

THE
ACQUISITION
OF
WRITTEN LANGUAGE:

Response and Revision

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Introduction: Acquiring Written Language

Eudora Welty (1983) describes the internal response that cues her revisions: "When I write and the sound of it comes back to my ears, then I act to make my changes. I have always trusted this voice" (p. 12). The contributors to this volume are ultimately concerned with how writers acquire trusted inner voices and with understanding the roles schools and teachers can play in helping student writers in the learning process.

Underlying all the chapters is a theory of how writing is acquired. To set up a framework for the book and for studies of the acquisition of written language, I will first explicate that theory. To do so, I borrow from theories of oral language development and intellectual skill development. Writing, although closely related to oral language, is not just speech written down; it is a more conscious activity than speech, and for most, it is largely learned in school rather than at home. Thus, the perspectives of oral language acquisition and intellectual skill acquisition seem appropriate. The authors in this volume view writing at once as a form of language learning and as an intellectual skill.

In oral language development, children "use what people say to form hypotheses about how different ideas are expressed in the language they are acquiring." They test "how well they are understood by others" (Clark & Clark, 1977, 336-337). Children, it seems, use the speech of others as a model, and, when others' speech consists of a response to their own utterances, as a guide to the effectiveness of their own communication. If children employ similar hypothesis testing strategies to learn written language, they need to know how experts write, and they need to know how their readers understand and respond to their writing. By using this information, they can revise their hypotheses about how written language is produced. Just as the listener-speaker interaction is crucial to hypothesis testing when children learn to speak, the reader-writer interaction must be crucial when children learn to write. This reader-writer interaction takes into account both the writer as a reader of others' writing and the writer in interaction with his or her reader, at some times literally and at other times imaginatively.

In theories of the acquisition of schooltype intellectual skills, from Vygotsky's (1978) to Anderson's (1982), response or feedback plays a central role. As when developing other intellectual skills, learning writers need to distinguish when they are performing well from when they are not, and they need to know how to take corrective action when their writing is not proceeding well. They must gain metacognitive skills (Brown, 1981) which help them know what and how to revise. The notion that writers solve composing problems (Hayes & Flower, 1980) grows out of the problem-solving literature that is built around how learners solve problems in other domains (Newell & Simon, 1972). Theories of intellectual skill acquisition

imply a level of conscious control of cognitive processes that is not implied by theories of oral language acquisition.

For the acquisition of written language, theory in both oral language learning and intellectual skill development indicates that response stimulates revision in the form both of somewhat unconscious hypothesis testing and of conscious problem solving. These theories lead to many questions about written language acquisition, but the two central ones to be addressed here are: How can response or feedback best serve the pedagogical end of helping writers increase their skill in writing? And what role does revision play in skill development?

A review of the literature on response to student writing reveals that in order to help students learn, response has to lead to revision in three ways: it must help students consciously identify and solve their composing problems; it must stimulate practice—students must use the response (reading or hearing a comment may not in itself lead to practice or use); and the practice must help students transfer their skills to new writings (Freedman, 1984).

Definitions of response and revision provide a framework for organizing the chapters in this book, for each chapter stresses a slightly different aspect of response or revision, each aspect being important in written language acquisition. Looked at broadly, *response* includes feedback or reaction to something the writer has already produced. It is important to remember two points: (a) response to nonwritten plans and ideas for writing is as much response as response to writing itself, but (b) teaching, in preparation for writing before the writing process begins, although also key in learning and related to response as it lays the groundwork for how response will be understood, is not, in itself, commonly defined as response.

Traditionally, the term *revision* has been used in several ways. First, a revision is a change a writer makes in a piece of writing. The writer makes the changes because the writer re-sees (or in Welty's case rehears) and decides the changes are needed. Such changes may or may not be traceable to the text the writer produces. A second kind of revision involves changes a writer makes in the procedures for producing writing. Again the writer decides to make the changes. Changes in procedures for producing writing may or may not be visible in the writing itself. The third sense in which revision is used is in reference to that part of the composing process during which changes are made. The cognitive processes included during the revision subprocess may be partially inferred through tracing the changes in the written product and through observing changes in procedures for writing. Finally, in its most fundamental sense, the term revision implies a revision of cognition itself. Revision becomes a part of the learning process that involves the reorganization of the rules for text production. This revision of cognition or cognitive reorganization spans across the production of different texts.

The authors in this volume use revision in all senses, but the underlying concern is to lead to an understanding of the last type of revision, the cognitive reorganization that must take place for transferable learning to occur, a reorganization that stems from response. When one considers how revision leads to cognitive reorganization or transfer, it is important to abandon the mechanistic view of a

response–revision cycle that operates within a given text. Rather, what is important is how both response and revision span across a writer's learning, across different pieces of writing, written for different purposes, in different contexts.

Response and revision then are linked by a special type of response: self-response, or Welty's "inner voice." Response from others, augmented by one's reading experiences and the teaching-learning environment, shapes internal or self-response. It is this key part of the writing process that determines the nature of revisions in cognitive organization. Self-responses tell writers whether they understand external response and other input relevant to learning to write. It might be argued that response is basic to the process of teaching written language and that revision is basic to the process of learning.

The Language of Instruction—Classroom, Peer Group, Writing Conference

The six chapters in Part I examine the language of instruction to see how response and revision are accomplished in instructional settings. As a group, the chapters illustrate a range of ways that linguistic ethnography and text analysis, as research methodologies, can be used to shed light on the acquisition of written language. With the exception of Ammon (Chap. 4), the authors' linguistic analyses focus primarily on the oral language of teaching and learning. Heath and Branscombe (Chap. 1), and Gere and Stevens (Chap. 5) supplement their analysis of teaching with analyses of students' written language. Ammon focuses first on how the written language changes across a year's time and then looks back to the classroom to try to understand why those changes occur.

The six chapters cover a range of types of response to student writing and suggest how different types of response might engender the kind of revision that is associated with the cognitive reorganization that accompanies learning. Heath and Branscombe (Chap. 1), Dunn, Florio-Ruane, and Clark (Chap. 2); Cazden, Michaels, and Tabors (Chap. 3), and Ammon (Chap. 4) focus on whole class interactions. Gere and Stephens (Chap. 5) look at peer groups, and Freedman and Sperling (Chap. 6) at individual conferences. Cazden, Michaels, and Tabors and Freedman and Sperling demonstrate the extra complexity involved in the teaching-learning process for traditionally low-achieving students. Together these first six chapters illustrate how different types of response provide instructive feedback for writers, or in Cazden, Michaels, and Tabors's chapter, how emerging writers revise their speech to elicit positive response from their listeners.

All authors in this section would agree that the *coordination* of a variety of types of response is necessary for learning to occur. But most basic, writers first must learn from their respondents how they are communicating or making meaning, how they are being understood. Included in this concern with communication is more than the communication of propositional meaning: in addition, writers want to communicate an "intended impression." This impression is similar to what we

communicate about ourselves through the clothes we choose, the house we live in, the friends we select. Once writers perceive a mismatch between what they intend to communicate—either with respect to meaning or impression—and what an audience understands, they then revise. At first, they revise a particular piece of text; this revision of text may demand a revised set of procedures. Further, it may or may not lead to a revision of cognitive structures. The chapter authors all suggest that a writer's first goal is to attend to the reader's needs by revising in order to communicate more effectively. In order to achieve this goal, they learn to control the written structures they need to accomplish their ends.

