

Analysis of Writing Knowledge

CDA of Evidence of Writing Knowledge:

Jen discusses her struggle with sharing her knowledge of grammar in stanza 3:

When the student asked me if the phrasing of a specific sentence made sense, and I did feel like there was something missing, instead of pausing and asking her what she might add to make it clearer, I just gave her an answer. I definitely could have told her to reread the sentence out loud and tell me why she thought it sounded weird and what she might think was missing. If she was not getting anywhere with that, I could have told her that I think a verb might be missing in order to help lead her in the right direction. I feel like I did this a few times in the session, and I wish I had taken the time to ask her what words might be added or what words might be changed in order to get her to think about why it makes sense to phrase it a little differently. With me doing it for her, I feel like it prevents her from learning. However, there were quite a few times that she changed the wording of something on her own.

By sharing a variety of strategies she could have used to help the student make more of her own revisions, Jen indicates that she has both sentence-level writing knowledge and the understanding of how to share it helpfully with students, even though she sometimes needs to be more mindful about practicing these strategies in sessions. As she noted in her last sentence of this stanza, both she and the student contributed to the sentence-level revision in the session.

Lori also struggled with how to share her sentence-level knowledge with the first student she recorded:

Early on in the second read-through, I pointed out that a sentence needed to be more consistent, stylistically. It took her a minute to understand what I was talking about and I had to give her an

example. I would like to be able to be a little clearer in explanations and use examples that are not part of the actual paper. Some other times during the session, I used examples that she liked and changed her sentences to reflect that. I would like to be able to help the student come up with new words/ideas on her own.

Although Lori indicates her awareness that it would be helpful for her to develop additional strategies for discussing sentence-level revisions in ways that are more clear to students (she used the phrase “more consistent, stylistically” when she was trying to get the student to revise for parallel structure, which was unclear and confusing to the student), her focus here is on how to deliver information to students. It would be more conducive to collaboration for her to consider strategies for devising questions to discover what a student might already know about grammatical structures and how a student might be thinking about a confusing moment in her own text, in order to help students be more active participants in their revision processes.

Kate also struggled with sharing her knowledge of grammar with Student D, who relied very much on Kate’s expertise. One moment in the video of the second session she recorded illustrates how this dependent behavior played out: Student D asked if she should take a comma out of a sentence. Kate responded, “Well, why would you take it out, explain it to me.” Student D provided an explanation but did not get it quite right, so Kate corrected her, explaining the grammatical rule in detail. Kate does not discuss this exchange in her reflection, but she does describe a similar exchange in stanza 3 of her second reflection:

This time I caught myself over-explaining once, but then I had her answer her own questions by asking ‘Well, what do you think?’ If her explanations were correct, I would agree with her, but if they were not, I would re-explain why she was wrong so that she understood the correct grammar/usage/etc.

While Kate is trying to guide Student D toward a better understanding of comma usage, Kate's use of "correct" and "wrong" in her description of this interaction seem to reinforce the message that she is the expert who holds the key to this knowledge, which the student certainly sees her as. It also positions Student D as a novice who requires constant monitoring and correction, rather than as a co-collaborator working together with Kate to understand how grammar can work rhetorically. If Kate had instead asked Student D how she was thinking about commas and they had discussed her assumptions, as well as what readers might be expecting or thinking when they saw, or did not see, a comma, Kate might have been able to shift Student D to a different kind of understanding of grammar guidelines. Especially since Kate notes that she has explained and re-explained these rules to this student, it would be helpful to work with her on finding other ways to discuss sentence-level revision.