Apprenticeship in the Instructor-Led Peer Conference

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The instructor-led peer conference, a lesser-known approach to peer re-
sponse involving both students and teachers, affords significant oppor-
tunities for collaborative learning and apprenticeship in the teaching of
composition. This article uses sociocultural theories of learning to exam-
ine video-recorded episodes from two instructor-led peer conferences.
Close analysis reveals how these conferences make visible the negotiated
meanings of teachers and students, along with their embodied (and often
tacit) practices of writing and response. Through attention to these prac-
tices, writing teachers can help students respond effectively to the writing
of their peers.

Peer response is a standard feature of a process-oriented approach to
writing instruction. Composition teachers have students read and re-
spond to one another's writing for a variety of reasons, but high among
them is a desire to take advantage of the power of collaborative learn-
ing (see Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning"; Gere; Trimbur). Both composi-
tion scholars and teachers alike, though, have found that simply throw-
ing students into groups and asking them to share is not enough. Without
adequate guidance, peer response groups can succumb to problems like
negative social dynamics or an inability (or unwillingness) to provide con-
structive feedback to one another (see Belcher, "Peer Review"; George;
Grimm; Spear; Stygall). As Karen Spear puts it, "peer response groups
don't work just because we think they should" (7). A critical question, then,
is this: how can teachers adequately prepare students for productive and
meaningful participation in peer response groups?

One common practice among teachers has been to provide students with
worksheets or rubrics that structure their encounters with each other's drafts,
and although worksheets may reduce "uninteresting, off-task talk" (Freed-
man 79), they have also been criticized for contributing to "fill-in-the-blank
syndrome" (Grimm 92), where completing the worksheet takes over as the
primary objective (Freedman 90). Another approach has instead focused on
training students, before they begin peer response, how to interact more
effectively in groups and how to provide feedback to drafts-in-progress (see
Berg; Hanson and Liu; Rollinson; Spear). This approach may be effective,
but it requires that teachers devote a significant amount of instructional
effort in such preparatory work.

There is a third, but lesser-known method for guiding students through
peer response that addresses these shortcomings while retaining its col-

laborative potential: the instructor-led peer conference. Sometimes called a "small group conference" or "group tutorial," this is an activity in which a teacher meets with a small group of students (usually outside of regular class time) to discuss student drafts (see Ching; Miller; Thomas and Thomas).[1] Instead of—or in addition to—training students ahead of time or supplying worksheets to structure peer response, a teacher in an instructor-led peer conference can provide in-the-moment guidance to students as they comment on one another's writing. Such inclusion of a teacher at the scene of peer response might seem almost perverse, especially since one common rationale for peer response is to give students a space within which to interact with relative autonomy (see Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning"; Gere). However, just because a teacher's absence has been a traditional feature of peer response groups does not make it a necessary condition. That is, the defining characteristic of peer response should be that it involves peers responding to each other's writing, whether or not a teacher also participates. Of course, teachers are not students' peers, and so when they participate in instructor-led peer conferences, the activity and group dynamics are significantly different from student-only peer response groups.

It is my aim in this article to examine what happens when teachers and students meet together in instructor-led peer conferences to discuss student drafts. Specifically, I want to consider how this approach to peer response enables certain kinds of constructive student-teacher interactions that do not typically occur in student-only groups. It must be said, though, that unless they are completely student-initiated, voluntary, and self-sponsored, even "student-only" groups involve some form of teacher participation. Not only do composition instructors typically assign peer response and determine when it will occur, they also shape the activity through assignments, class discussions, and the kinds of training and worksheets mentioned earlier. But where training and worksheets require teachers to anticipate in advance the kinds of issues and concerns that might come up during student-only peer response groups, the instructor-led peer conference allows teachers to shape students' feedback and interactions on the fly. So, the difference between these approaches does not lie in whether or not a teacher intervenes in peer response, but instead in what form that intervention takes.

