The Role of Talk in Small Writing Groups: Building Declarative and Procedural Knowledge for Basic Writers

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ABSTRACT: *Through the use of a case study, this article explores the role of talk in underprepared students' acquisition of academic discourse. Conversation analysis as a linguistic framework is used to examine the interactions of students participating in a small writing group. Tracing the progress of one student's paper, I explore how students' participation in small writing groups allows them, in Faerch and Kasper's terms, to build declarative knowledge and negotiate strategies they can apply to their procedural knowledge of writing. The small writing groups, led by a teaching assistant, provide underprepared students with exposure to the practices and values of the academic discourse community. A systematic look at how students' talk is structured and what topics they focus on offers important insights to instructors into aspects of student writers' learning processes and suggests additional pedagogical approaches.*

KEYWORDS: *academic discourse; declarative knowledge; procedural knowledge; writing groups; communities of practice*

Like many composition teachers, I have struggled with finding ways to help my students, especially underprepared students, acquire the language of the academy. Since talk is key to the acquisition of academic discourse and the pragmatic strategies necessary for academic writing, modeling the discourse within appropriate situational contexts becomes a primary means by which to assist students' learning. Discourse, like language, is complex, especially for learners new to a particular discourse. Is it possible to observe their learning process as a first step toward unraveling the complexity of the discourse for them? The systematic analysis of the talk of our students using conversation or discourse analysis as a linguistic framework is one method by which to help instructors gain a better understanding of how discourse acquisition takes place and facilitate the process for basic writing students in multiple contexts.

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This study examines the talk of writing students in peer groups led by a teaching assistant in order to explore how conversational interaction facilitates the acquisition of discourse. Since learning is socially negotiated, proficiency in a new discourse community, Lave and Wenger claim, may be acquired through limited peripheral participation which they define as a way to gain access—to learn gradually through ever-growing involvement (37). Situated learning, or "learning-in-practice," takes place by interacting with experienced members of the community through talk, observation, and practice (Lave and Wenger 101). As talk is a central socio-cultural practice, learning to talk about writing in mediated social interactions allows composition students to negotiate the meanings of the new discourse such that conversation becomes the "matrix" for their acquisition process (Levinson 284).

The work presented in this article is part of a larger research project on interactional strategies and the acquisition of academic discourse. For that project, I videotaped freshman composition students in small writing groups that were a component of the Freshman Composition Program at a large southeastern university, a program implemented to replace the university's remedial composition courses and set up to work in tandem with the freshman composition course, English 101. The students in each group are all enrolled in English 101 and attend a writing group session led by a teaching assistant once a week in addition to their regular composition class.

Through the use of a case study, I trace the progress of one paper from the student's first attempts at understanding the assignment to the writing of her first through final drafts. I argue that the small writing group functions as a means of socialization into a new community of practice used to build both procedural and declarative knowledge about writing. Specifically, I show how the students use talk to develop declarative knowledge and try out different strategies, building procedural knowledge, to bridge the gaps between knowing *what* to do and *how* to do it. In addition, I consider the role of the teaching assistant as an experienced community member in creating a social setting wherein students practice new proficiencies in academic writing.

Frameworks of Discourse Acquisition

As a composition instructor, I have often observed a significant gap or mismatch between the knowledge and abilities that my students bring to the classroom. This gap can be seen when students are clearly able to speak about

the changes they need to make in revising their draft, yet the essay that gets turned in does not match the students' plans. In other words, they are not yet able to carry over that verbal understanding of the process into their actual writing. What causes this gap between knowledge and ability—between the ability to define a rhetorical term, like pathos, and the inability to write a rhetorical analysis? For successful essays, composition students need to control different levels of language competence. Like all language users, they function linguistically on two basic levels: competence and performance. A speaker has many different underlying, or subconscious, competences including grammatical, communicative, pragmatic, and discursive. The second level, that of performance or "the actual use of language in concrete situations" (Chomsky 4), is often an imperfect reflection of underlying language competences. This is especially true when speakers learn new languages or enter new discourse communities, as do our freshman writers.

Frameworks for looking at levels of competence and performance from the field of second language acquisition provide composition instructors with alternative insights for understanding the learning processes of beginning college writers. One valuable perspective, first proposed in 1986 by Faerch and Kasper, claims that students employ two types of knowledge: declarative and procedural. Drawing on the research of cognitive science, they define declarative knowledge as an understanding of the "what" or knowing "that" of something, and procedural knowledge as "knowing how." In this framework, declarative knowledge consists of linguistic, pragmatic, discourse, and socio-interactional knowledge (8), knowledge which the speaker or learner internalizes. Both levels of language, structural and social, interact with each other to create an individual's language competences. In order to become competent speakers of the discourse, newcomers must learn the pragmatic and discourse rules of each community of practice they enter. Therefore in order to be successful writers, composition students must first develop this internal knowledge of the socio-linguistic rules of academic discourse.

