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Keeping the Teacher at Arm's Length: Student Resistance in Writing Conferences in Two High School Classrooms

Annamary Consalvo
The University of Texas at Tyler

Beth Maloch
The University of Texas at Austin

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore a subset of findings taken from yearlong qualitative study of writing conferences in two diversely populated, urban high school classrooms. Drawing on multiple data sources, we used case study and discourse analytic methods to follow two focal students across the year in order to examine instructional and relational features of the teachers' writing conferences. One salient theme in the writing conference data was subtle student resistance to well-meaning teacher moves. Analysis generated a five-level continuum of resistance behaviors ranging from ignoring or hiding to changing the subject to lying. In this paper, we (1) examine ways that the students sometimes resisted teacher attempts to connect with them, and (2) portray teacher attempts to sensitively navigate the learning needs of those students while continuing to work on building trust-based relationships in their classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore a subset of findings taken from yearlong qualitative study of writing conferences in two diversely populated, urban high school classrooms where students appeared to be resisting teacher efforts to bring them into a writerly community. Drawing on multiple data sources, we used case study and discourse analytic methods to follow two focal students across the year in order to examine instructional and relational features of the teachers' writing conferences. Previous analysis of these two students and their teachers generated two broad themes: teachers and students built a writerly community through trust-based relationships; and, teachers navigated the learning needs of the diverse students in the classrooms based on those trust-based relationships. A phenomenon that we noticed—one that we work to unpack here—was subtle student resistance to well-meaning teacher moves. This analysis foregrounds these two case study students and their teachers, as well as bringing in other student examples.

In this paper, we (1) examine ways that the students sometimes resisted teacher attempts to connect with them, and (2) portray teacher attempts to sensitively navigate the learning needs of those students while continuing to work on building trust-based relationships in their classrooms. Here, we aim to explore what we are calling a "continuum of resistance" in two well-running high school English classrooms in which student voice and choice were valued.

WRITING INSTRUCTION AND CONFERRING

A sociocultural view of teaching and learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991) holds that teaching and learning occurs not as an accumulation of bits of knowledge, but rather as a process of internalization through participation. In this view, learners acquire the practices of communities as they engage in the practice with the more experienced. For example, in the case of writing, students are mentored into the practices of writing by teachers who write (Kaufman, 2000; Rowe, 2008). Process-based writing instruction (Emig, 1972; Flower & Hayes, 1982) focuses on strengthening the student's processes of writing, rather than focusing solely on the end product so that the student can emerge as more metacognitively aware and more able to manage and develop his or her own writing.

Recent studies have focused on writing as spaces where students' voices, interests, experiences, and lifeworlds are acknowledged and welcomed (Martinez, 2010; Skerrett & Bomer, 2011). According to Ray and Laminack (2001), indispensable elements of writing instruction include "choices about content, time for writing, teaching, talking, periods of focused study, publication rituals, high expectations and safety, [and] structured management" (pp. 15). It appears that structuring writing instruction in these ways—that is, providing time to write, time for demonstrations, and time for conferring—may make a difference in students' writing. The National Writing Project (NWP), a non-profit organization that provides national and local professional development about process writing instruction, combined data from 16 studies in seven states and found that teachers who had undertaken NWP professional development and their students out-performed those who did not, both in terms of quality of thought and quality of writing (NWP, 2010, p. 2).

Writing conferences as structures for teaching in process-based writing instruction can take the form of relatively brief meetings with and between students about their writing, as well as between teacher and student (Calkins 1994; Ray & Laminack, 2001). Our particular interest is the talk between student and teacher. The one-to-one teacher-student conference is an instructional conversation (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991), the purpose of which is to help the student with his or her writing. It occurs inside a set-aside island of time that may last anywhere from less than one to fifteen minutes (Sperling, 1991, p. 135). We view writing conferences as a type of conversational/participation structure (Goffman, 1981), one that is both curricular and interpersonal, that affords repeated and recognizable spaces for dialogue about writing. Such conversations can normalize thinking-out-loud-together kinds of encounters, can accustom students to think about their own thinking, and can provide "conditions of entry…into speech activities associated with complex thinking and problem solving" (O'Connor & Michaels, 1996, p. 64).