Computers—Response and Revision

Besides response to writing that is embedded in the language of the classroom, computers are now being programmed to respond to student writing and to help students revise. Furthermore, the computer, which is often anthropomorphized with its command structure, gives the appearance of interacting with the writer during composing. Some have suggested that the computer itself, because of how it works, helps young writers think of an audience that will read their writing as they compose (e.g., Daiute, 1983). Above and beyond what the computer does by its existence, the text editors and word processors that writers use allow them to revise differently than they do with pencil and paper. For this reason, composition researchers have speculated that the convenience of revising when using the computer might profoundly affect writers' composing processes.

The authors of the four chapters in Part II investigate the role of the computer as respondent and the usefulness of its aid during revision. Their findings are interesting, yielding sometimes unexpected results. Daiute (Chap. 7) and Levin, Reil, Rowe, and Boruta, (Chap. 8) show how elementary-age writers confront computers. Daiute's questions center on the effects of the computer on cognitive processing during writing. Her word processor prompts students to revise. Levin and his coauthors look at the responsive writing environments that can be encouraged by the computer and at the social effects of computer use. Bridwell, Sirc, and Brooke (Chap. 9) and Frase, Kiefer, Smith, Macdonald, and Fox (Chap. 10) turn to college-age writers. Bridwell, Sirc, and Brooke examine how the word processor itself affects these writers' revising processes whereas Frase, Kiefer, Smith, Macdonald, and Fox focus on the effects of the Writer's Workbench programs that are designed to aid writers during composing, especially with the mechanics of writing.

Daiute (Chap. 7) and Bridwell, Sirc, and Brooke (Chap. 9) look to see whether the computer itself facilitates more substantive revisions in texts and in the procedures for producing texts. They find that the computer exerts more of an effect on some students than on others. Daiute further finds that students use her computer prompts to help prompt themselves when they are composing on the computer. Levin, Reil, Rowe, and Boruta, (Chap. 8) and Frase, Kiefer, Smith, Macdonald, and Fox (Chap. 10) find the computer especially helpful for improving low-level

editing skills. And Levin and his colleagues illustrate how the computer can be integrated into the classroom to assist in providing an environment conducive to the types of response described by the authors in the first section of this volume.

These four chapters on the computer as respondent and assistant to revision focus on different instructional settings, use different computer software, and use different research methods. It is not surprising that each sheds a different light on current knowledge about how computer response affects writers and about how that response relates to revision.

Theories of and Research on Revision

Taken together the three last chapters (Part III) challenge both traditional ways of studying revision and past assumptions about parts of the revision process. Indeed, they sketch a new perspective for studying revision and its relationship to response.

Danielewicz and Chafe (Chap. 11) suggest that it might be possible to understand how writers do or do not get the cues that they need in order to revise. These authors compare written and oral language, looking particularly at punctuation errors and relating them to oral intonation. On one level, the sounds these writers hear literally interfere with their writing. Matsuhashi and Gordon (Chap. 12) challenge the traditional expert–novice comparisons, showing that novices, when directed to do so, can revise globally in the ways that experts do. Witte (Chap. 13) offers a theoretical perspective for a new way of thinking about revision. He urges researchers to stop thinking of and studying revision as if it were a textbound process, and to be wary of the instructional implications drawn from research on the writing process without tests of those implications.

And So—

I have attempted to bring together a set of chapters that can help us begin to account both for cognitive processes underlying learning to write and the social context of schooling. Both perspectives are crucial to even a rudimentary understanding of the acquisition of written language.

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Written Language Acquisition: The Role of Response and the Writing Conference*

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Introduction

Although children generally learn written language in school and acquire spoken language at home, they depend on response from others for both types of language learning. Most evidence dealing with spoken language acquisition supports the theory that children acquire spoken language through hypothesis testing—by “testing their hypotheses about structure and function and by finding out how well they are understood by others when doing this” (Clark & Clark, 1977, p. 337). Although it is probable that the processes of acquiring written and spoken language differ in significant respects, it is likely that the responses of the receivers or readers of written messages give learners a foundation for testing hypotheses about the construction of written communication. Just as parent-child interaction is central to the process of hypothesis testing when children acquire speech, teacher-student interaction becomes central when students learn to write in school. Our research focuses on a key teacher-student interactive event in the teaching and learning of written language: the writing conference. We examine its potential role in the teaching and learning of written language.

From elementary school through college, the student-teacher writing conference has become a popular and seemingly effective pedagogical event (e.g., Duke, 1975; Graves, 1982; Murray, 1968). The conference occurs away from classroom activity so that teacher and student can interact one-to-one. Both participants have the opportunity to express not only academic but also personal concerns about any number of issues ranging from specific student papers to writing in general, and even to areas only tangentially related to writing. The conference gives the teacher a chance to address the student's individual needs in a way that cannot be duplicated in the classroom, and perhaps mainly for this reason, the conference has come to be

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regarded as a felicitous adjunct to classroom interaction, which often unavoidably demands that the teacher homogenize the student group being addressed.

In a sense, the conference is two things at once (Freedman & Katz, in press; Jacobs & Karliner, 1977). First, unlike most learning situations, it is a conversational dialogue. As such, it has what Gumperz (1982) calls “dialogic properties”; that is, among other things, meanings and interpretations are being continuously “negotiated by speaker and hearer and judgements either confirmed or changed by the reactions they evoke” (p. 5). In other words, both participants continuously engage in seeking and maintaining a mutually agreeable level of interaction. Characterized by turn-taking, the conference-as-conversation also allows each participant to raise issues, to shift topics, and to encourage or discourage topic elaboration.

But like most school-based learning situations, the conference is also a teaching-learning event, constrained by the teacher-student relationship and the relative status of the one to the other, as well as by an overall purpose that the teacher give something, that is, new knowledge, to the student.

This double-headed nature makes the conference particularly interesting to study and raises questions about teaching and learning that our research has attempted to begin to answer. Do, for example, high- and low-achieving students elicit different types of responses from the teacher during the writing conference? Do students themselves respond differently and can their responses be explained by the data? Can we develop hypotheses about the effects on learning of these writing conferences? Can we develop insight into the efficacy of individualized teacher-student interaction?

It has been recognized for some time that high- and low-achieving students and students from nonmainstream ethnic backgrounds receive differential instructional emphases, even within the same course, resulting in high-ability, middle-class students being given discourse strategies that can prepare them to participate in a literate, middle-class society (e.g., Collins & Michaels, 1980; Michaels, 1981). Low-achieving students from non-Caucasian ethnic groups often have difficulty adapting to the culture of the school and may unintentionally elicit differential treatment from their teachers (e.g., Au & Mason, 1981; Cazden, John, & Hymes, 1982; Cazden, Michaels, & Tabors, this volume; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1981; Michaels, 1981). These students also have difficulty acquiring the written language of the school, and once such students begin to have difficulty, their problems only increase (e.g., Weinstein, 1982; Wilkinson, Clevenger, & Dollogan, 1981).