Simultaneously, students must also build their procedural knowledge. A parallel concept to performance, procedural knowledge is the use of one's declarative knowledge and consists of a speaker's strategies for accomplishing various language tasks. Drawing on the socio-interactional resources of their declarative knowledge, speakers within a discourse community develop their procedural knowledge, which in turn allows them to regulate the discourse, use language forms in socially appropriate ways, and create coherent texts. According to Faerch and Kasper, part of successfully developing procedural

knowledge requires knowing how to use language appropriately in particular situations in order to accomplish different language tasks. Assessing the context means knowing the appropriate things to say as well the appropriate ways to accomplish tasks. This aspect of acquisition involves developing successful communication strategies, or "strategic competence" (Canale and Swain as qtd. in Faerch and Kasper II). For it is through the organization of their talk that speakers display the many types of competences necessary to be considered a proficient member of a particular discourse community. Within this framework, composition students need to develop competences in more than one level of language. However, like all language learners, they acquire these types of knowledge at different rates, often engendering a gap between their declarative and procedural knowledge, or between their ability to talk about writing and their ability to write an academic paper.

Thus instructors must help students build strategic competences as a way for them to bridge the gap between their declarative and procedural knowledge. As beginners in the discourse, composition students will move through different stages of development and test hypotheses about the rules of the discourse they are learning. This process of hypothesis formation and testing is shaped by way of several factors: their access to the discourse; selection of input; and modeling of the discourse by experienced community members. First, access to the discourse is critical. In order to acquire declarative knowledge, students must have structured access to academic discourse, which will enable them to revise their internalized language model(s). According to Klein, access consists of two components: the amount of input, or language exposure, a learner receives, and opportunities for communication (44). Furthermore, the process of structured access combines these two components so that the learner's acquisition process is guided by more experienced community members who provide parallel information about both the content and function of discourse features.

Exposure to fluent speakers who can model and clarify the language/discourse is especially vital for the new learner. According to Beaugrande, each student comes to the discourse learning process with "a model of the language, with the limitations and approximations peculiar to that speaker's experiences and abilities. In this sense, learning a language means revising one's model . . . through a succession of stages" (126). Since more than just comprehension of the discourse is necessary to be successful in a new community of practice, new schemas or language models need to be developed for all the language tasks associated with academic writing. Guiding students toward a new or more viable language model is one of the tasks that instruc-

tors, as experienced community members, must undertake since "what gets performed or learned on any one occasion always depends on the learner's current model" (Beaugrande 126). In order to help learners revise their language models, Long and Crookes argue that instructors should design "pedagogic tasks which provide a vehicle for the presentation of appropriate language samples to learners" (qtd. in Cook 151). Thus through the guided exploration of different genres of writing and speaking, students learn to negotiate both their own writing process and the meaning of writing within the larger academic community. As with second language learners, students enter more fully into academic communities of practice as they "begin to understand the distinct communities that are held together or separated by not only genres and vocabulary, but also practices and values" (Guleff 214).

The Writing Groups (WG)

To help instructors determine which students would benefit from the WG, all students in freshman English 101 courses are given a diagnostic essay the first week of class. These essays are evaluated together with writing samples from high school writing portfolios that all in-coming freshman students are requested to bring with them to class. Students are then recommended to the WG based on the quality of their writing, and/or their attitude toward writing. Some of the writing qualities which suggest that a student could benefit from the WG are a lack of content or development, evidence of dialect differences, and an abundance of mechanical and/or grammatical issues. Emotional responses such as fear or dislike of writing or a negative writing experience are more reasons to recommend a student. Also any student who wishes to volunteer for the WG may do so.

A writing group normally consists of four or five students from several different English 101 classes and a group leader, who is either an experienced teaching assistant (TA) or an English faculty member. All the TAs who work in a WG have taught composition as well as tutored in the writing center. During the semester, they participate in a weekly meeting with the WG director where they can talk through any problems in their groups as well as draw on the expertise of their peers in devising writing strategies for their students.

In a typical session, students meet in the WG room, where they sign in. There is usually some initial social talk, and then the group begins to discuss the essays each student has brought to share. Each student reads her/his essay aloud, and then the other students and group leader comment. If possible,

the group leader tries to build discussion on peer comments. This practice validates the students' comments and encourages greater involvement among participants. However, it is not uncommon for students to bring an assignment without a draft because they don't understand what the assignment requires. In these cases, the group will talk the students through it.

Data Analysis

The data for this article is drawn from videotapes of a writing group that were recorded and transcribed according to conventions established by linguist Gail Jefferson.[1] The excerpts presented are taken from three group sessions over a period of four weeks during a single semester. This particular group includes three students and the group leader. The analytical framework is Conversation Analysis (CA), often used in research pertaining to both ordinary and institutional talk or discourse. Within the CA theoretical framework, it is the job of the researcher to discern the categories—the systematic and orderly properties of the discourse—that are meaningful to the participants and not impose a set of predetermined categories on the data. When examining the talk of composition students, it is therefore important to identify the structural and other elements in the talk that are meaningful to the students themselves, as these also offer clues to pragmatic competence.

The student in the case study is Ricki (all names used are pseudonyms), an African American freshman in her first semester. Like many students who are speakers of vernacular or non-standard language varieties, Ricki starts the process of acquiring academic discourse at a greater distance from the target discourse than students whose middle-class dialect and discourse practices more closely resemble institutionalized school practices (Heath). Thus, for Ricki, like other students in the WG, the differences in her home/primary discourse require that she engage in bridge building—in creating new language models—that negotiate between primary and secondary ("academic") discourses (Gee 156-57). My analysis focuses on Ricki's attempt to understand her instructor's challenging rhetorical assignment as she is supported by her peers and a group leader working in collaboration. Although most of the excerpts presented focus on Ricki's interactions with the group leader, the entire group was present at each session.