What kind of intervention are we talking about? It is useful to think of the instructor-led peer conference as a kind of apprenticeship.[2] Typically, an apprentice learns how to perform tasks, or modified versions of them, with assistance from (or in close proximity to) a more experienced practitioner. In an instructor-led peer conference, the teacher is not just a guide, but also a co-participant in the activity of responding to student writing. That is, a teacher is doing two things simultaneously: 1) helping students respond productively to the writing of their peers, and 2) responding to students' drafts. In this way, all participants in an instructor-led peer conference are collaborators, and students in this setting gain access to the meanings and values teachers ascribe to various features of student writing. This access

may be even more important than learning to generate feedback, since, as Louise Phelps puts it, response to student writing "is most fundamentally reading, not writing" (93). The instructor-led peer conference positions students as novice readers and writers working in close proximity to their more experienced and expert instructors.

In framing the instructor-led peer conference as an apprenticeship, I am drawing on Sarah Freedman's sense that, ideally, response to student writing should function as "collaborative problem solving" (*Response* 7). Of course, collaborative learning is not exactly a novelty in composition studies. It was first popularized for the field in the mid-1980s by Kenneth Bruffee who highlighted the need for learning to take place among a "community of status equals" or "peers" ("Collaborative Learning" 642). Less restrictive is Freedman's vision of "collaborative problem solving," which makes room for both students and teachers. In the conclusion to their review of the literature on peer response, DiPardo and Freedman imagine response taking place in "a cooperative environment wherein power is productively shared—a class-room that could more properly be called a resource room, its teacher more properly a knowledgeable coach, its students more properly one another's colleagues" (144). In such an environment, the responsibility for teaching and learning is spread not just among students but extends to the teacher as well. I believe the instructor-led peer conference, with its expanded op-portunities for apprenticeship, can provide just such an environment. Of course, it is not the case that this or any other response activity carries with it guaranteed results. However, the participation structure of instructor-led peer conferences does afford unique kinds of in-the-moment interactions that foreground "collaborative problem solving," especially between teach-ers and peer responders.

In order to explore these interactions in greater detail, I consider below two sample conversations from actual instructor-led peer conferences, and each of these sample conversations is examined through one of two theo-retical lenses that will help illuminate how apprenticeship happens. For the first, I reexamine some of Vygotsky's concepts that have been used in the past to underwrite the use of student-only peer response groups. Through reconsidering these theories, I hope to amend some of the peculiar ways they have been taken up, especially in discussions of response to student writing. What Vygotsky renders intelligible are discreet, dyadic interactions between a teacher and a student responder. However, Vygotsky is not especially helpful for understanding how engaging in an instructor-led peer conference enables multiple layers of interaction and fuller participation in academic practices of reading and responding to student writing. Therefore, the second lens, based on Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's theory of "situated learning," frames the conference as a space for guided participation. Taken together, these two frameworks reveal how these conferences are both about learning discreet tasks of response and about participating in academic literate practices. In other words, the instructor-led peer conference is a space where students

do two things simultaneously: they participate to learn, and they learn to participate. What is ultimately at stake is not just a greater understanding of a neglected response format, but also a fleshing-out of what it means to view response to student writing as collaborative problem solving.

Participating to Learn

Both of these exchanges that follow occurred in the same lower-division writing course taught at a large public university by Ellen (a pseudonym), at the time a graduate teaching assistant. The course was the first in a two-part, first-year composition sequence, and its specific focus was on "textual analysis." Students in the course read both fiction (in the form of short stories) and non-fictional essays, and then wrote essays in which they analyzed the rhetorical choices made in these texts. For the conferences excerpted below, students had traded drafts of their essays in class and also provided Ellen with copies of their drafts. Prior to each hour-long conference meeting outside of class, the students and Ellen read the group's drafts, and during the conference, students were expected to provide one another feedback. It was also expected that students would revise their drafts after the conference, according to the feedback they had received. I chose these particular exchanges to examine because they were representative of the kinds of apprenticeship work I want to illustrate. Because of that aim, these exchanges show a teacher actively guiding students as they respond to other students or remaining relatively silent while students discuss the drafts, but not a teacher offering her own feedback to a writer. In other words, they do not constitute a comprehensive picture of what happens in instructor-led peer conferences.

Exchange #1 is primarily an interaction between a peer reviewer and a writer, as mediated by an instructor's prompting and validation of reviewer comments.