The one-to-one writing conference allows us a close look at what has been observed by others in the classroom, in many ways being better open to scrutiny because of its focused, yet sustained, nature. That it is a one-to-one setting adds interest to the observation because it has at least the appearance of being spontaneous and personal behind its often somewhat planned (Ochs, 1979) and pedagogic nature. Teacher and student must operate at different levels—the conversa-

tional as well as the pedagogical—which may, ultimately, reinforce one another. Whether interaction is conversational or pedagogic, because it is interaction, what one party puts in influences what the other party puts out; that is, response by each is influenced by the other.

For this chapter, we examine student-teacher interactions in one college-level writing conference for each of four students: one high-achieving Caucasian, one high-achieving Asian-American, one low-achieving Caucasian, and one low-achieving Asian-American. With this small sample, we cannot make general claims about written language acquisition as it is affected by teacher-student interaction; however, we aim to suggest possible avenues to explore and certain analytic methods to use to help understand how best to study the acquisition process and, in the end, to help students in their efforts to acquire written language skill, which, we know, often depends on response and interaction. We have chosen to focus on the first conference of the semester for each student. We look closely not only at differences in how these four students interact with the same teacher, with implications about the interaction being more, or less, productive for the student, but also at how teacher and student initially establish the teaching/learning relationship.

Methods and Procedures

Subject Selection

Teacher (T). The teacher was selected from a pool of approximately 30 instructors at San Francisco State University (SFSU) who participated in a rigorous three-course training sequence for college composition teachers. The thirty were hired because they excelled in the training program.

All these instructors required regular teacher-student writing conferences of their writing students. The selected teacher was chosen because she represented the best teaching available. Student evaluation placed T in the top 90% of the staff as did supervisor evaluations based on class visits. We were interested in seeing how an excellent teacher works with what we would traditionally label higher- or lower-achieving students and with students from differing ethnic groups.

Students (Ss). Originally 8 students were chosen to participate in the study, 2 high-achieving Caucasians, 2 low-achieving Caucasians, 2 high-achieving Asian-Americans, and 2 low-achieving Asian-Americans. Those students designated as high-achieving scored above 500 on verbal aptitude as measured by the SAT, and those designated as low-achieving scored below 350. Deciding on the ethnic mix was the result of a demographic survey conducted in 1978 of students enrolled in composition courses at SFSU which showed an almost even mix of Caucasian-Americans (31%) and Asian-Americans (29%), a parameter that invited our studying the Asian-American student writer, about whom little work had yet been done.

The Asian-American students selected to participate were native English speakers whose parents spoke an Asian language; thus, they came from homes in which

there was an Asian cultural heritage, but they were not expected to produce the writing errors typical of the nonnative speaker.

From these 8 students, everything they wrote during the semester was collected, including all drafts of their papers and all their notes. All their conferences were tape-recorded, a minimum of four across the semester for all students who completed the course.¹ Also collected were three investigator-student interviews about the students' at-home composing process.

Next, four students who were judged to have learned the most and to have had the most successful T-S interactions in the conferences were selected for our analysis, one from each original group: high- and low-achieving Caucasian and Asian-American. Selections were based on both student and teacher judgments. In this study, then, we look at these four students: (a) Jay, a high-achieving Caucasian; (b) Sherry, a high-achieving Asian-American; (c) Dee, a low-achieving Caucasian; and (d) Cee, a low-achieving Asian-American. While the group is split in two by ability level, we note that the four students are also listed in order of decreasing scores on the SAT: Jay scored higher than Sherry; Dee scored higher than Cee.

Database

Since we wanted to learn about how the relationship between T and S is established, we studied the first of the semester conferences for each of the four students. It was reasonable to believe that in this first conference differences and similarities in the students' interactions with T would begin to evolve. This conference had the added benefit of T's following the same specified format for each S. The conference covered, in sequence, discussion of (1) interview questions to S about course schedules, previous writing courses, and writing habits; and (2) certain diagnostic instruments that S had already completed, specifically, (a) the items on a questionnaire that had been given to the entire class about writing; (b) a writing sample done by the entire class; and (c) the items on a verbal skills test, also completed by the entire class.

Each conference was audiotaped and then transcribed. Conferences lasted from 30 to 45 minutes.

Data Analysis

Topics of Conversation. We first examined topics of conversation, a semantic concept (Agar, 1980; Covelli & Murray, 1980; Keenan & Schieffelin, 1976; Shuy, 1981). By analyzing *what* one talks about, that is, the topics one covers and the topics that concern students, one can see *how* (and if) conferences with different students vary, while at the same time discovering systematically what the key topics in a conference are.

Two independent coders identified topic shifts and achieved agreement approx-

¹ All except one student, a low-achieving Caucasian, completed the course.

imately 90% of the time. They noted whether T or S initiated a topic and whether T or S was continuing a topic. (For further discussion of procedures for analyzing topic shifts, see Freedman, 1981.) For each student, the coders then noted how often each topic was T-initiated, S-initiated, T-continued, or S-continued. Topics were labeled and classified as either *intellectual*, that is, dealing objectively with some aspect of the subject matter that came up, or *affective*, that is, dealing with either T or S feelings about different subjects (including feelings about each other), or *other*, that is, dealing with neither of the other classifications and generally unique to a particular student.

We followed Mehan's (1978, 1979) procedures for accounting for data:

1. "Retrievability of data" (Mehan, 1979, p. 19): The data should not be presented in a reduced or tabulated form when one presents research findings; verbatim transcripts should be organized and included. In other words, the frequency counts of correlational research and the selected descriptions in the field report are not sufficient.
2. "Comprehensive data treatment" (Mehan, 1979, p. 20): A model for data analysis must include all the data. "This comprehensive data analysis is accomplished by a method that is analogous to 'analytic induction' (Znaniecki, 1934, 234-233; Robinson, 1951). The method begins with a small batch of data. A provisional analytic scheme is generated. The scheme is then compared to other data, and modifications are made in the scheme as necessary. The provisional analytic scheme is constantly confronted by 'negative' or 'disreputant' cases until the researcher has derived a small set of recursive rules that incorporate all the data in the corpus" (Mehan, 1979, p. 21). This is similar to the procedure the linguist uses to explain the rules of speech, to show the organization inherent in spoken language (Chomsky, 1965).
3. "Convergence between researchers' and participants' perspectives" (Mehan, 1979, p. 22): The researcher must check his or her interpretations of the events against the perceptions of the participants.²
4. "Interactional level of analysis" (Mehan, 1979, pp. 23-24): "Since classroom events [and conference events] are socially organized, a constitutive analysis has the further commitment to locate this organization in the interaction itself. . . . Evidence for the organizational machinery of lessons [and conferences] is to be found in the words and in the gestures of the participants." In other words, what the participants actually do and say, not what one guesses about their thoughts, is what will reveal the structure of the event.

Idea Units To allow a closer examination of the discourse, we had certain portions of the talk transcribed into idea units. The theoretical basis for this division

² It should be noted that Mehan's guideline #3, "Convergence between researchers' and participants' perspectives," can be questioned. Research in conversational strategy (Gumperz, 1982) has shown that what participants perceive is occurring in conversation can be different from what is actually occurring.

comes from Chafe (1980), who defines the idea unit as a segment of discourse that coincides with a person's focus of attention or focus of consciousness. Chafe (1980) notes, "A property of spontaneous speech that is readily apparent to anyone who examines it closely is that it is produced, not in a flowing stream, but in a series of brief spurts" (p. 13). These spurts are the idea units. The main criterion for deciding on an idea unit boundary is the intonational contour (that is, pitch either rises or falls). See Danielewicz and Chafe (this volume) for more detail on the idea unit or what they now call an "intonation unit."