RESISTANCE

According to the New Oxford American Dictionary, resistance has its origin in the Latin *resistere* or "to hold back." Two of the definitions given seem telling here. The first is the commonly understood use of the word as "the refusal to accept or comply with something." The next and perhaps more salient for this discussion is "the impeding, slowing, or stopping effect of one…over another." In this paper, we discuss the various ways these high school students resisted their teachers' support moves as well as how the teachers responded to these moves of resistance.

Researchers argue that learning can happen even when a learner is disinclined to consider new notions (Alexander, Schallert & Reynolds, 2009). Learning is fraught with tensions stemming from reconciling old understandings of the world with new information and necessities. We align with Lee and Schallert's (2011) point of view that resistance is "potentially transformative and productive" (p. 1), and we believe it may be an under-examined side of dialogic learning environments. Illeris (2003) helpfully identified differences between defense mechanisms and resistance in a learner: "Whereas the defense mechanisms exist prior to the learning situation and function re-actively, resistance is caused by the learning situation itself as an active response. Thus, resistance contains a very strong learning potential, especially for accommodative and even transformative learning" (p. 404). While student resistance can be difficult for the students and teachers alike, it also serves a normal and healthy function in a democratic society. Thus, it makes sense to examine ways that students might deploy resistive behaviors and how teachers adjust their teaching in order to maximize the potential for students' learning as much as possible.

The experience and conceptualization of adolescence offers another context for understanding why students might resist teacher moves designed to support their learning. According to Vadenboncoeur (2005), adolescence is an enduring fiction imposed upon young people; its narrative asserts that teens are "Unruly. Hormone-crazed. Awkward. Out of control. Risk seekers" (p. 5). By the time they are juniors in high school, she observed, teens have been negotiating the "hyper-regulated" (p. 11) environment of school for about 12 years, or most of their lives. They've learned to behave in certain ways in school and they have learned that teachers behave in predictable ways as well. Lenters (2006) identified the mismatch between such an environment and youth who must inhabit it, noting the inevitable "friction between the educational system and the developmental aspects of adolescence" (p. 138).

In her study on youth categorized as offenders, Finders (2005) reported that the youth who were expelled from school felt that they were obliged to live up to their reputations as "juvenile delinquents":

> "It's like you gotta be bad. Like prove somethin'…." These fifteen year-olds, expelled from school, vehemently denied literacy engagement and enacted a rigid set of rituals performed to preserve a sense of self. It was their acts of resistance to school experiences that made them think of themselves as smart and creative people. (p. 98)

The students we report on here are not offenders but still bear the burden of being cast as "adolescents." As public high school students in the United States, they had long experience in school and with schooling. In the discussion that follows, we examine the nature of resistance incidents we witnessed on the part of students to their teachers' attempts to support the students' writing.

As we consider these resistance incidents, we draw on a theoretical framework that is attentive to the dialogic nature of classrooms. Maintaining dialogue in educational settings is crucial to establishing an atmosphere where trust can be built. Burbules and Rice (1991) point out that people in educational settings are more alike than not in the need to be heard, valued, and engaged. Despite the fact that "effort and good will alone are not guarantees; dialogue is fallible" (p. 405), yet, in the persistence of effort lies the possibility of positive change and better understanding. They suggest that understanding in dialogical exchange is a continuum spanning: 1) agreement and consensus; 2) common understandings established where discussion remains possible; 3) disagreement with positions but respect for conversational partners' thoughtful positions; and 4) irreconcilable differences (p. 409). Moreover, Burbules and Rice (1991) developed what they call communicative virtues, the practice of which reflects "an affective and intellectual stance toward partners in conversation; they promote a generous and sympathetic regard for the perspectives and self-expression of others" (p. 411).

> These virtues include tolerance, patience, respect for differences, a willingness to listen, the inclination to admit that one may be mistaken, the ability to reinterpret or translate one's own concerns in a way that makes them comprehensible to others, the self imposition of restraint in order that others may "have a turn" to speak, and the disposition to express one's self honestly and sincerely. (p. 411)

This framework sheds light on the cases we examine in this paper. First, participants navigate between the middle two stages of Burbules and Rice's continuum of communication – between respectful disagreement and working to establish common understandings. Secondly, the teacher moves we explore suggest that they are attempting to manifest these virtues in their encounters with students.

METHOD

These data were collected by the first author during a year-long qualitative study in two high school English classrooms. The larger study focused on the ways the two teachers conducted one-to-one writing conferences while providing their students with regular, prolonged writing time. In this analysis, we examine what appeared to be resistive moves that students made to deflect teacher attention from themselves and/or their writing.