Exchange #1
Participants: Ellen (instructor), Valerie (writer), Carrie (reviewer), Mike (reviewer)

Turn	Speaker	Text of Turn
1	Ellen	So, looking at Valerie's—maybe we can just look at a particular paragraph again where—why don't we pick one where there is a fairly clear claim, but still is maybe not quite as developed in terms of what you want or even evidence. Do you guys have any place like that? ((*30-second pause while reviewers flip through their copies of the writer's draft*))

Turn	Speaker	Text of Turn
2	Carrie	((*to Valerie*)) I thought the um, where you start talking, it's ((*quoting from draft*)) "the narrator becomes more preoccupied with wallpaper," and you start talking about the domino effect, I thought those were really good ideas, but you didn't explain it too much. It was—and I thought it could develop really far into eventually what would happen if women started being more controlling, how would that affect society, and all of that, because it was a good idea that I didn't think a lot of people got to. And um...
3	Ellen	Yeah, I agree. That's exactly what I put. ((*picks up her own draft and shows it to Carrie, quoting from her own notes*)) "Set it up as a thesis, develop as a claim ((*laughing*)), and provide evidence and warrants for it." Um yeah, I mean...
4	Carrie	I mean you can almost, when st- even at the beginning where you said "throughout history," you could almost tie in the history part there, that women have actually developed and got rights to vote and stuff like that that you can almost include to tie into part of your thesis as part of history.

In this exchange, conference participants are discussing a student's essay draft that examines feminist themes in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper." Ellen, the instructor, starts by asking the student reviewers (in the first conversational turn) to choose a paragraph in the draft that has "a fairly clear claim," but that is "not quite as developed" or lacks evidence. In making this request, she sets up the activity by laying out a clearly defined task for the reviewers, one which asks them to apply their understanding of such concepts as "claim," "development," and "evidence" to this writer's paper. There is a fairly long (30-second) pause while students flip through their copies of the draft, ostensibly searching for a paragraph that fits the criteria Ellen has just articulated. Eventually, Carrie (one of the student reviewers) responds directly to the writer, Valerie, drawing her attention to a paragraph that she feels could have used more development, and she even suggests how the paragraph could be expanded. At this point, Carrie has responded to Ellen's prompt, but she moves beyond the narrow request to pick only one paragraph, and shifts back (as it were) into the larger context of the conference by offering advice to the writer.

Within this brief exchange, the interaction between Ellen and Carrie represents a kind of "zone of proximal development." In *Mind in Society*, Vygotsky defines the zone of proximal development as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (86).

Originally, Vygotsky developed this model for the purpose of assessing more than a child's "current developmental level," but also for determining

"those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation" (85-6). For Vygotsky, the fact that a child can perform tasks at a higher developmental level while assisted by an adult (or some other "more capable" person) means that "the zone of proximal development today will be the actual developmental level tomorrow" (87).

But the zone of proximal development is not just a predictor of development; it articulates a mechanism by which learning happens. Using speech as an example, Vygotsky argues that "language arises initially as a means of communication between the child and the people in his environment. Only subsequently, upon conversion to internal speech, does it come to organize a child's thought . . . become an internal mental function" (89).

There is some evidence of this kind of internalization in the way Valerie takes up some of Ellen's terminology in this exchange. Ellen models terms like "paragraph," "develop," "claim," and "evidence" for students, and these are keyed to the assignment prompt and in-class discussions of writing. In turn two, Carrie partially translates and partially adopts this terminology. She shifts Ellen's terms "claim" and "evidence" into less precise language when she says in turn two "I thought those were really good ideas, but you didn't explain it too much." However, Carrie does adopt Ellen's term "develop," which she uses in turn two to describe what the writer might focus on. In turn three, it is Ellen's turn to perform this kind of translation, since she reframes Carrie's comment as essentially identical to what she had written in the margin of her own draft copy: "Set it up as a thesis, develop as a claim, and provide evidence and warrants for it." Carrie takes up more of this specialized language in turn four, again using the term "develop" (though less precisely) and "thesis" as she elaborates on her initial point. Though incomplete and imprecise, Carrie's uptake of these terms suggests that she is in the process of internalization described by Vygotsky.