Every semester, the instructor of Ricki's English 101 class, a composition and rhetoric graduate student, gives her students a rhetorical analysis assignment, for which the students select an essay from the class reader

and analyze its use of either ethos, pathos, or logos. A list of questions is designed to show them how their author is using the rhetorical strategy they have chosen, and the instructor expects students to use examples from their selected essays to demonstrate the effectiveness of specific rhetorical devices they must identify. The essay that Ricki chose for her paper is "Sexploitation" by Tipper Gore. However, the assignment proved difficult for her, since it required a level of textual analysis generally beyond the experience of writers such as Ricki, as it involved at least two separate analytical tasks. The first task is analysis of pathos, showing how Gore generates an emotional reaction from her audience as determined by textual structure apart from content. The second task is the creation of Ricki's essay. Through the group, she recognizes that she must discuss word choice and textual examples rather than summarizing or criticizing the reading's content—an approach typical of students at this level (Launspach 217).

So while not typical for freshman composition, the assignment functions as a good example of the cognitive gap between declarative and procedural knowledge for beginning college writers as it highlights an assignment which, if done successfully, effectively would situate students within an academic language-oriented community of practice. Yet the entire premise of the assignment is quite challenging to the experience and expectations of Ricki as a beginning college writer. She has no mental representation of pathos as a rhetorical device and must therefore build declarative knowledge before she can devise procedural strategies to write her essay. The data will show how talking through stages of the assignment in the writing group helps Ricki to develop an understanding of the rhetorical terms as well as a sense of the writing process.

The First Session

The first time the assignment is discussed, Ricki is just starting to work on her paper. At this point, she does not have a clear idea of what the assignment is asking her to do. One strategy the group leader, Jean, a teaching assistant, employs is to get Ricki to restate the assignment in her own words. In Excerpt 1, Ricki describes the assignment as she currently understands it.

Excerpt 1

Ricki: Okay, we h<u>a</u>d like uhm. (2.9) a list of words like, logos ethos and pathos. (4.3) I chose pathos. and I can't think of the meaning right now.

Jean: Uh it would have to do with emotion.

Ricki: Yeah. how da-how da-da feel, yeah how she felt (.) about what she was writing, or what not.

Ricki is vague about the assignment as she is also uncertain about the meaning of the rhetorical terms her instructor has used. In her first turn, she is unsure of what pathos means. In her second turn, having been given a definition, she states how she envisions pathos would be used in an essay. She associates it with the attitude or feelings of writers toward their content rather than as a means to engage the emotions of a reader. It is clear that she does not understand the conventional definition or rhetorical use of pathos. Like most instructors, Ricki's instructor had explained the assignment in class and defined each term. Despite this preparation, there exists a mismatch between the conventional definition and Ricki's understanding of the term.

In Excerpt 2, Jean is aware that Ricki is lost on several levels. She tries to get her to think about how she will approach her paper, pressing for Ricki to connect the terminology and the drafting process.

Excerpt 2

Jean: Now, what an-when-when you do your essay? what are you supposed to do with the pathos?

Ricki: Well? that's something I don't kno(h)w. uh I guess I supposed to write like. (2.5) jus' analyzing (.) how she felt about the sex entertainment. (2.1) without stating my opinion on how I think she was feeling. but jus' write what she really was meaning. I guess.

Ricki recognizes that her paper must analyze how Gore feels about her topic, sex entertainment, but at this point she doesn't understand that she will need to do more than discuss the general topic or Gore's feelings about it. Ricki will need to discuss how Gore touches the emotions of her readers. Initially, Ricki enters into the assignment by focusing on Gore's *what*, not on her *how*. Like other students I have studied, she does not yet realize that

it is possible to analyze the essay's structure separate from its content. One of the group's tasks then is to help Ricki devise successful strategies to write just such an analysis. Jean approaches this in several ways. First she works with Ricki to construct a definition for the rhetorical term, pathos. Second, she stresses that Ricki's paper should be analysis, not summary. She states the point directly: "You know not to just summarize the article/ but to analyze which means to pull out/ just pull out specific pieces and look at them." Later she rephrases the point, "You want to analyze it/and that means that you'll pull out certain/relevant pieces to look at in more detail/does that make sense?" In the same turn, she reminds Ricki not to get involved in the issue, i.e., the content, but to look at how Gore writes about it. Third, Jean solicits peer input from Seth, another student, in order to help Ricki devise some practical writing strategies.

Excerpt 3

Seth: 'Cause we did something. sort of like that, we did a critical analysis my 12th grade year. of a writer. we had to analyze his writing, and how it reflected his background. and I was kinda like tryin' to (.) reflect it towards that.

Jean: Yeah so you were thinkin. (0.9) wh-hearing the <u>a</u>nalysis. how did you see that analysis being the same, from what you did? and-and what uh Ricki's doing?

Seth: 'Cause we had to like. we had uhm-I had. T.S Eliot. Eliot I believe. and uh (2.4) what did I write. I think I wrote about his ah. I wrote about the poem uh. Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock. and uhm I just pulled out of there, like different lines that showed you, like a lonely man. and stuff like that. that reflected on his background, and that's what he wrote about, and all that other kind of stuff. it's like (.) pulling certain verses, or something like that.

Jean: S<u>o</u> it means that you don't tell the whole thing over.

Seth: Yeah.

