practicums. Erin's research for her dissertation and her continued scholarship investigates how elementary school teachers' discourse mediates opportunities for their students to learn and become academic writers.