By breaking the talk into idea units (numbering each unit and placing it on a separate line), we could measure the amount of conscious energy or focus devoted to each part of the conference conversation, compare the weight of the teacher's and student's focus on particular topics, and compare the weights across conferences. We could then develop hypotheses about the consequences of topic focus on the student-teacher relationship, and try to think of that emerging relationship as it might affect subsequent student writing.

This analysis also allowed us to hypothesize whether the amount of focus could be related to student ability or ethnicity, a topic that could be pursued in more extensive research that would make use of a larger S and T sample base.

Comparison of Cross-Conference Similarities: Backchannel Cues We next looked at a segment of discourse that appeared to be the same across conferences to see if, on close analysis, an apparently similar incident might provide insights to add to the analysis of differences in topic focus across conferences that we had already found and identified. We selected the segment in each conference when T and S discussed the test of verbal skills that S had taken in class, since T followed the same format and covered the same items in this segment for each S. Our close analysis consisted of examining "backchannel" cues (signals) made by each S.

Backchannel signals are what Yngve (1970) calls interjections such as "OK," "right," "aha," and "uh huh," and are a common signal of conversational cooperation (Gumperz, 1982). Further, Gumperz explains that they are expected to be synchronous in conversation, coming at boundaries between clauses or tone groups. Rationale for analyzing these segments for backchannel signals comes from studies of interactive synchrony which show that asynchrony characterizes "uncomfortable moments" in conversational interaction (e.g., Erickson & Schultz, 1982). As Gumperz notes, because the timing of backchannels can reflect differing sociocultural conventions, it may unintentionally create, to use Erickson's phrase, "uncomfortable moments" in cross-cultural communication. Analysis of backchannels was, thus, a way to discuss "harmony" or "disharmony" between T and S and to discover possible differences among the four students that might fall into a pattern.

Consequences to the Student Since our semantic analysis uncovered differences in both T and S behavior, we next looked for what we could call obvious consequences of these differences for the student. That is, since the student presumably is to come away from a conference having been given at least something

from the teacher, we looked for what the students indeed came away with in these first conferences, which, occurring at the beginning of the semester, did not focus on current class work or class assignments and so could not contribute in an immediate or direct way to the student's work for the course.

We found two points worth noting: (a) expository modeling episodes, and (b) invitations to return to T's office, issued by T to S. As a way to measure the amount of "conscious energy" devoted to these segments of the conference, we counted the number of idea units devoted to each. For the modeling episodes, we also noted how frequently they occurred. These counts allowed us to compare conferences for patterns.

Results

Analysis

Semantic

Generalizations about self. When considering the semantic content of the data, we looked primarily for "focal" topics, those specified topics, both intellectual and affective, that T and S seemed to want to address most. In the analysis, however, we encountered an interesting sidelight: Throughout the conferences, students offer different generalizations about themselves, not necessarily "focal" as we have defined the term, but nonetheless informative statements volunteered spontaneously by S about S, not made in response to T questions. That the students make such generalizations is not in and of itself surprising—we all, during conversation, make them (I'm not any good at Scrabble, I'm an Agatha Christie fan, I don't water-ski very well, and so on). These kinds of generalizations lead whomever we are conversing with to make inferences about us, to get a picture of us. What we noticed with our four students was that these generalizations fell into distinctive patterns for each one. Because of this they deserve attention, and we discuss them first since they are one factor, albeit a subtle one, that we think influences the general quality of the conferences, lending support to our findings on focal topics.

The generalizations made by each S are as follows:

Jay

I could write long letters, but after I read it I can't stand them.

I really admire people who can write well.

People who write well are special to me.

I like to write well.

Sherry

I'm pretty weak in English

I'm really not good in math.

Dee

I hate libraries.

I still don't think I'm that good a writer.

I'm not really into writing . . .

I never did well on tests.

I have a terrible vocabulary.

Cee

My sister has a brighter mind than I do.

I enjoy working better than going to school.

I prefer to be educated in a company because I learn much faster.

I do not like lectures at all.

Jay's generalizations are positive, revealing his sympathy with writing—"people who write well are special to me"—and would no doubt please an English teacher. Sherry's, while critical about herself, are nonetheless mitigated criticisms—she says she is "pretty" weak in English, not "really" good in math, these appearing as statements of modesty as much as of self-deprecation. The patterns for the low-achieving students are strikingly different. Dee's remarks tend to be strongly negative—"I hate libraries," "I never did well on tests." Her notions of herself seem set in concrete and, in content, are not remarks that would guarantee positive T response. Cee's remarks, too, are not calculated to ingratiate an academic. She can learn, she says, but school's not the place—"I prefer to be educated in a company" (that is, the workplace). Their generalizations follow a kind of pattern from most teacher-pleasing to least, with Jay's most likely to lead to productive T response, as opposed to blind alleys.

The teacher, of course, responds to these generalizations. Her responses to Jay and to Dee are particularly revealing of the differentially productive nature of these exchanges, with both T and S influencing each other's remarks.

Jay: I really admire people who can write well. I think it's, it's hard, sometimes, so people who write really well are really special to me.

T: Yeah, that's nice. Uh, do you feel like you're the kind of person who could write well? I mean, do you ever identify with, with that ability or do you kind of say that's a group out there. . . .

The teacher doesn't need to confront this statement in any way or clarify her stance toward writers—it's fairly safe to assume that she and Jay are on the same wavelength. She can take his statement about admiring writers and turn the experience around to Jay, personalizing it for him and getting him to explore his own sense of being a writer. Jay's statement triggers a conversation, by the way, that

goes on for twelve more turns. He and the teacher "have something to talk about" that the teacher uses as a discovery tool for the student and as a teaching tool. In the course of this fourteen-turn segment, the teacher talks about the writing process, using that term; she talks about prewriting, feedback, writer's block, in a way that she doesn't do for any of the other three students.

The exchange with Dee is different.

Dee: I hate libraries.

T: I know. I always hated libraries too.

On the surface, T's response to Dee's "I hate libraries" is, as is her response to Jay, positive and sympathetic. In fact, the conversation goes on for five more turns in which Dee, essentially, elaborates on libraries being stuffy, big, and unpleasant, and the teacher interjecting a sympathetic "yeah" at appropriate junctures. What is interesting is that the teacher seems to have established a common experience with the student; however, we found out later in interviewing the teacher about this particular exchange that she was so taken aback by Dee's admission, that "I always hated libraries too" is what came out. She was trying to do the same thing as with Jay—establish common ground. Yet the substance could only lead to an anti-academic exchange.

It is interesting to keep these interactions in mind when looking at the different topics, both intellectual and affective, that T and S focus on during the conferences.

