

Gender in Conversation: A Case Study of Faculty Talk about Teaching Writing

The following exchange occurred after Lena expressed concern about assigning primary research in her American government course. She worried her inability to individually mentor students with varying levels of experience with disciplinary methodology might lead to misconceptions about legitimate research in the field. In response, Bill told a story about how he wrestled with similar concerns:

1 **LENA:** So, my previous concern is, and that's why I
2 think I ended up going back to, "Oh, I'll just let them do
3 the secondary research, because I don't want anyone
4 to walk out of my class thinking that anything they do
5 is legitimate," [laughs] you know?

6 **BILL:** Right, right, I think that's a good question with
7 undergraduate students when you're introducing the
8 research like this, primary research. I mean I know I
9 had this question even with this graduate course that I
10 taught last spring. [I]t really freaked me out because
11 one of the students wanted to use the paper she wrote
12 for my course as the seeds for her master's thesis. And
13 it was a little outside the boundaries of what I felt
14 comfortable with in terms of my knowledge, that she
15 was writing on something that I was interested in. And

GD: seeks affirmation/confirmation (ll. 5)

EG: fellow question poser (ll. 8-9)

GD: parallel conversation (ll. 9-10)

EG: also "freaked out" (ll. 10)

EG: not all-knowing (ll. 13-15)

16 somebody in my field is publishing about that, but it's
17 not me, and I'm also not reading those people. But the
18 other piece was just that, from a methodological
19 standpoint, it was just a mess. I mean it wouldn't have
20 passed muster, and she had no sense of why. And it
21 felt like, [sigh] it's like an entire another thing, and this
22 was a graduate student. And then last fall I taught an
23 undergraduate course where the students were doing
24 some primary research. And again, this question of, "Is
25 this legit?" You know? "Is it legit for this course? Is it
26 legit for the students who are taking this one class
27 that's going to ask them to do this kind of work?
28 Would an undergraduate journal publish this?" I have
29 all those questions too.

30 **LENA:** Yeah.

31 **BILL:** And I guess the right way to do it, I guess, would
32 be kind of the method sequence and all that. [B]ut on
33 the flip side of it, just to hold off on all that stuff and
34 just sort of have them read and test them until they
35 get there, I guess, which seems like they don't get to
36 do anything.

37 **LENA:** Right.

GD: parallel story
(ll. 21, 22-24)

EG: self-doubt;
question posing
(ll. 24-29)

GD: minimal
response (ll. 30)

EG: tempers
advice (ll. 31-5)

GD: minimal
response (ll. 37)

38 **BILL:** I mean, I guess...The sort of conclusion I came to
39 with both these instances was that these students
40 were going to ask a question and begin to try on a
41 methodology or method to explore it for the first time.

42 **LENA:** Mm-hmm.

43 **BILL:** And so that counts as something. You know,
44 where it goes from there, who knows. I mean, with
45 undergraduates I think a lot of times it doesn't go
46 anywhere...But how much time do you have time
47 mapped out for this in terms of...?

**EG: tempers
advice (ll. 38)**

**GD: minimal
response (ll. 42)**

**GD:
storytelling:
achievement
(ll. 38, 43)**

**GD: determines
next topic (ll.
46-7)**

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