This internalizing function of social interaction has historically been a primary focus in treatments of Vygotsky in composition studies, but the idiosyncratic way it has been taken up by the field has largely underplayed the importance the theorist placed on "adult guidance" or a "more capable peer" in the learning process. Kenneth Bruffee, one of the first to import Vygotsky's theories into the field, lumps the theorist together with Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish, whose respective ideas of conversation and interpretive communities resonated (for Bruffee) with Vygotsky's notion that thought is the internalization of social speech.[3] Anne Ruggles Gere follows Bruffee in this view, when she ranks student-only writing groups among those "social interactions that aid the process of internalization" (83). For both of these writers, it is the interaction of students with one another—and not with a teacher—that produces the social speech that in turn becomes internalized thought.[4] In this way, early attempts to frame peer collaboration as a zone of proximal development insisted on the necessity of student autonomy. However, no such claims were made by Vygotsky, for whom it was parents or teachers who typically functioned as "adult guidance" or "more capable peer."

What is important is that, in order to exceed their "current developmental level," learners must participate in collaborative problem solving alongside someone who is "more capable" in some relevant way.[5]

In the exchange between Ellen and Carrie above, Ellen plays the role of "more capable" person in order to help student reviewers like Carrie formulate their feedback on the draft before them. She begins the exchange by breaking the activity down into a specific, focused task: find a claim in the draft that is not yet developed or supported adequately. In order to participate in this conference, students are called upon to align their comments with how the instructor chooses to frame the activity. By scaffolding the activity in this way, Ellen discourages students from performing superficial judgments about the essay, such as "I liked your essay—it was good." In her book on peer response, *Sharing Writing,* Karen Spear notes that one of the ways student-only peer response groups often have trouble is when "students restrict themselves to tinkering with details rather than fully accepting the tasks of inventing and revising" (39). Students in such groups float upon the surface of the text, concerning themselves with obvious errors and awkward phrasings, and they are unwilling—or unable—to delve deeper into the conceptual needs of the draft. Though Spear speculates that perhaps "many student writers are not developmentally ready to assume more holistic perspectives" (40), she blames this tendency upon group dynamics that "divert students' attention from the writing to the writer" (39). In this way, a desire to not seem overly critical of one's peers can have a profound effect upon the quality of comments made by students to each other.

Spear's solution to this dilemma is to have teachers provide students with overt instruction in group dynamics, with lessons in listening and giving feedback. Such discussions provide a kind of apprenticeship, as we have been using the term, but it is a different way of structuring the activity than instructor-led peer conferences. With student-only writing groups, instructors following Spears' advice shape the quality of student response by frontloading lessons in group interaction, and relying on students to deploy those response strategies in the context of their groups. With the instructor-led peer conference, however, such careful frontloading becomes less essential, since the nature of the activity permits the teacher to shape group interactions in the moment, to provide, as it were, instantaneous and continuous feedback to the feedback being given in the writing group. The difference between student-only groups and instructor-led groups is not the amount of teacher involvement, since even student-only groups are shaped by the kinds of frontloading proponents of peer response suggest. Instead, the difference lies in whether a teacher's influence comes from outside the group or from within it.

There is an example of this in-the-moment shaping of response in Ellen's validation of Carrie's feedback in the exchange above. In turn three, Ellen leans over and shows her own copy of the draft to Carrie, pointing to what she herself had written on her own copy, and saying "I agree. That's exactly

what I put." She then goes on to quote what she had noted in the margins: "Set it up as a thesis, develop as a claim, and provide evidence and warrants for it." As I suggested above, Ellen is translating Carrie's comments here. After all, Carrie seemed to be asking Valerie to address a particular issue (women "being more controlling") while Ellen's comment frames it more in terms of following a specific procedure for argumentation. Nevertheless, what is worth pointing out here is the way that Ellen's intervention establishes a kind of intersubjectivity between the instructor and the reviewer. Both by verbally agreeing with Carrie, and by pointing explicitly to her own notes, Ellen not only validates Carrie's feedback to Valerie, but also communicates their mutual concern over this particular section of the draft. In other words, Ellen frames the activity as an instance of collaborative problem solving, and even if their articulations of the problem differ, they are represented by Ellen as virtually identical.

