

## Disciplinary Genre Knowledge Analysis

### CDA of Evidence of Disciplinary Genre Knowledge:

Jen reflects on an interaction in her session which troubled her, though she does not discuss it in terms of what it reveals about her knowledge of disciplinary genre conventions. In stanza 2, she describes a discussion about a thesis statement that she thought was missing from Student A's paper, while Student A was reluctant to make the suggested addition to her introduction:

I think the biggest thing I tried to explain to the student in regard to her paper is the use of a thesis statement. After reading through her introduction section and realizing that one was lacking, I asked her if she thought she had one and if so where it was. I felt like she was a little thrown off by this, but she said she had no idea where her thesis was, so I tried explaining what a thesis statement is so she would have a better idea of how to create one for this paper. At first, I did think I explained the gist of a thesis pretty well, but the student still seemed confused and didn't completely understand why she would need a thesis. Instead of getting stuck on this, I suggested we move forward to the next section so she might get a better idea of how to create a thesis, where it would go, and why it is important to have one. Looking back now, I do realize how my phrasing might make what I was saying about a thesis a little confusing at first. I am afraid that I gave her too much in creating her thesis by starting to state it for her, but I was afraid that she still was not getting what a thesis was or how to create one. To assure that she understood why one was being used, what it was saying, and where it would be, I simply asked her if she got why we did it. She laughed and said it made a lot more sense to her now.

Jen is presenting herself as knowledgeable about a writing convention. However, the information about thesis statements that Jen gave to Student A was from a Humanities genre perspective

rather than a Social Sciences genre perspective, which is the genre the student was writing in. In the video, Jen described a thesis as “the point you’re trying to make to the reader.” However, Linton, et al., note that in writing in the sciences, “sometimes there is a true thesis statement near the end of the introduction, but more often what is stated in the introduction is a hypothesis, which focuses the issue yet preserves the possibility that the outcome may be unexpected” (68). Student A’s reluctance to incorporate a thesis how and where Jen wanted her to could be attributed to her understanding, albeit implicit (since she was not able to clearly explain her thinking to Jen), that the kind of thesis that Jen was encouraging her to write was not appropriate for the genre she was writing in. Indeed, based on my viewing of this interaction on the video, it appears that Student A voices her concern in the session when she says that adding a thesis where Jen suggests “will totally defeat the purpose of her whole problem paragraph,” which comes after the point in the paper that appears to Jen to be the end of her introduction. This interaction presents an opportunity for Jen to be truly collaborative with the student by attempting to make more explicit Student A’s implicit knowledge of such conventions, or by introducing a discussion about possible differences in academic genre conventions. That Jen does not initiate a discussion of what the student might know about how thesis statements work in kind of writing she was doing, and instead forges on with her thesis recommendation, indicates to me that she is not as knowledgeable of differences in disciplinary genres as she could be.

Similarly, Lori reflects on an interaction that also presented a missed opportunity for sharing metaknowledge about disciplinary genre conventions in stanza 4 of her second reflection:

I asked the student why she had so many paragraphs. I felt that they were too short and the student explained that she is used to blogging and using short paragraphs. Although this is valid, I was unsure whether I should encourage her to combine paragraphs or not.

This discussion of paragraph length was a perfect opportunity to discuss the student's knowledge of and experience writing in multiple genres and to encourage her to consider why conventions for paragraph length in blog writing might be different from paragraph length in academic writing. That Lori does not do this, and that the focus in this stanza, as with much of this reflection, is her feelings of insecurity about whether she is doing things correctly, is likely a good indication that Lori is missing the very knowledge that would have been helpful to communicate to the student. Most importantly, Lori is missing the idea that this knowledge could have been co-constructed with the student, who, as a graduate student, was clearly more of an expert than Lori in this genre.

In stanza 6 of the same reflection, Lori discusses another interaction that indicates that she can effectively co-construct genre knowledge with students:

Finally, the student and I discussed whether or not she should include one of the studies in her paper. This was an interesting experience and I was not sure if I was helpful or not. In the end, I believe I allowed her to "talk it out" in a way that helped her come to her own conclusion.

While Lori indicates that she did not have the disciplinary knowledge in the social science use of data to be able to help the student decide on the use of a source, in this instance she was able to acknowledge the agency of the student to make her own decisions about her text as well as the importance and value of discussing or "talking it out."

As with procedural knowledge, disciplinary genre knowledge alone is not enough. Tutors also need to know how to employ their knowledge in a collaborative way. Kate does have access

to knowledge about disciplinary genres, but she has not yet found a collaborative way to share this knowledge with Student D. For example, in stanza 2 of her second reflection Kate writes: As with our previous session, the student questioned what the professor was looking for in this assignment. This time around, instead of projecting what I felt the professor wanted, I tried to clearly suggest to her that my opinion and what the professor wants are two different things. Moreover, I also tried suggesting to her throughout the session that many things she was asking my opinion on were a matter of personal preference and that she had the ability to answer these questions for herself. While I continually deferred to the assignment, I also had her justify what she did and did not [sic] to fulfill the professor's requirements. I felt that in having her actually think about what she did and justify her answers to me that she understood the complexities of the assignment and the ways in which she did (or did not) fulfill the requirements.

Kate makes some confusing assertions about authority in this stanza, seeming to portray it as being divided somehow between herself and the professor, and sometimes framing it more as personal opinion, rather than as knowledge guided by the academic genre the student was being asked to write in. She writes: "This time around, instead of projecting what I felt the professor wanted, I tried to clearly suggest to her that my opinion and what the professor wants are two different things." This would likely be a confusing statement to this student for a few reasons: Kate had positioned herself as the authority in interpreting the assignments before—we saw her do this in the previous session in which she read from and interpreted the assignment for the student. Also, while her "opinion" might be different from "what the professor wants," as a tutor Kate does have the writing and institutional knowledge that could help a student understand an assignment; that is not opinion, it is disciplinary genre knowledge. Finally, Kate does not describe herself creating space here for the student to consider what she might already know

about the academic genre she is writing in by, for example, asking questions to help Student D understand the assignment, such as how Student D might connect the assignment to her understanding of the course goals or to information the professor had provided in class. In the next line of this stanza, Kate continues to frame the issue as a matter of personal preference and opinion, rather than one guided by genre conventions: “Moreover, I also tried suggesting to her throughout the session that many things she was asking my opinion on were a matter of personal preference and that she had the ability to answer these questions for herself.” While this might seem to be an empowering statement, it is not clear what would have been personal preference, what would have been genre conventions, and what would have been the expectations of this particular assignment and this professor. Teasing those ideas out and making them more visible to the student could have been a helpful way to deal with this issue. Instead, Kate seems place herself in a position of authority in the next line: “While I continually deferred to the assignment, I also had her justify what she did and did not [sic] to fulfill the professor’s requirements.” The use of the verb “justify” here positions Kate as the arbiter of correctness, rather than a sharer of information.