Types of topics. Table 1 illustrates the topic initiations for both the student and the teacher. Notice that the two Asian-American students initiate either significantly more or significantly fewer topics than the Caucasians. Sherry, the high-achieving student who is Chinese, follows the stereotype of the quiet Asian student, initiating only eleven topics. Cee, the low-achieving student who is Japanese, initiates significantly more topics than appears to be the norm. The teacher initiates approximately

Table 1. Topic Initiations

Student	Teacher-initiated			Student-initiated		
	Intellectual	Affective	Other	Intellectual	Affective	Other
Jay	58 (54%)	14 (13%)	35 (33%)	107	17 (47%)	9 (25%)
Sherry	32 (43%)	8 (11%)	34 (46%)	74	7 (64%)	3 (27%)
Dee	60 (50%)	4 (3%)	56 (47%)	120	29 (62%)	7 (15%)
Cee	48 (47.5%)	6 (6%)	47 (46.5%)	101	42 (49%)	32 (37%)
					12	12
					(37%)	(14%)
					86	

the same number of topics with all students except Sherry, with whom she initiates fewer topics. In all cases, the teacher initiates more topics than the student, an indication of her role as director of the conversation. None of the other trends in topic initiation appear noteworthy.

Focal topics: Intellectual. In each conference, the teacher focuses on an almost identical percentage of intellectual topics with each student. However, the substance of those topics varies for both the teacher and the student. The intellectual topics were subdivided into two categories: discourse and surface level. Table 2 illustrates the differences in concentration across the conferences. The different types of students express their intellectual energy differently, and T expresses different intellectual foci with the different students.

As Table 2 illustrates, of the topics T initiates with Jay, Sherry, and Dee, most are discourse-level topics. In fact, recent research (Ammon, this volume; Dunn, Florio-Ruane, & Clark, this volume; Freedman, 1979; Gere & Stevens, this volume; Heath & Branscombe, this volume; Sommers, 1982) indicates that feedback on discourse level topics is the most "productive" feedback for a S to get about writing; that is, when T and Ss make discourse concerns a priority, Ss are more apt to generate successful essays than when discourse concerns are subordinated to surface concerns. It is of note, then, that T does not emphasize discourse concerns for Cee in the way she does with the other three students. T initiates discourse and surface-level topics almost equally with Cee, neither one assuming priority over the other.

The two Caucasian students, Jay and Dee, initiate mostly discourse topics themselves. Here Jay thinks of global planning:

T: Can you remember the kind of steps you went through . . . when you had to write a paper?

Jay: I probably took longest thinking of an introduction, how I would introduce what I was going to write about.

Table 2. Intellectual Focal Topics

Student	Teacher-initiated			Student-initiated		
	Discourse	Surface	Total N	Discourse	Surface	Total N
Jay	43 (74%)	15 (26%)	58	15 (88%)	2 (12%)	17
Sherry	24 (75%)	8 (25%)	32	2 (29%)	5 (71%)	7
Dee	49 (82%)	11 (18%)	60	21 (72%)	8 (28%)	29
Cee	27 (56%)	21 (44%)	48	22 (52%)	20 (48%)	42

Here Jay brings up his changing the *content* of his essay:

T: I was interested in what you thought about your revision. . . . Did you feel like you changed a lot of the essay? What kinds of things did you attack?

Jay: I took a little, a different point to explain . . . mostly got rid of stuff about, the usual stuff that is obvious in college—you're exposed to a lot of new people and new ideas and stuff like that. I think I cut that down . . . but I went on to something different.

Later:

Jay: I think my endings are pretty vague and repetitive . . .

On the other hand, Sherry initiates surface concerns most, exactly the opposite of what her teacher initiates with her. Cee splits her concern, a pattern again different from the rest. Cee seems to see intellectual concerns as a flat set; she imposes no hierarchy of importance on them, a fact that could have detrimental consequences for her writing process. She seems to have difficulty distinguishing what is important.

Here Cee tells T what in the course she finds helpful:

Cee: I did have trouble [in a past class] in some areas which you are going over right now.

T: Like what kind of areas so far?

Cee: Well, like when we were on fragments and clauses and phrases. . . .

On the steps in writing an essay:

T: What kind of steps and stages would you go through, um, when you were writing the three-page essay?

Cee: Well first, she gave us about three topics to choose from, and I chose one then. And then we had to choose a topic sentence. Sometimes she said the topic sentence doesn't come first: it comes last after you write your whole essay.

T: Oh, your thesis statement. Oh, okay, okay.

Cee: And then, uh, we'd write our thesis statement and then we'd start narrowing it down until we can no longer go no farther. And then we'd write the next one which has to be sort of on the basis of the first one.

T: The next draft, is that what you're saying? Or the next . . .

Cee: No, the next paragraph.

T: The next paragraph. I see. Okay, okay. And how long would that kind of process take you then?

Cee: Sometimes an hour. Sometimes up to three hours. It depends.

T: Okay. Then what would you do after that?

Cee: Well, then, I would retype it and then see where my errors are. Which I cannot always find. And see which ones I could take out. And see what I could add in.

T: Were you mostly like taking out or putting in sentences or were you like taking out and putting in whole paragraphs, or whole . . .

Cee: Sentences or words. If I want to change a word or not.

Cee allocates her composing energy on some parts of the task and then on others. At this point in the semester, the teacher does not appear to be leading her to concentrate mostly on one area as she does with the other students.

It is interesting that, during the conferences, the teacher asks whether English is the native language for both Asian-American students, an issue that never arises with the Caucasians. Both Asian-Americans evidence a certain amount of linguistic insecurity, which perhaps leads to their concern with the surface level of writing.

Students' own agendas. That the concern be shared between T and S, however, may be even more important than what the concern is. As we have noted, there is no match in focal topics between T and Sherry. With no match in focal concern, T and S may likely be talking at cross purposes and may not even be attending to what the other is trying to say. Freedman (1981) found that such cross-purpose talk manifests itself in a T-S conference when S and T each bring up a topic of concern over and over again, no matter what the other wants to focus on, indicating that T and S often have different agendas for what needs to be covered in the conference.

In this study, we found, in fact, that the students' own agendas surface subtly. For example, we found that students can initiate talk about their concerns by bringing up topics as if in extended response to T questions, but which really take the form of 'quick answer to X, but now I want to talk about Y.'³

T: Okay and you're not sure about some punctuation marks. Okay those are fairly technical concerns. Do you have any other . . . areas in your writing like when you're sitting down to write an essay, that you really feel . . . that are . . . difficult for you to do. Like does it seem difficult to organize, does it seem difficult to develop?

Sherry: No not really. Um . . . I sometimes my I guess tense, I have to say it out loud, and that's why I can't do it in class, cause you don't want to . . . start . . . talking.

³ Transcription conventions:

<i>italics</i>	interruption by other speaker
—	elongated syllable
-	speech hesitation
.	rising intonation
.	falling intonation
..	nonmeasurable pause
...	measurable pause

T wants to talk not about mechanics, but about organization and development, but Sherry brings the conversation around to her own concerns, verb tense. Another example, with Cee, follows:

T: (reading Cee's essay) See—when you break it down like that, you ... what ... what you have is the ... the first core, "person is able to experience," prepositional phrase, and, another verb phrase, "receive education, that is directly related" ... clause, and "not off the beaten path." Okay that you could have really ... um ... taken out, because it was almost redundant with this, particular statement there. "As it is taught in college, where the teachers teach the student, and ... the student finds." So ... you have all those joining words, and joining techniques, so that you never ... you never stop the sentence, and then start a new one, because you keep having these link words, these words that link all your ideas together.