The setting was an urban, diverse school we call Governor High School (all names are pseudonyms) in which approximately 50% of students qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch. Participants in the original study included two teachers and their students in one class apiece. During the study, Kathy Hampshire, the 11th grade teacher, was in her fourth year of teaching; John O'Brien, the 12th grade teacher, was in his twentieth. Ms. Hampshire was pursuing her master's degree, while Mr. O'Brien had already earned his. Both were actively involved in the local site of the National Writing Project. Both teachers are white—a selection decision that mirrors demographic trends in the teaching profession (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). The two teachers in this study both held high standards for their students, valued choice in student inquiry, and located writing as a central feature of their curricula.

While the larger study attended to ten focal students, here our analysis centers on two (Julian, a young Latino man whose family immigrated from Mexico, and Anthony, a young African American man) with additional analyses and data drawn from four other focal students. The ethnicity of the focal students was reflective of the diversity of the classrooms and of the changing population trends in the United States (Passell & Cohn, 2008) (see Table 1: Focal students).

In the larger study, data were collected by the first author in three sometimes overlapping phases: entry, data-gathering, and closing. Phase One occurred over the first five weeks of the school year and focused on acclimating to the classrooms. Phase Two lasted from late October 2009 through April 2010. It was during this time that data collection focused on documenting writing conferences and follow-up interviews through field notes, audio/video recordings, and collection of artifacts. Each period lasted 50 minutes. To catch the words and actions of the participants, the first author spent two days per week on average in the two classrooms across the school year for

Table 1
Focal Students

Teacher: Kathy Hampshire (white)	Teacher: John O'Brien (white)
Julien (Latino)	Anthony (African American)
Sha'Nequa (African American)	Lydia (Asian American)
Pedro (Latino)	Peter (African American)

approximately 75 site visits. Frequently, she spent time in both classrooms on any given day. In total, 207 writing conferences were documented across both classrooms. Post-writing conference "stimulated recall interviews" (DiPardo, 1994) were conducted individually with all writing conference participants from whom consent had been obtained –both students and teachers – in order to gather participants' thinking about specific writing conferences. In addition, loosely structured interviews with the teachers about their teaching and intentions for the year were conducted. In total, Phase Two interviews amounted to 61 student interviews and 26 teacher interviews. Phase Three's activities focused on conducting year-end "retrospective interviews" (Green & Higgins, 1994) with students and teachers of which 22 were gathered. These final interviews created a space for participants to reflect upon their overall experiences and perceptions of growth cross-year by viewing and commenting upon conference videos as well as work samples.

For this paper, we have purposefully selected (Patton, 1990) two focal students – one from each classroom – whose data sets represent a variety of writing conferences. We analyze the writing conferences involving Julien (seven conferences in total) from Ms. Hampshire's classroom, and Anthony (16 conferences) from Mr. O'Brien's classroom. To accomplish this, we repeatedly viewed video recordings and transcripts of each student's writing conferences. Our specific focus was on relational and instructional interactions between each student and the teacher and the features that impacted the nature of those interactions across time with each student. We also examined student work samples and audio-recordings of the follow up and retrospective interviews with the students for evidence of change traceable to the conference and students' perspectives on the events.

From over 245 codes ascribed to the writing conference data of the larger study, the three most robust categories were instructional, with 66 codes, such as "teacher modeling out-loud composing", embodiment, with 72 codes, such as "teacher closes distance in writing conference", and relational, with 55 codes, such as "teacher offers encouragement". As we undertook the dual case study, these codes from the larger study informed our analyses of incidents of resistance. Drawing from codes indexing instructional, relational, or embodied exchanges, we examined the ways resistance was enacted through such mediators as gaze engagement or avoidance, responsiveness to instruction or non-responsiveness, use of conversational pivots, instances of humor, gestures and facial expressions for various purposes, and incidents of lying. This analysis led to our conception of the "continuum of resistance" (see Table 2: Continuum of student resistance).