At the beginning of this excerpt, Seth compares Ricki's assignment to one he did in high school. He has picked up on its analytical aspect. His class was asked to analyze how a writer's background affected his writing. The group leader then encourages Seth to elaborate on his comparisons in her next turn. Seth talks about his essay and emphasizes picking out parts of the text that will support the thesis. He stresses that his analysis used lines that

showed the loneliness of the writer, and compares this process to Ricki's of using examples to show how word choice affects the reader's emotions.

Next Jean and Seth collaborate to give Ricki suggestions for getting started, reemphasizing the main points touched on in earlier parts of the interaction: study the assignment sheet, reread Gore's essay, and look for examples. Seth also suggests that Ricki practice on something easy, to get the hang of it before writing her actual essay.

Thus, the first group session lays important groundwork for Ricki in terms of building both her declarative and procedural knowledge. Ricki has been led to construct an understanding of rhetorical terms and build her declarative knowledge. At the same time, the collaboration between Jean and Seth has modeled for her both the concept of analysis and a strategy for writing her essay. In the discussion of writing strategies, Ricki also progresses toward academic discourse: analysis, and the use of examples to support ideas.

The Second Session

One week later, Ricki's assignment is discussed again. This time she brings the first draft of her paper. Today the group will continue to help her understand the assignment and offer suggestions for revision based on her teacher's comments. Twice Ricki is asked to explain her assignment, once at the beginning and later when the group actually discusses her draft. Excerpt 4 shows her initial restatement.

Excerpt 4

Jean: After we hear what Ricki's doing. Ricki tell us what you're doing.

Ricki: Well. we had to write on our rhetorical analysis. well the subject I chose, was curbing sexploitation industry by Tipper Gore? and I write like about pathos. how she stir-red the audience (.) emotions. (1.3) to uhm limit (.) the sex entertainment. for uh children. (10.0) *{Jean writing notes}*

Jean: Uh how are you going to? how is pathos uh. work in what you are doing. how-how do you see that as important in your as-signment?

Ricki: Uhm. (2.7) I see how she's showin' (.) the feeling of a woman. and a parent. how children they imitate stuff they see on TV, like

they imitate violence, so she-she believe that once a child sees the sex. the stuff on TV. or what they hear through lyrics, that they might imitate it, and then it's also how it degrade women. degrading to women. (2.4) so she stro-she trying to strike up feelings. in the female. as well as both p<u>a</u>rents. as how th<u>is</u> affects their child.

Here Ricki is able to give a concise explanation of the assignment. She identifies the important elements of the assignment, that is, to analyze an essay and describe the author's use of pathos. Her new way of thinking is reflected in her switch from pathos as it relates to Gore's feelings or attitudes toward her content to pathos as a means Gore has to touch the emotions of her audience.

Similar to her approach in the first group meeting, Jean works with Ricki on two levels: building her understanding of the rhetorical terms, and relating these terms to writing. We can see this strategy in her turn, where she asks Ricki to apply her new understanding of pathos to the construction of her own text. However, Ricki is still unable to analyze pathos separately from the content of Gore's essay, and so the first part of her turn involves a recounting of some of Gore's content. In the end of her turn, she finally articulates that it is the examples that will "strike up feelings" in the audience.

In Excerpt 5, Jean points out to Ricki her improved understanding of the assignment compared to last week.

Excerpt 5

Jean: Yeah okay. so you made some progress on that haven't you?

Ricki: Not really.

Jean: hahhuh I think you made some progress on th<u>i</u>:nking. on the thinking about it. 'cause you have a sense of, what-of how you're supposed to do the analysis. you have a better sense of it, than you did before. that you're supposed to look at how Tipper G<u>o</u>re. (0.7) uh. (2.1) how pathos acts in what she (.) is writing. it that-does that seem how you are thinking of it?

Ricki: I'm thinkin of it. but I jus' ain't, writing like that. it's kinda hard . 'cause I keep- I don't want to keep quoting her and I cain't s<u>u</u>mmarize it. and I ain't never did no paper like this before. so it's kinda hard for me to try an' do this.

The group leader notes the progress in Ricki's 'thinking' about the assignment at the same time she recognizes that such meta-awareness is an important aspect of writing. However, Ricki initially denies this progress. Instead she focuses on some of the main difficulties of the assignment: she doesn't want to quote the author; she knows she may not summarize; and more importantly, she has no previous experience with this type of writing. Her ability to articulate these problems further indicates her growing meta-awareness of her own writing process.

These two excerpts from the second session evince the gaps between the student's declarative and emergent procedural knowledge. The group leader focuses on and praises Ricki's growth in her meta-awareness—her ability to articulate her knowledge of the terms of the assignment, while Ricki in contrast focuses on her struggles with drafting—with the translation of her declarative knowledge of the terms to the writing itself. She is not really conscious yet that the meta-awareness she is building will eventually help her to create a successful essay. Neither will Jean ignore Ricki's concerns as the group proceeds to discuss her first draft.

Introducing the First Draft

Ricki passes out copies of her paper, and Jean asks her to again explain her assignment. Ricki reads aloud from the assignment sheet to remind the group of the requirements; she then reads aloud her essay.