Cee: It is true enough. (laughter) Well it is true. Like I took this Secretary Administration class, and I was working at Kaiser, as a personnel clerk, and I noticed that. I learned things much better ... and much faster, and ... my supervisor is much more patient with me, than the teacher, who expected more, and who didn't really give a dam, if you failed or not.

T talks about sentence structure, but Cee is more concerned with the topic itself, not as content for writing but as an anecdote to discuss anew, to lend support to her complaints about past experiences with teachers. Cee's is an affective, rather than an intellectual, concern (see next section) that she brings up over and over during the conference.

The quality of exchanges in which the students wedge in their own agendas is clearly different from instances in which there is a match between what T and S wish to discuss:

T: Um ... is there anything else, about starting to write, that seems really frustrating to you, or hard or keeps you from wanting to start a paper, aside from the thesis statement.

Jay: Um ... no u—m I'm just like ... like I said before, I'm afraid, that I'm gonna get too vague, if I ... if I'm writing a paragraph, and I don't have any ... you know to support I'm gonna start repeating myself, saying the same ... saying the same differently. So

T: Uhhum. Do you, is it, would you say that's one of the things that, a good writer would have to ... to be able to do is have ... choose the right ideas, that are defensible, right from the beginning, before they start to write?

Jay: Yeah. Yeah. That's ... that's choosing the right idea, and then having a thesis statement from there.

T: Oh, okay, good.

In later conferences, the importance of one's own agenda also manifests itself when T does not listen to or acknowledge S's topic of concern, but rather brings the discussion back around to something else. However, in these first conferences, T

tends to play the role of good listener. (In later conferences, she has a clear-cut agenda of her own about the students' papers and does not have to shift topics subtly; instead, she may and usually does shift clearly and explicitly.)

Focal topics: Affective. Just one affective response, praise giving, is made by T, and it is distributed somewhat unevenly, with T initiating praise more with the higher-achieving students than with the low-achieving ones. Table 1 shows that T initiates praise for the two stronger students more than for the two weaker. Indeed, the percentage of times the teacher initiates praise (of the total number of teacher-initiated topics) is 13% and 11% for Jay and Sherry, respectively, and 3% and 6% for Dee and Cee, respectively.

Interestingly, the amount of praise the high-achieving students receive seems to reflect, in part, the substance of the affective topic that these students initiate. Both high-achieving students admit their insecurity about their writing and praise follows these admissions. It appears that these students are skilled at eliciting praise from the teacher. For example,

Jay: (On thesis statement) I worry ... sometimes.

T: If it's a good thesis statement.

Jay: Yeah.

T: Yeah ... well that's a good worry. I mean you're accurate, and you're on the right track, to be concerned, about a thesis statement, so that's good.

Further, the nature of the other affective focal topics initiated by the students differs, depending on the S's achievement level, with high-achieving students initiating teacher-pleasing comments, and low-achieving student initiating potentially teacher-alienating comments. Dee discusses at length her laziness as a student. Of the 47 topics she initiates, this one is the third most frequently initiated. Understandably, these admissions do not elicit praise. For example, in response to the teacher question, "Do you like to read?" she says:

I have friends, and my friends are really ... big readers, and they are constantly recommending books, and I just ... it's laziness, I just ... I mean reading takes concentration, whereas television viewing you just sit there, and they do all the work.

Cee, the low-achieving Asian-American, has a markedly different affective concern, how much she dislikes and distrusts teachers. She brings up this topic more than any of the other topics she initiates. She brings up her concern when she discusses her job and remarks that her "supervisor is much more patient with me than the teacher, who expected more and who didn't really give a dam if you failed or not." The conversation continues:

T: Hum. Have you found that to be true, a—at State too. In all your classes.

Cee: Yes, ... As a whole. I found there is a lot of ... discrimination, going on, at this school, and I talked with other students, and they ... notice it too. Like ... I was

talking to this girl recently. I believe it was about two or three days ago, a—nd she took this psychology class, last semester. She got a B out of the teacher. But there was this other girl, who also had the same teacher, two s—semesters ago, uh received a D or an F. A—nd she found out that .. if the teacher likes you, she'll give you a good grade. If she doesn't like you at all, she'll give you a bad grade. That's why I've been feeling. I guess depressed, a—nd lost, because .. I sometimes ... there are not many people who .. who would give you confidence, and who would help you. Even though a teacher might say .. oh I'm always there to help you, but when you go to them, have this attitude .. of I don't want to help you. That happened to my business teacher; she always came to the classroom, and there's um ... two students she liked. She always said hi to them, directly, and then the other students she would just ignore.

Neither low-achieving student focuses on an affective issue that would indicate that she was "teacher-wise." Rather, both talk in ways by which they could easily alienate a teacher or at least not ingratiate themselves to the teacher.

Backchannel Cues. Analysis of semantic content was augmented by the finer-grained backchannel cue analysis. While the content of the segment analyzed, in which T talks to S about a test S has taken, appears similar in all the conferences, in fact the quality of one of the segments contrasts sharply with that of the others (Table 3) when one considers backchannel cues.

In each conference, this segment lasts just short of 7½ minutes. In all segments (that is, across conferences), T covers the same issues, in the same order. In each conference T does most of the talking, with S contributing only an occasional comment. Yet Cee's conference looks unlike the others when we examine backchannel cues. Cee produces approximately three to four times as many backchannel responses as the other students, and one third of her responses come at inappropriate moments, interrupting clauses or tone groups. Further, when listening to the tapes, we perceived that several of these responses are elongated, "uh—huu—h," serving to interrupt T simply because they "drag on." It is as if Cee wants to be a participant in the conversation but does not know how. The following examples help illustrate what occurs:

Table 3. Backchannel Cues

Student	Length of test episode segment	N of S backchannel cues	N of backchannel cues that interrupt tone groups
Jay	7 min 20 s	8	0
Sherry	7 min 20 s	8	0
Dec	7 min 20 s	12	0
Cee	7 min 30 s	30	11

T: Um you also did well, if we come back and look at the very beginning, ... the first two questions were asking you, if they if you knew how to limit the topic. Remember how we talked about */uh hum/* limit in class. And the first one was uh, in a two-page essay, which one of these categories. And in a 20-page essay, which one of these categories. And you got them both right, which is good, because it indicates at least according to this test, whatever a test */uh hum/* can indicate, that you have a sense of how much or how little you can say ... in a given amount of space.

Cee: That's true.

T: So that's, that's good. Now this part in through here, down thru—gh ... */oh thai/* Oh that. You remember */laughter/* the sentences. What they want what they were essentially testing here was your organizational ability. Um ... up through number 37. Which is right .. */um here/* here. Okay.

In contrast, note the appropriate placement of Dee's backchannel cues. The teacher does not have to stop to address any interruptions; the conversation flows smoothly, with synchrony.

T: They're testing your sense of how much you should limit ... a subject. It's better to limit a subject, and say ... a lot about it, and go in depth, and develop it. Than to chooses a hu—ge subject. And say very little about ... it. */Uh hum./* Cover all this area, and really say nothing. */Uh hum./* Okay so that's what they were testing, and you missed both of those. I don't know if it's because you didn't know, how much this was, or if you didn't understand what they were testing or what.