FINDINGS

As mentioned earlier, our broader analysis generated two themes that serve as background for our focus here. First, our analysis across these two sets of writing conferences suggested the ways in which these conferences were embedded within

Table 2
Continuum of Student Resistance

Level 1	Ignoring or Hiding: Student did not make bid for teacher attention/hiding.
Level 2	Appearances of agreement: Student is smiling and nodding during conference but does not engage with the conversation or with his.her writing.
Level 3	Changing subject: Abrupt changing of the subject of conversation initiated by teacher.
Level 4	Student refusal: Student will overtly refuse to take up teacher's instruction; and, or will overtly challenge that instruction often while smiling.
Level 5	Lying and/or hostility: Upon teacher initiation of conversation or midstream, student prevaricates, or gestures teacher to "go away" (i.e. shooing motions).

trusting classroom communities that valued writing. Analysis of the broader data set indicated that both of these teachers valued student choice in writing topics, time for students to develop their compositions, and talk about their writing. Both designed their classrooms as collaborative workspaces founded on trusting and respectful interactions between the teacher and students, and among student peers. Conferring practices, situated within these communities, were one way that the two classroom communities were built and sustained over time. Both Mr. O'Brien and Ms. Hampshire set aside traditional, hierarchical notions of a teacher-centered classroom by talking one-to-one with students regularly and by using a variety of verbal (e.g. gentle self-deprecation; performing the role of the active reader) and non-verbal (e.g. lowered body position; moving around to students) strategies to build trust with their students.

Second, to further analyze the ways these conferences contributed, or not, to students' writing development and to the classroom community, we examined, primarily, two sets of writing conferences belonging to Julien and Anthony. We also discuss four other students to varying degrees in order to illustrate particulars of resistance. Those students, in order of discussion are Lydia, Sha'Nequa, Pedro, and Peter. While we attended to both instructional and relational features of these conferences, the relational features were most salient and relevant to our overarching findings. Julien, in Ms. Hampshire's class, conferred with her multiple times over the year. Julien's case showcased the way Ms. Hampshire worked to bring out students who were shy, retiring, and/or reluctant to speak up. Julien often confined his requests for aid to instruction on surface features. In addition, he expressed in his interview how he was disinclined to ask for Ms. Hampshire's attention, even though he liked it, because, "she has so much students to…to take care of" (Jan. 11, 2010). Ms. Hampshire made it a point to get around to him, unasked. Her persistence and intentionality in regularly conferring with students resulted in steady support for Julien across the year. Anthony's case (in Mr. O'Brien's classroom) illustrates the ways adolescent students sometimes overtly resist or push back against teachers' instruction. Mr. O'Brien's response to Anthony's resistance was to persist in communication and to find ways of negotiating a pathway in conversation; his negotiations often built on what he knew of Anthony's life. Mr. O'Brien repeatedly, persistently and flexibly reshaped his own instructions inside of these conferences.

We provide brief portraits of the four students whose writing conference data we draw upon, secondarily, to illustrate various facets of resistance in the two classrooms. First, Lydia, a Vietnamese-American, in Mr. O'Brien's classroom, conferred little with him over the course of the year. Mr. O'Brien would mainly make himself available to students through proximity and seemed to require a summons (e.g. a look in his direction, a question). Lydia, typically, did not summon him, instead, relying upon conversation with one or two other young women whom she had befriended in the class. Second, Sha'Nequa, in Ms. Hampshire's class, was a sociable, pleasant young African-American woman with whom Ms. Hampshire conferred numerous times across the school year. Most of the conferences videorecorded with Sha'Nequa underscore Ms. Hampshire's persistence in reframing her instructional agenda with Sha'Nequa.

To accomplish this, Ms. Hampshire deployed an arsenal of relational and instructional moves as she made mid-point corrections in her approaches and tried again and again to meet Sha'Nequa in her zone of proximal development. At the end of the school year, both related that real learning had taken place and that the instructional and relational investment in Sha'Nequa by Ms. Hampshire helped Sha'Nequa to become a more confident writer. Third, Pedro, also a student of Ms. Hampshire's, was a young Latino who clearly enjoyed using humor, and who frequently sat with other Latino males. Both the classroom and conference data show Ms. Hampshire frequently, firmly, and tactfully reminding Pedro to pay attention to consideration for other people in the class as well as to the task at hand. Last, Peter, in Mr. O'Brien's class, a young African American man, was both attentive and polite, as well as frequently absent. Classroom and conference data show a respectful dynamic between the two men that included Peter calling out his questions to Mr. O'Brien at some distance. He frequently summoned Mr. O'Brien in this

way in order to be able to keep writing if his teacher was engaged with another student. Mr. O'Brien reliably visited with Peter two or three times during a writing session, even if very briefly.