One strategy employed by group leaders in these small writing groups is to set up the other students as leaders of the discussion. This strategy encourages students to become active participants in the discussion of each other's papers. Through this type of limited peripheral participation, the students in the WG gradually increase their participation in the different practices of academic writing. These interactional strategies provide a way of gaining access through a growing involvement in a type of "social practice that entails learning as integral constituent" (Lave and Wenger 35). Jean gets the other students to "take over" by asking Ricki to explain the assignment to Seth. Through his questions and comments, he provides the direction of the discussion for the next eight turns. Notably, he asks Ricki, "Is it persuasive writing?" That is, is her essay supposed to persuade her readers that Gore is right in her claim?

Excerpt 6

Seth: or you trying to convince them to go one way or the other? or are you just tryin to get them to think? (.) yeah she's right.

Ricki: Well see, okay for what I'm d<u>o</u>ing, is-I'm-I'm describing how she striking the feelings up. within another person. like how she <u>feels</u>. toward that uhm that topic. she's also using like different examples. and that's like one way of. like the one example she uses uhm. (2.6) she's talking about she watching a game show one morning. and then they had a preview of a soap opera, with a rape scene in there. so I have to show how's that uhm. how would that-how would that feel towards the audience, you know your child looking at a morning show, and then a rape scene comes up. and your child might try to imitate that, that's what's she's trying to.

In Excerpt 6, Ricki shows that she is now oriented toward the idea of demonstrating pathos and showing how an audience would react to Gore's examples. But she is still not quite certain about her intentions for the paper. She knows that her essay should describe how Gore "strikes up feelings" through the use of different examples, and that she must explain to her own readers the intended effect of Gore's examples on the audience, which Ricki has identified as parents with children. Of course Gore's essay is intended to be persuasive. However, Ricki does not give Seth a definite answer as to whether her own essay should be persuasive, which was probably the intent of his question. Rather she interprets it as relating to Gore's text. In subsequent turns, Jean responds to Ricki's confusion as she tries to reinforce the difference between the two papers: Gore's paper is persuasive, while Ricki's should be analytical.

The First Draft

Like many beginning or inexperienced writers, Ricki writes like she talks. According to Beaugrande, the differences in the conditions of talk vs. writing produce "manifestations of interference when experienced talkers must act as inexperienced writers." (129). However, the transfer of dialect features is not a simple one-to-one proposition and many students, like Ricki, exhibit an intralect in their writing which contains features not found in either their vernacular dialect or standard written English.[2] As we will soon judge by way of her final draft, the more Ricki is engaged in using talk as a

means to acquiring the language of the academy, the greater the impact will be on such intralectical features of her writing as can be identified here.

Ricki's First Draft

Curbing the Sexploitation Industry Tipper Gore

Tipper Gore purpose towards the parents is to convince them on limiting sexual messages that children acquire through television, radio and other entertainment. Also open eyes to the degrading of women. Throughout the essay there is great concern of the welfare of the children. Children mimics what they see on T.V. as for example a five-year old boy from Boston got up from watching a teen-slasher film and stabbed a two-year girl with a butcher knife. The same as a child might mimic a preview of a rape scene of a soap opera that interrupts during a morning show. Gore states that "we cannot control what our children watch, but we can let the industry know we're angry." She also is stating that children is going to watch whatever they like, but we can cut down on most of the advertisement of different sexual acts. She continues her pathos view by portraying another "teen-slasher" film which depicts the killing, torture and sexual mutilation of women in sickening detail. This is an example of degrading women in such that it is i n t o l e r a b l e and despicable towards the nature of a woman. She is opening eyes to our environment as a woman and a woman with children it is time to limit this sex entertainment. Gore is also describing how the industry is poisoning our children mind with pornography.

The group's discussion of Ricki's draft centers around several main points. One aspect they discuss is Ricki's concern about not using too many quotes, something she has stated earlier (Excerpt 5). Another is the group's attempts to get Ricki to focus on Gore's use of language as the means to affect the emotions of her audience. The group tries to work this idea out with Ricki by suggesting the use of concrete examples—either from the essay or by way of comparisons drawn from experience. Through the process of discussing her essay, Ricki realizes that what she has done is mainly summary.

The group advises her to look at the words that Gore uses to affect parents. Jean asks her, "Can you find some quotes in there/that you would use/have you picked out some uhm quotes/ some words/images/passages

where you would say she's using pathos." Seth points out several words that seem strong to him as possible examples she might use, "mutilation and all that kinda stuff/it-it's not like the usual words that float through/it jus sorta like pops out at you/it's like you don't every day read the newspaper." In addition, they also recommend that she try to imagine herself as Gore when she was writing her essay—to try to figure out why Gore made the choices she did. Seth says, "A good way to put it/you got to think/ what Tipper Gore was thinking/when she wrote the paper." Both Seth and Jean stress to Ricki that her paper should be an analysis of Gore's. Jean says, "So it's like/it's a-it's a double thing isn't it/it's layered/Tipper Gore has written about sexploitation/and you're not to write about that/but you're to write about how Tipper Gore writes about it." Later Seth states, "So you're not writing about the sexploitation/she's writing about what Tipper Gore wrote about."

While Ricki has made progress in building her declarative knowledge of the rhetorical terms from one group meeting to the next, her paper tells a different story. At this second group meeting, Ricki has demonstrated from her discussions that she understands that pathos relates to the emotions of the reader and that she needs to talk about the effect of pathos on Gore's readers. She can make that distinction when *talking* about her paper—however, the text itself does not yet reflect her new meta-knowledge about the definition of pathos and its role in an essay.