One has to ask whether Cee's backchannel cues reflect her place on the achievement scale, whether they are a product of ethnic background, or whether they are simply idiosyncratic. Analysis of the language patterns of more students would be required to answer those questions. Yet it is evident that, whatever the cause, Cee's discourse strategy marks her as different from the other students, and that this strategy, taken along with the kinds of topics she focuses on, as revealed earlier, helps shape the quality of her conference.

Consequences to the Student

Expository Modeling

Definition. Certain segments in T's discourse stand out for their length and complexity. They appear, in fact, like "mini" essays, composed orally, on the spot, and delivered to the student almost like formal lessons. We found that some of these segments meet certain "expository writing criteria." The criteria are:

1. that the piece of discourse contain a "thesis," that is, an overriding general idea that could be supported by facts, illustration, explanation, or other conventional development strategies that an essay writer would employ;

2. that it also be developed in some way, whether by a single sentence or several sentences; and
3. that it be able to "stand alone" as writing stands alone, with appropriate deixis, independent of exophoric reference (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

Example 1 should make clear the kind of discourse that we included in our analysis, and example 2 the kind we excluded:

(1) *T speaking to Dee*

There is a difference obviously between speaking and writing. There's a lot more communication that can go on in speaking. I can move my hands, or knit my brows or do something, and you're getting a lot more information, than my words, whereas the reader only has a piece of paper, and the words on it. So ... a lot of people, do tend to write the way they speak, until they suddenly ... learn ... principles or guidelines, that help them, manipulate, this artificial ... world called a piece of paper with words on it, or an essay, however you want to call it.

(2) *T speaking to Sherry*

Of course the subject emphasizes, and what you need ... at least, to join these two ... complete ideas, is a semicolon. Hopefully, you'll be learning other joining words, like "but," and "and," and "or," "so," to show, how to join, the sentences, and indicate, the kind of relationships that exist between these two sentences.

In example 2, while T develops the idea of joining complete sentences with a semicolon or coordinating conjunctions, and while it might be argued that she begins with a topic sentence, she depends on exophoric reference to be understood, specifically, reference to the identity of the sentences that T and S are discussing. The use of the demonstrative "these," occurring twice in the discourse cited, is a clue to her depending on an external context. Thus, even though it has some of the marks of expository discourse, we do not count it as expository for our purposes. In contrast, example 1 contains all the criteria: It has a topic sentence which is developed and the text is internally consistent, with reference being endophoric.

After identifying all instances of expository discourse for each of the four conferences, we considered the following:

1. the number of times that such discourse occurs and the number of idea units within each occurrence,
2. whether the occurrences are characterized as highly colloquial or as academic in register,⁴ and
3. what motivates the discourse.

⁴ Let us clarify what we mean by "written" language features. Chafe (1980, 1982) describes certain language features as being prototypically spoken or prototypically written. Nominalization ("operation," not "operate"; "management," not "manage"), for example, is a prototypically written rather than spoken feature. We also designate as written, or academic, certain broad discourse strategies such as succinct thesis statement, clear supporting evidence, balanced sentences, and transitional devices such as "however." Such features will be identified as they come up in the discussion.

Frequency of occurrence. Over the four conferences, expository discourse appears as is illustrated in Table 4. At the extreme ends, the high-ability Caucasian, Jay, receives almost five times the number of expository discourse models from T as does the low-ability Asian-American, Cee.

Looking at idea units, one gets a slightly different picture. Although idea units devoted to expository discourse for Jay outnumber those for Cee by more than four to one and thus echo the ratio seen in Table 4, the linear progression across the four students does not recur. The two Caucasian students receive an almost equal number of total idea units devoted to expository discourse. However, because this is accounted for by one stretch of discourse in Dee's conference that is particularly long—96 idea units, as opposed to the average length for the four students which is 23 idea units—the results may simply reflect an anomaly.

Occurrence of written language features. We found some of these expository episodes to be more "written" or academic in register and some to be more colloquial. Example 3 illustrates what we mean. Italicized are elements that can be identified as belonging to a written rather than colloquial register:

(3) *T to Jay*

When we talk about prewriting in class, we talk about the whole process, and that Trimble book, talks a lot about feelings people have, and assumptions that are ... either accurate or inaccurate, about professional writer, people who make their living writing, and um ... maybe by reading that book, and doing some of your own thinking, um ... and I'd like students' feedback, as they go through the course of the semester, to see ... what kinds of things, you start realizing about yourself, as a writer, you know ... what ... what ... does seem to block you, what is really that fear, and can you tackle it. Is it just something ... that's ... kind of an arbitrary ... fear you have, or is it something that is really genuine, that ... where you lack a certain ability that you feel, is necessary, to be a professional writer. So hopefully, you know by going through this class not only do you learn the techniques of expository writing, but you'll learn something about yourself.

The written-like features include: an introductory subordinate clause, two instances of technical language, an instance of nominalization, two correlative conjunctions, and an appositional phrase. One should also note T's reference to authority, "that Trimble book," in support of her ideas that writing is a "process" whereby one discovers one's strengths and weaknesses as a writer, the overriding

Table 4. Expository Modeling

Language features	Jay	Sherry	Dee	Cee
N of incidents	9	6	4	2
N of idea units	166	84	157	42
Range of idea units across incidents	6 to 34	8 to 21	16 to 96	13 to 29

thesis of this stretch of discourse. These features, thesis and support from an outside authority, are, of course, characteristic of written essays.

Example 4 between T and Dee, although labeled expository since it contains "expository" features, contrasts sharply with example 3. One might argue that the expository model that Dee receives is different in kind from the one Jay receives:

(4) *T to Dee*

That's really a great start, to come into . . . a . . . a writing class like this and have all those . . . different ideas, plans and stages that you go through, you're really . . . I think . . . very far along in knowing, the whole *process*, that . . . that . . . um occurs when you have to write a paper. Most people think that you can just sit down and do all that at once, you can think and write and organize it, yeah . . . and that's why most people have so much difficulty when they write.

One written-like feature (technical language) is italicized here. There is a thesis—that there's an advantage to knowing that writing is a process—but the support is anecdotal, a legitimate strategy for development but close to informal conversational strategy. So while both pieces appear more "spoken" than "written," containing hedges, hesitations, vagueness, and colloquialisms, example 3 is clearly denser in written features than is 4 and fits an academic register more than a colloquial one.

While T uses both colloquial and academic registers throughout the conferences, during these expository episodes, at least, she speaks in a strikingly more academic manner more of the time with Jay than with Sherry or Dee and even less with Cee. Perhaps for the reasons we found in our semantic analysis, perhaps for other reasons, T is motivated to use, and thus to model, an academic register differently with these students. In general, the effects of this kind of interchange for students could well be that, even indirectly through modeling, some learn how to talk to a teacher, getting practice participating in an academic register with a guiding interlocutor, while others get no such practice.

The two high-achieving students seem to know how, although unwittingly, to get T to begin her expository episodes. As in the incidents of praise-giving, T generally responds to Jay in this expository way when he has expressed or implied uncertainty about writing. T seems to want to help him see things as writing teachers do, to let him in on her own perspectives about writing:

T: You—as long as . . . and along with your classmates, will—see that, editing is very specific. It's not just sitting back, and saying, "Gee this seems nice, or it doesn't seem nice," and you don't know why, and you start . . . when you're va—gue, you almost have to, it seems, attack the person personally, but if you're looking at specific things, . . . every single topic sentence, the thesis statement, the organization, how you decided to open up the paragraph, introductory paragraph. It's very . . . technical really, when you get down to it, so that there isn't much room for va—gue generalities, va—

gue judgments, at least it shouldn't be. And I think by then too, once you see the kinds of things that other people are doing, you . . . you won't be as threatened. Too—at least hopefully that's the experience you'll have. And by then you'll be . . . you'll have written a lot of essays for the class, so you'll have a pretty good sense of, the things that are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer. So too, so it shouldn't come as some great shocker.