In this paper, we follow up on this theme of resistance seen in our earlier analysis. We focus on the acts of resistance that we first noticed during analysis of Anthony's conference data. We then noted Julien's disinclination to engage in the conferences and propose that he, too, engaged in resistance—subtle as it appeared. As we looked back across the larger set of data with this particular research focus, we also found evidences of resistance and teacher persistence with other students.

In our findings, then, we draw on data from Julian and Anthony, as well other illustrative cases to showcase ways that students in these two classrooms pushed back against teachers' moves to support their writing as well as how teachers persisted in their instruction. We organized our findings according to our analysis of levels of resistance. Beginning at Level 1, as the most subtle, and moving up through Level 5, as the least subtle, we offer definitions, context, and outcomes for each expression of student resistance. The analysis of students' resistance into levels is meant to illustrate the range of behaviors we categorized as resistance. Moreover, we demonstrate what each teacher did in response to the resistive acts using instructional and relational moves that were consistently observed across the larger data set.

RESISTING BEHAVIORS

Establishing patterns of classroom talk that welcome the voices of teachers and students calls for maintaining respect for differences while working to establish common understandings. In our findings, we show degrees and kinds of student distancing moves—including silence, verbal pushing back, and using untruths—and teachers' counter-moves to close communicative gaps. Across the examples, we see the ways students attempted to maintain a space for themselves that may or may not have aligned with the teachers' intentions.

Level 1: Ignoring or hiding. In the most subtle resistance behavior we observed, students did not make bids for teacher attention (Lydia) and/or avoided eye contact (Julien). Simply put, they tried to hide. Below, we examine an interaction between Julien and Ms. Hampshire (Video, 10/22/09). In this episode, the teacher employed her customary conference opener: "How are you doing?". This opener seemed to typically function in her conferring as a question about writing: "How is your writing going?" In the example below, this move was met with resistance. Julien's response to Ms. Hampshire's inquiry was a somewhat tentative, "Ok-ay", delivered in a sing-song voice as he simultaneously drew on his book cover and kept his eyes upon his drawing as he spoke. He then asked her a question about the use of quotation marks.

Ms. Hampshire did not insist that he look at her, but instead used a combination of nonverbal moves to indicate her listening—eye contact, nodding, and using "mmmhmm"—and encouraged him to speak. Ms. Hampshire took her cues from Julien who controlled the conference. As she sat down, he eventually asked her about how to use quotation marks. She did not push him past his inquiry, but instead, answered his question and, in context, taught him conventions of using a comma before inserted dialogue and quotation marks around those quoted words. She put quotation marks around one piece of dialogue in his journal, and circled both the introductory comma and the quotation marks, so that he could find and refer to those examples when he wrote subsequent drafts.

In his interview later, Julien said that he found Ms. Hampshire's attention helpful, but indicated he did not wish to bother her because "she has so many kids." It's hard to know why Julien resisted Ms. Hampshire's attention. His journal entry on that day was on one of the themes the class was exploring (alcoholism, friendship, loss, parenting) in their reading of Sherman Alexie's (2007) book and viewing his film (1998). Julien wrote about his own dad being an unreformed alcoholic and the stresses that placed upon his

family. When she came by his desk, Ms. Hampshire read through his one page entry and seemed ready to talk with him about what he had written. Instead, Julien asked about mechanics. Perhaps his question was genuine and/or perhaps he did not wish to speak out loud about what he had written.

Despite the reasons for it, Julien's averted gaze and focus on mechanics did work to shift the focus of the conference away from discussing the content of his work and possibly from the teacher's original intent. The fact that she chose to support Julien with his question suggests that she, in the moment, prioritized relationship and trust building. And, perhaps, this relationship-building paid off. Across the year, his conferences with Ms. Hampshire moved away from solely surface features and included exchanges about content. Later in the year, Julien wrote several short memoirs and a short story (fiction) based on a documentary—analysis of these writing samples suggest dramatic improvements as a writer across the year.

Level 2: Appearance of agreement. At this level, the student smiled or nodded (a step up from hiding or ignoring), but did not engage with his or her writing or with the teacher. We draw from a writing conference between Sha'Nequa and Ms. Hampshire (Video 11/2/09) to illustrate this level. In this example, Ms. Hampshire stopped at Sha'Nequa's desk to engage her in a talking through the introduction to her paper. Since the class was in the lab, Ms. Hampshire stood beside Sha'Nequa and read through her draft displayed on the monitor.