For instance, Ricki states in her check-in for this session that she needs to demonstrate how Gore shows the feeling of a woman (Excerpt 4). While she focuses on the content, that children will imitate what they see and how such content is degrading to women, she fails to show the feelings that Gore wants to produce from the use of these examples in her own essay, even though she is very clear that Gore is trying to strike up feelings in parents, especially women. Later in Excerpt 6, she again is able to articulate that she needs to describe how Gore strikes up feelings and later show how an audience would feel or react to Gore's example. However, when she writes about the rape scene used to advertise a soap opera, she does not make the leap in her own text to demonstrating how Gore uses this example to provoke a reaction from her audience.

In her writing, we see a difference between Ricki's new declarative knowledge and her performance abilities, or her procedural knowledge—the set of skills that will allow her to "perform" a rhetorical analysis. From the WG discussions, Ricki has absorbed the importance of using examples; she mentions several, but does not articulate how they function to create certain types of feelings in the reader. Her primary focus in this draft is still on

Gore's content—on the information that Gore is giving readers rather than the techniques, or "the pathos view," that Gore uses to persuade her readers. But while this draft contains a lot of summary, restating the examples that Gore uses, it is not entirely summary. Ricki writes about two purposes that she believes Gore has—opening the reader's eyes to this problem and limiting the sexual messages that children are exposed to. She implies that Gore's target audience is women, especially ones with children. In this way, her draft shows some limited evidence of analysis. In addition, Ricki's draft gives evidence that she is able to perceive genres. She understands that Gore's essay is a persuasive essay, when she states Gore's "purpose towards the parents is to convince them."

Despite the flaws in the draft, Ricki is making progress in her apprenticeship process. Through the guided talk in the WG, she has made important steps in the development of her understanding of several key rhetorical concepts: pathos, analysis, summary. Within the safety of the group, she has been able to negotiate through her participation, the academic meaning of pathos and make initial strides toward a workable textual structure. Still she has moved only so far toward participation in her new community of practice.

The Next Draft

At the third and last session in which this paper is discussed, Ricki is asked again to restate the assignment as a preface to reading her new draft aloud. The following excerpt presents her restatement.

Excerpt 7

Jean: tell us-tell us what you were supposed to do in this paper
Ricki: okay what I supposed to have done was uh tell how and why that she reaches out to her audience evokes feelings which is uhm pathos and I jus' use some of the words
and how it might affect a parent which was her audience it suppose like limit the sexploitation in the industry like get some of that uhm sex entertainment off the TVs or like rock groups or what not that's what I was supposed to done
Jean: okay okay let's see if she did it

In her turn, Ricki is now better able to summarize the main points of the assignment. One further improvement that Ricki has made in her understanding of the assignment is the connection between Gore's word choices and evoking pathos. This realization marks an important step in her verbal understanding—she is moving from what the term means, a definition of pathos, to being able to perceive what resources an author might use to create pathos.

The draft that Ricki has brought is one that has been returned to her with the teacher's comments. Like her earlier draft, it also contains African American English features, intralect features, and standard written English usage. The draft is now two-pages typed (half a page longer than previously), and organized in only two paragraphs: introduction and a single body paragraph. In the introduction, she states her main points; in the body, she uses quotes and examples from Gore's essay.

Excerpt 1 from Ricki's Final Draft

"Sentiment of Gore towards Sexploitation"

Tipper Gore uses pathos in her essay, "Curbing the Sexploitation Industry" to reach out to the women and parents with children under the age of fifteen. She is letting her audience know of the deep need to limit the children to sex entertainment. As to back her argument she shows examples how easily influence the children are by what they watch before they hit adolescence.

Gore has a great concern for the welfare of the children and women reputation. She evokes a suddenness of protection and at the same time anger combine together at these entertainers The crucial words as sadomasochism, brutality, mutilation and titillate gives harsh images of what a child might be seeing done to the women.

Overall this paper is more organized and contains less summary than the first version. Ricki has selected four different words that she feels Gores uses to evoke a response in the reader. For each of the words she has chosen, Ricki uses examples from Gore's essay that illustrate their use. The following excerpt is one example of this strategy. Here she starts with *mutilation* and connects it through the example to the next word—*titillate*.

Excerpt 2 from Ricki's Final Draft

Which lets me go to the next crucial word she uses mutilation. The example used by Gore is: "teen slasher' film, and it typically depicts the killing, torture and sexual mutilation of women ins sickening detail." That is despicable showing how one can remove a necessary part of a woman and then show it to the children. Which only increase their curiosity (Titillate) of what would happen next.

The excerpt that follows is from later in the essay: here she has chosen the word *brutality*, but unlike in the earlier excerpt, she doesn't present her reader with any of Gore's examples to demonstrate brutality. Instead she comments on the emotional impact she feels the word would have on Gore's readers.

Excerpt 3 from Ricki's Final Draft

The word brutality hits close to the heart of majority of women. This is another one of crucial words that she uses to throw pain in her audience heart, because of the fact that they been in the situation once or twice.

Evincing analysis, these excerpts make it possible to observe Ricki implementing the advice she has been given in the WG; she is trying to connect the emotions of the reader to the words used by Gore. We can see the beginning of her new procedural knowledge.

Despite this progress, the conclusion of the paper returns to what Ricki feels is Gore's main message rather than focusing on the emotional impact of Gore's essay.