Her responses to Sherry and Dee are similarly motivated (although Dee's motivating statements tend to come across as complaints rather than uncertainty—e.g., "I have a terrible vocabulary"). T is not, however, motivated to give Cee the kinds of lessons and insights that she does with the other three. Of the two expository episodes that Cee is exposed to, the first Cee requests directly: "What exactly is an idiom?"—a question, incidentally, that comes somewhat inappropriately after T has asked Cee whether she has any questions about class procedure.

The second of these episodes with Cee comes as a way for T to divert an awkward situation in which Cee praises T's teaching abilities. So this low-achieving student, unlike Dee, and unlike the two high-achieving students, does not get "taught" by T during the conference in the same characteristically "expository" manner. Her own contributions to the conference helps prevent these lessons from occurring.

Invitations to Return. A sample of talk from the end of every conference proved particularly revealing in illustrating the disparities of the student-teacher interaction. This talk generally centers on the teacher's invitation to the student to return for additional individual meetings. On the whole, this teacher is exceptionally generous with her time and lets her students know about her generosity. However, these four students get different tastes of this generosity. Each idea unit is numbered.

Jay

T: (1) if you think of anything.

(2) do feel free to come down,

(3) . . . and talk with me,

(4) in the office.

(5) If I go through a lesson too quickly,

(6) . . . or there're points that I . . . didn't raise,

(7) that you really wanted,

(8) to ask about,

(9) and you didn't feel you had time in class to cover them.

(10) Always come down,

(11) . . . or set up an appointment to . . . to meet with me.

(12) . . . Uhm—as a process class it's important,

(13) . . . that you keep up with the work.

(14) Because you don't want to be thinking about thesis statements,

- (15) when you're thinking about topic sentences.
 (16) or topic sentences when you're thinking about paragraph development.
 (17) Or—introductions and conclusions.
 (18) You know ... when you can kinda tackle ... each part of the writing.
 (19) itself.
 (20) as its own.
 (21) little ... what.
 (22) ... As its own issue.
 (23) and its own lesson.
 (24) .. And you can kinda get clear.
 (25) at least on the principle.
 (26) It takes a while,
 (27) to incorporate it into your writing.
 (28) It takes practice.
 (29) .. There's only so much I can teach you through,
 (30) ... talking.
 (31) Most of it comes from you,
 (32) writing
/Yeah/
 (33) Um,
 (34) but I think you'll find that,
 (35) step by step,
 (36) the essay will not be,
 (37) a big blur,
 (38) of issues that,
 (39) ... you've already got a good sense of a lot of the factors and variables that go in.
 (40) Hopefully this will clarify some of the techniques that you can use to accomplish those,
 (41) .. those techniques,
 (42) those variables,
 (43) so if you have any questions,
 (44) ... feel free to ask.
- Sherry
 T: (1) Well you know where my office is.
 S:
 T: (2) And ... if you ... if after a class,
 (3) on a thesis statement ... or something,
 (4) you don't understand,
 (5) do come down here.
 (6) I try not to let ... I really like people to get ... keep up with the class.
 (7) since it is a what do you call process-oriented class.
 (8) You don't want to be thinking about thesis statements,

- (9) when you're down the road looking at ... how to join sentences,
 (10) and develop sentences,
 (11) or ... you don't want to be thinking about topic sentences when we're looking at ... how to develop ... paragraphs.
 (12) So that if for some reason a particular lesson seems very confusing,
 (13) or you have other ideas that you wanted to discuss,
 (14) do come down,
 (16) .. and make use of this time.
 S: Okay
 T: (17) Okay all right ... and if you think of questions later,
 (18) you'll feel free to come in.
- Dee
 T: (1) Uhm ... all right like I said,
 (2) if you have any ... questions,
 (3) ... comments,
 (4) things that you want to talk to me about,
 (5) ... do come down to the office,
 (6) and keep up with the course.
 S: Okay.
 T: (7) Uhm feel free to come down now that you know where it is,
 (8) ... to visit.
 S: All right.
 T: whatever.
 S: Okay.
 T: Is that it?
 T: Yeah
 ... that's all
 ... I just essentially(...)
- Cee
 T: (1) I think it's very important that you ... feel that you come and talk ... with me,
 (2) or even *uh hum/* your other students in the class
 (3) and say ... I didn't get this
 (4) when she was talking about that
 (5) or can you give me more ... homework for this
 (6) on ... um ... I di I disagree I—everybody in the class saying this about the paragraph
 (7) but I really think that.

The number of teacher idea units devoted to the invitation varies from 44 for the strongest Caucasian student to 7 for the weaker Asian-American. Of note is T's

depersonalizing Cee's "invitation" by creating a scenario in which Cee is given a strong option to speak to other Ss in the class rather than to T about what she doesn't understand. She invites Cee to ask her for homework, not for elaborate discussion. And whereas the invitations to the other three Ss occur at the end of the conference, Cee's is embedded in the middle. Her last remarks for Cee are:

- T: I have to go to a class now.
 Cee: Okay.
 T: Uhm is there anything else you want to ask me? Any final observations?
 Cee: Is there any extra credit work we could do?

It is notable that this is the same student, Cee, who admits that she feels discriminated against by her teachers. In fact, she is. But we also see why.

Conclusion

We have examined how the teaching-learning relationship is established between one teacher and four of her students in a college composition course. We have found that: (a) the different students wanted to focus on different types of topics (discourse-level topics for the two Caucasians and surface-level for the high-achieving Asian-American; the lowest-achieving student had no hierarchy of intellectual topics); (b) the teacher focused on different types of intellectual topics for the different students (discourse-level topics for all except the lowest-achieving Asian-American student); (c) the teacher gave more praise to the higher-achieving students who seemed to elicit that praise by expressing their insecurity about their writing; (d) the lower-achieving students initiated topics likely to alienate a teacher; and (e) the synchrony of the conversation broke down with the lowest-achieving Asian-American student, a native speaker of English, who inserted backchannel signals at inappropriate times in the conversation.

These differences in conversational interaction signal the possibility of differential instruction. Even in this first get-acquainted conference, we found that the teacher gave quantitatively and qualitatively different explanations to the four students, with the higher-achieving students receiving more expository explanations and with their explanations being delivered in a more formal, "written-like" register. Further, the higher achieving student, the more likely she or he was to receive a more elaborate invitation to return for future conferences.

The teacher intended to treat all of her students equally and was surprised by the results of the analysis which bring to light much of what is unconscious in a T-S interaction. By highlighting the differences in a single excellent teacher's interactions with her different students and by making explicit the students' contributions to the interaction, we can begin to practice exerting conscious control over those aspects of the teaching-learning process that are likely to influence what a student

learns, and we can focus on those aspects that are likely to lead to success. Our intent is to help teachers carry out their intents.

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