Ms. Hampshire: Something you could put in your first sentence that would make it a little stronger? (*She reads aloud from the draft*) "Alcohol abuse plays a big part in the movie, Smoke Signals..." . . . Now, what I want to know…is what you're going to sa-ay (said in a questioning tone) about the alcohol abuse… So you could say, "alcohol abuse" or "The (*pause*) blank (*pause*) of alcohol abuse...What are you trying to say about alcohol abuse? *Both are looking at computer screen.*

Sha'Nequa: All right, okay (*low voice – whispery*)

Ms. Hampshire: (*In a soft, even voice*) Well (*pause*) tell me (*pause*).

Sha'Nequa did not respond into the space that Ms. Hampshire created for her. Despite the nudging from Ms. Hampshire, she remained silent, looking at her screen. When Ms. Hampshire persisted, Sha'Nequa finally smiled and said "Oh!" in a surprised manner that seemed to initiate, for her, a cascade of talk.

Sha'Nequa: OHHhhh (*pause*) Alcohol abuse is li-ike. You do something like, you go crazy, you go off on people. And like, you're hurting your loved ones.

In response to Sha'Nequa's ideas, Ms. Hampshire, validated her train of thought and tried to help her select a synonymous word that she could use in her opening:

Ms. Hampshire: Okay (*repeating student's words*): "You've hurt your loved ones," "you go crazy," "and you go off on people." What kind of a force is that? Can you give me a word for that? Like, if you were to finish the sentence, "alcohol abuse ii-iss -----------"

Sha'Nequa: Terrifying? (*soft voice*)

Ms. Hampshire: Terrifying. Good! Give me some more.

Sha'Nequa: Hmmm.. I don't know. Like, destructive and stuff?

	(*Sha'Nequa turns to face KH who nods*). 'Cause like he's hurting the family and stuff.
Ms. Hampshire:	"Destructive" is a really good word
Sha'Nequa:	Okay.

Ms. Hampshire adjusted her instruction, restructuring the draft-out-loud task and continuing to offer Sha'Nequa scaffolded opportunities to verbally draft using her own words. Eventually, Sha'Nequa took up Ms. Hampshire's invitation:

Ms. Hampshire:	(*reaching out-- almost touching the screen*) In the beginning – I'm thinking so your reader knows exactly what you're trying to say about alcohol abuse. You could say, "In the movie...." (*pause*) "The movie Smoke Signals shows that alcohol abuse is -----"(*four full seconds pause –where teacher and student are gazing at each other*). What was your word?
Sha'Nequa:	Destructive.
Ms. Hampshire:	Yah.
Sha'Nequa:	Oh! I went blank for a minute (*smiles*).

Ms. Hampshire persisted and continued to use questioning and prompts in order to scaffold Sha'Nequa's engagement with her writing. The writing conference concluded with Sha'Nequa having drafted an opening sentence about the nature of alcohol abuse. In her final comment, Ms. Hampshire worked to leave the conference on a positive note.

Ms. Hampshire:	All right. I'll be back (*standing up*) You're the author, remember. So, you can play with that word (*backing away hand gestures*). I think the word 'destructive' is very powerful (*continues backing off – takes her leave*).

Throughout this exchange, Ms. Hampshire had to adjust and re-adjust her teaching, move by move. She accepted the minimal drafting-out-loud that Sha'Nequa offered and yet encouraged her to continue to think of herself as a writer. Sha'Nequa's subsequent drafts showed some uptake of Ms. Hampshire's advice about the introduction. We wonder if such tenacious teacher attention may have been unfamiliar to Sha'Nequa at this early point in the school year. It appeared to us that Sha'Nequa may have drawn upon an array of moves, deployed successfully in classes prior to this one, perhaps designed to appease teachers into going away. In particular, we point to her frequent use of "okay" as possible agreeability; and, her periods of silences punctuated by occasional vocalizations of surprise ("Oh!"). However, Ms. Hampshire stuck with her despite what looked like Sha'Nequa's efforts to rid herself of this teacher who held high expectations for her.