Excerpt 4 from Ricki's Final Draft

Gore concluding statement, "The fate of the family, the dignity of women, the mental health of children—These concerns belong to everyone.", make you think that everybody suppose to come together and put an end to this sexploitation. Lets her audience come into an agreement that the family should stick together on the issue of anybodies child state of being.

While the teacher's comments on the draft emphasize a need to work on the organization, she praises Ricki's progress with the assignment, and gives the impression that overall she is pleased with Ricki's draft. Ricki, on the other hand, lets the group know that while happy with her grade, she is not pleased with what she views as her mistakes. Firstly, she doesn't think that she did the best job she could have since she got hung up on the idea of the paper being hard. She states that she needed to get beyond the idea of it being hard and just convince herself that she could do it. Secondly, she is aware of the mechanical errors in the paper: spelling errors, skipped information, and problems with sentence structure. She feels it falls short of the requirements of the assignment as she has now come to understand them.

Discussion

As this study shows, for basic or inexperienced writers, access to talk in peer groups enables students to construct meaning in social interaction through collaborative learning, facilitating their participation in the larger academic conversation. As evidence of socially situated learning, the data in this study is useful to composition instructors as we trace Ricki's process of development over the course of four weeks, watching her grapple with acquiring new declarative knowledge and struggle with translating that new knowledge into actual writing strategies. Excerpts of conversation with a supportive peer group show that she is able to move from having no understanding of pathos as a rhetorical term, to associating pathos with the writers' feeling toward their content, to understanding pathos as a means to touch the reader's emotions. Thus, the talk in the Writing Group serves as an "institutionalized" guide for Ricki, providing essential discourse input for her and highlighting important aspects of academic discourse and practices.

Writing is a multiple step process. We have to know "what" to do as well as "how" to do it, and beginning academic writers, like Ricki, often struggle with more than one type of knowledge gap when confronted with writing in the academy. Their acquisition process needs to take place on both cognitive and pragmatic levels, affecting declarative and procedural knowledge. The small writing group provides Ricki with a "safe" forum to negotiate the meaning of new rhetorical terms as well as an apprenticeship-like setting, a place for guided participation in the academic writing process.

In addition, the Writing Group provides what Faerch and Kasper refer to as accessibility (14). They explain, "To become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity,

old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources, and opportunities for participation" (Lave and Wenger 100-101). Conversational interactions in the Writing Group make available to basic writers, like Ricki, important linguistic and discourse resources, that are not usually overtly articulated for students during a composition course. It is a place where, for example, rhetorical terms are not only defined, but modeled by the group leader as well as by peers.

Moreover, like other speakers of vernacular dialects, Ricki also experiences a difference between her home and academic discourses. She must find a way to bridge that gap, to negotiate the differences, without losing her voice. Rather than forcing such students to abandon all of their discourse norms, one way to enhance their acquisition of academic discourse is to build on their expertise in their home discourses. Smitherman advocates using the oral language resources that African American students possess to help them promote learning through social interaction. Thus instructors might use what students already know to "move them to what they need to know" (219). Like Smitherman, Perez holds that use of linguistic knowledge from students' home discourse can ease the transition and provide scaffolding for learning new discourse norms. Thus, instructors can draw on the linguistic resources that students bring with them as a way of providing students structured access to academic discourse in order to facilitate their acquisition process.

As a writer, Ricki is still working out the appropriate relationships between herself and her audience (her peers and instructor), and the assigned topic (a rhetorical analysis). What is the best way for her to negotiate these different elements? As the number of options for instruction of basic writers has widened in the field, the use of small groups may fit a variety of basic writing contexts: basic writing courses, groups run out of a writing center, or pull-out workshops such as the one described in this study. Writing groups could be implemented in writing programs, either by individual instructors within a classroom setting using a teaching assistant, or by a program as a whole. Both the methods and results of this study advocate for such small group or studio arrangements as productive places of discourse development for basic writers.

Through the discussions in the Writing Group, Ricki is able to increase her declarative knowledge, allowing her to shift from writing a summary of Gore's essay to the beginnings of an analysis of Gore's use of pathos. The Writing Group's discussions assist her in coming up with strategies for writing her paper such as selecting, connecting, and analyzing words she

feels that Gore used to invoke responses in her reader. It is a sound strategy. However, we can see in her draft that Ricki's inexperience as a writer, her lack of procedural knowledge, does not allow her to translate this new approach into a well organized paper. While she has gained through the Writing Group interactions a strategy to approach a rhetorical analysis of a text, she is struggling with other aspects of expository writing. She is still working on building the strategic competences that will improve her actual writing skills. At this point in her acquisition process, Ricki's declarative knowledge has out-stripped her performance ability.

A primary advantage that Ricki has is access to an experienced community member, the teaching assistant, Jean, who models the discourse and provides links between the discourse and creating texts for Ricki and her peers. The TA uses a series of interactional strategies: restating the assignment, using focus questions,[3] advice giving, and soliciting focused input from Ricki's peers. This last strategy provides Ricki with advice and suggestions that are framed in language that she can relate to and at the same time builds the linguistic competence of her peers. Further, the group leader's language use models for students' suitable responses, allowing them to reframe their talk in ways that come to match more and more accepted discourse practices. This type of structured access to the discourse is especially beneficial to basic writers like Ricki, who start farther from the target discourse than other students who may have had some exposure to it in other contexts. All language learners need sufficient exposure to the target discourse: the more meaningful the language input they receive, the faster their acquisition process will become.