Level 3: Changing subject. Another resistance strategy was changing the subject. In the following writing conference with Pedro (Video 10/22/09), Ms. Hampshire opened by addressing a deeply personal, affective aspect of his writing. Silently, Ms. Hampshire read what Pedro had written in his notebook, and commented out loud, "That's intense. Pedro":

> In the movie Smoke Signals death and alcohol abuse happens through out the hole movie. Victor's dad drinked a lot in the movie and abused of it and got drunk. Arnold hits Victor and his wife. As a matter of fact because of Arnold's drunkness, Thomas parents ruined his hole childhood growing up with only with a grandma. Now I'm not saying I didn't grow up with a dad but he did die. And its bearly been 8 months and its

> already really hard for me. Now he didn't drink but its really hard. I can't go to school for one day without thinking about him. Imagine Thomas hole life has never met his dad because he died. (Artifact)

In her initial response to his writing, Ms. Hampshire attended to the message of his work, and not to conventions. Pedro did not acknowledge her enthusiasm for his content and instead, deflected her attention by responding, "Huh?" and laughing. Ms. Hampshire followed up with, "Your opening, it's a big deal." At this, Pedro fully pivoted the conference toward surface features of his writing, responding, "How do you spell 'loss'…". Ms. Hampshire followed Pedro's lead. She let Pedro control the conference and validated his self-correction as he talked through his confusion of the spellings of "lose" and "loss". Ms. Hampshire showed respect for Pedro's privacy, pivoting her verbal instruction to that of validating his ability to reconstruct and recall the spelling of those particular words. At the end of the draft, Ms. Hampshire wrote the following comment: "A very powerful insight about the movie. Discuss more about your point – moving on and growing from hardship? Independence? Loss? Focus and make your message strong to the reader."

This conference is illustrative of how complicated it can get when students bring their out-of-school experiences to their work. Students might feel too exposed when bringing a personal connection to their writing and then having a teacher engage them about it out loud. It's not surprising, then, that Pedro resisted Ms. Hampshire's invitation to talk about his connection to the film through the narrative of loss he identified in his writing. Ms. Hampshire sought first to welcome his insights and experiences to the work of reading and writing and thinking; then, adjusted her agenda to show that she was and would remain a safe space for Pedro to grow as a writer.

Level 4: Student refusal (sometimes veiled in humor). Students occasionally either challenged the teacher's observations about his or her writing and/or refused to consider those suggestions. In the instance we report here, humor was present. In a writing conference (Video, 11/10/09), Mr. O'Brien attempted to encourage Anthony to narrow his essay topic. Anthony's response was a vigorous, "I have a lot of stuff that needs to be shared," accompanied by a broad smile. The exchange continued:

> **Mr. O'Brien:** Yeah but you don't want to talk about all of it.
> **Anthony:** Why?!? It's interesting!
> **Mr. O'Brien:** I know, but you want to narrow the topic down.
> **Anthony:** But I'm an interesting person!

Clearly, Anthony resisted this refocusing of his writing. Mr. O'Brien decided to persist and, at the same time, to be considerate of this young man's concern:

> **Mr. O'Brien:** (*said lightly, while smiling*) In that case, it would take too long, and you would never finish, because you have so many interesting things to talk about.

At this, Anthony appeared to visibly relax and listened to Mr. O'Brien's thoughts about his topic. Mr. O'Brien then listened closely and carefully to Anthony as the two talked through Anthony's three main areas of interest (music, video making, design). In the end, Mr. O'Brien helped Anthony to find a way to weave the three areas together as relevant to one (music) of his main interests. Some teachers may have not employed the instructional and relational flexibility that Mr. O'Brien displayed here. By careful and relaxed listening, and by not holding tightly to his original "one topic" agenda, Mr. O'Brien was able to engage Anthony in working through how to weave his three interests together into a coherent aim for his paper.

As the school year went on, Anthony became a more confident writer; moreover, he told me in his retrospective interview how much he grew that year as a writer. After the conference reported here, Anthony routinely sought out Mr. O'Brien as a thinking partner in his writing. Anthony said that he was finally reading and writing for himself and to which he largely attributed Mr. O'Brien's careful one-on-one explanations as needed, and his acceptance of his students as individuals with interests, concerns, and full lives outside of school. Although Anthony continued to have questions for Mr. O'Brien, we saw less evidence over time of that degree of resistance.

Level 5: Lying and/or hostility. In our data examples, we observed instances of a student who told an un-truth (Peter) in order to limit and control the one-to-one conversation, and we noted that students sometimes conveyed "go away" to teacher through gestures. In a writing conference with Peter (Video, 11/10/09), Mr. O'Brien asked if he had an idea for his paper, to which Peter responded, "No." Then after some instruction on how to determine a topic, the conference continued:

Mr. O'Brien:	You want to use your own stuff to prove your point.
Peter:	Okay.
Mr. O'Brien:	Okay. So you pick one of your books. Do you have an idea?
Peter:	Yes, sir.
Mr. O'Brien:	What?
Peter:	Oh, I ain't got an idea yet.
Mr. O'Brien:	(*laughing*) Oh, you're just saying 'yes sir' to get rid of me.

Mr. O'Brien used several moves in response to Peter's resistance to instruction at that moment. Mr. O'Brien attempted to teach into Peter's first "no" by revisiting instruction on how one finds a topic. Then, at the second "no" from Peter, Mr. O'Brien laughed good-naturedly. He also accurately noted Peter's intention and, in a matter-of-fact manner, named it: "To get rid of me". Lastly, he left. Taken together, Mr. O'Brien showed Peter that he could be trusted to persist in his efforts to teach Peter, stay light in mood and affect, and be perceptive in his awareness of student behaviors as well as honest in naming them.

After this conference, Peter began to engage Mr. O'Brien on his own terms, which Mr. O'Brien accepted. He would occasionally call a question about writing across the room, or ask Mr. O'Brien to give him an example in his explanation. We did not see Peter prevaricate again; instead, he found that he could easily ask Mr. O'Brien for clarification either when he was near, or, when he was across the room – and Mr. O'Brien would reliably offer Peter whatever assistance he wanted or needed.

DISCUSSION

Research centered on the writing conferring practices in high school settings, particularly diverse ones, is limited. Our case study adds to the literature available on teaching writing by providing up-close portraits of how teachers confer with students in urban settings. In this paper, we have portrayed a range of resistance behaviors we observed inside of writing conferences. The value these portraits offer resides in the descriptions and discussion of resistive moments in high school English classrooms and how teachers persisted in their instruction in response to students' resistance.

This study documents students' resistance to teachers' instruction around their writing. It is important to recall Sperling's (1991) observation that there is no ideal writing conference – that opening conversational spaces may invite responses that may or may not impact directly the writing at hand. It is not surprising that students--or rather, people--resist what they perceive as some sort of intrusion into their space or

integrity, and they may do so for many reasons. It is quite possible, in fact, that when the teacher drops in (on his/her timetable, not the student's) to confer, it may be perceived more like an intrusion than support. Or, students may resist a focus on meaning because of long histories of writing instruction that have focused their attention on surface errors. Further, focusing conversations around surface errors may seem particularly safe when working with teachers they may not yet trust. Importantly, the incidents of resistance that we portrayed here were clustered in the first few months of the school year. These resistance behaviors became less and less evident over time. We inferred from this pattern that, as teachers persisted in their instruction and relationship-building, students became more ready to engage in these instructional conversations over time.

Educators across disciplines and grades share concern about how to reach and engage with students. Meyer and Turner (2002), in a review of literature, found that students were far more likely to experience success in a "high affective support classroom" (p. 111); and they found that the earliest days in the year determined the norms for the degree of affective support available to students. This study may address the call by Schutz and DeCuir (2002) for research on emotions in educational settings concerning the skill of reading the emotions of others or other directedness (p. 132). Specifically they address that "the ability of a teacher to tell when students are anxious or frustrated about a task or not understanding the questions may be the first step in helping students to learn how to regulate those emotions. This is an area in which there has been very little inquiry but that has tremendous potential to help the educational process" (p. 132).

We find the pattern of teacher persistence the most compelling contribution of our work. The teachers persisted through the students' resistance and placed a premium on relationship and trust building. The teachers, in response to students' resistance, sometimes shifted their agenda, sometimes pushed through the resistance to shift students' focus to meaning, and they always returned to the students. We argue that this repeatable, returning-to structure allowed the teachers and students to build relationships that sustained conferring practices over time. Across time, the teachers and students engaged in repeated, individual conversations about their writing that, theoretically, functioned as what Mercer (1995) calls long conversations of learning about writing. ■

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Correspondance regarding this article should be directed to Annamary Consalvo from the University of Texas at Tyler. Email may be sent to aconsalvo@uttyler.edu