Other studies also show that there are additional benefits for composition students when an experienced language user, such as a peer group leader, an instructor, or a teaching assistant is present in a writing group. For example, Grobman, in her research, found that peer group leaders can function to "build bridges between basic writers and academic writers" by making academic discourses "visible" (45). Similarly, Brooke, O'Conner, and Mirtz also found that students, in peer groups with an experienced leader who modeled discussion about writing as well as genres of writing, made more relevant connections between talk about writing and the act of writing itself than did students in peer groups without a group leader. Those students had a harder time connecting their talk and their writing process (83). Thus, students in writing groups with an experienced group leader have more structured access to the discourse and can negotiate meanings

related to the composition process more productively than those in peer groups alone.

Like our students, we can also benefit from collaboration and talk about writing. This study demonstrates that we, as teachers and researchers, can gain important insights into our students' acquisition of writing when we examine the talk that goes into the creation of a draft—as well as examining the draft itself. Despite some of the problems with adapting research methods from other fields, Mortensen acknowledges that examining the talk of writing students can make more visible the process by which texts are constructed. In his critique of analyzing talk about writing, he states that "theoretically, then, analyzing talk about writing gives us a way of studying how texts are socially constructed. As a method, it offers a frame in which to arrange and interpret observations about the writing experience" (Mortensen, 120-21). He further observes that talk about writing is situated at the boundaries of text and individual perception. This intersection of text and consciousness leaves "traces" that can be recorded and utilized to further our understanding of a particular student's writing process. One way these traces can be seen is when we examine how talk about a text shapes the text itself. The intersection between talk and text is a meeting place of oral and written, between Ricki's talk about her draft, her draft, and prior drafts like it.

So what do the data imply about the relationship between Ricki's talk about her paper and her paper? Are there specific features/characteristics we can point to and use in other situations and with other writers? One aspect of the talk we can observe is the effect of repetition. Over the course of a month, Ricki is asked to restate her assignment at the beginning of the group session and right before her paper is discussed later in the same session. Guided by the TA and her peers, she is able to construct an understanding of the assignment through this process of stating and restating. How else can we view the shaping effect of talk on Ricki's essay? Organizationally, the emphasis of analysis over summary and advice to use examples given to Ricki from the first session onward support her effort to move from summary to analysis to incorporating examples in both her drafts. In the first draft, she uses examples taken from Gore's content, and in the second draft, she uses examples of words that express pathos. Phrases such as "degrading to women," "feelings of a parent," "pathos view," "children imitating TV" appear in the talk and reappear in the text. As a basic writer, she is relying heavily on others to provide her with the phrasal building blocks for her text.

These types of psychological, social, and discourse perspectives on writing gained from the analysis of talk are valuable to researchers and instructors. A systematic look at how students' talk is structured and what topics they focus on offers important insights into basic writers: the gaps in their knowledge, their learning process, and their view of the writing process. As a result, a deeper understanding of the discourse acquisition process and the way talk shapes texts could lead to changes in teaching methods and the way talk is framed in peer groups. In addition, as Smitherman, Heath, and others have claimed, the greater the awareness and understanding that instructors have of the distances that many students—minority, working class, first generation, and basic writers—have between their home discourses and the target discourse, the better they will be able to design curriculum that places those discourse modes more at the center of the students' learning experience.

Furthermore, our students benefit when we can take what they show us in their talk and transform it into ways they can improve their writing processes and acquire academic discourse more effectively. When we can go beyond analysis and integrate the insights gained from talk back into peer groups and the classroom, we help out students enter a new community of practice. As Mortensen tells us, "Studying talk about writing allows for the discovery of unexpected openings situated among people, ideas and discourse. And it allows us to see how these openings permit both the consensus and conflict that rhetorically, make and break the bonds of community" (124). It can create change by allowing new voices into the academic discourse community.

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Notes

1. Conversation is not organized the same way as written texts, and it can appear fragmented in comparison with writing, since speakers/hearers have different resources at their disposal. For example, intonations patterns, stress on words or individual vowels, pauses, repetition, discourse markers, and use of continuers such as "uhm" all serve to signal and create coherence

and meaning within a conversation. In a transcription of a conversation, different symbols are used to indicate vocal cues. Punctuation is used to signal intonation, underlines indicate places of greater stress. Pauses are timed in seconds (the numbers placed in parenthesis), while a slight pause is indicated by just a period inside a parenthesis. Some of the transcription conventions that appear in the excerpts of speech cited in this article: a colon : indicates a lengthened sound, usually a vowel; a period . indicates a stopping fall in tone; a single dash - indicates an abrupt cut off; an underline, e.g., a, indicates emphasis; numbers in parentheses, e.g., (0.1), indicate intervals between utterances, timed in tenths of a second; empty parentheses ( ) indicate that part of the utterance could not be deciphered (see Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson).

2. One stage that learners go through in learning a second language is called interlanguage. Interlanguage features are often different from either the learner's first language or the target/ second language. Scott Cobb makes a parallel claim for non-standard dialect learners of academic writing. They also go through an intermediate stage she calls intralect.

3. The larger research project focused on the types of interactional strategies that the beginning student writers developed over the course of the semester. As part of the analysis, the types and functions of the questions used in the discourse were categorized. (See Launspach. "Interactional Strategies and the Role of Questions in the Acquisition of Academic Discourse." Diss. U of South Carolina, 1998).

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