Where student-only peer response groups exclude teachers, the instructor-led peer conference includes the teacher as a co-participant in the activity of responding to student texts, and this co-participation enables productive teacher-student interactions. What it specifically affords for students is a kind of access to an instructor's practices of reading, assessing, and revising student texts. To be sure, the kinds of "frontloading" mentioned above might provide a certain measure of access to those practices for student-only groups, but didactic instruction—or, to take another common method, codification of those practices into worksheets or rubrics—is not the same thing as witnessing the embodied response practices of a teacher externalized in moment-to-moment interactions. In other words, explaining how to respond is not the same thing as modeling the activity in practice. In the instructor-led peer conference, both the teacher and the student reviewers are engaged in the same activity, and this co-participation makes their practices more visible to each other. With the teacher functioning as a "more capable" other, student reviewers are positioned to internalize the teacher's response practices. As teacher and students work together to respond to student drafts, the whole enterprise becomes a prime example of collaborative problem solving in a zone of proximal development.

It is important, though, to acknowledge possible limitations to viewing the instructor-led peer conference this way. In recent decades, there has been a growing recognition that many opportunities for learning are more tacit and less accessible to conscious reflection than Vygotsky sometimes represented (see Rogoff, *Apprenticeship*; *Cultural Nature*). The zone of proximal development is perhaps less a space for direct, didactic instruction than it is an opportunity for a learner to witness an "adult" or "more capable peer" acting dispositionally and fluently in context. That is to say, the embodied presence of the teacher improvising from a particular professional *habitus* exceeds whatever a teacher could be consciously aware of or be capable of intentionally teaching to students. Of course, as in any pedagogy, the potential of instructor-led peer conferences depends on particular modes of

implementation. Teachers in these conferences, as in classrooms and as for peers in peer groups, could create zones of disengagement and alienation as well as those that foster rich learning.

It is not the case that Vygotsky's theories apply exclusively to peer-to-peer interactions, as scholars like Bruffee have suggested. The zone of proximal development in particular was originally applied to interactions between an adult and child, or a child and a "more capable peer." But these lines of development occur along strictly dyadic lines, traced from adult to child, instructor to student, or even peer to peer. Thus the zone of proximal development is useful for tracing interactions between two individuals, but is limited in its ability to account for multiple and simultaneous interactions among all the participants in an instructor-led peer conference: the teacher, the writer, and peer reviewers. Its roots in assessment of children, perhaps, cause this focus on the products of interaction, the transferable skills that each individual develops in those interactions, as opposed to the activity within which those interactions circulate. Apprenticeship, as I want to use the term, is about more than skill; it is also about achieving membership in a community, about becoming a practitioner of an activity. In order to fully appreciate how the instructor-led peer conference makes this kind of movement possible, the next section examines a second conversation as an instance of situated learning.

Learning to Participate

Let us turn now to Exchange #2 (below), involving a different conference round with the same instructor but a different set of students. In this round, the student drafts are from an essay assignment that focused on the rhetoric of environmentalism. The exchange begins in the middle of discussing a draft that attempts to contrast the rhetorical techniques used by two environmentalist authors—Rachel Carson and Alan Durning.

Exchange #2
Participants: Ellen (instructor), Michelle (reviewer), Carl (writer), Paige (reviewer)

Turn	Speaker	Text of Turn
I	Ellen	Yeah, so we kind of have two different things that Durning is doing, according to Carl. There's a use of a global trend and there's also an attempt to make people feel guilty about the way they're affecting the world, right? So...((*gesturing to reviewers*)) what reasons can you guys think of why that might not be as effective as what Carson does? ((*gesturing to Carl*)) What reasons can *you* think of why that might not be so effective?
2	Michelle	To support Carson? The global is too general. Like it really doesn't touch our, like, I don't know, it just doesn't touch us personally, because it's too way out there, other world..

Turn	Speaker	Text of Turn
3	Ellen	How would he ((*indicating Carl*)) support this claim, that Durning might be too general?
4	Michelle	Use textual evidence?
5	Ellen	Okay, what kind of textual evidence do you think would be appropriate?
6	Carl	I need some textual evidence in that part, too?
7	Michelle	Just like, um, because you use like the quotes anyway, you could like just touch up on the things you mentioned already. You could just use key words.
8	Ellen	That's right. That's right. Michelle's got it—key words. It's the word of the day. Absolutely.

Carl, the writer of the draft under consideration, has identified two rhetorical techniques Durning uses, but has (apparently) not done enough to argue which technique is more effective, even though the assignment asks for an explicit comparison. In the first turn of this exchange, Ellen recaps Carl's claims, and then asks first the reviewers and then Carl himself to speculate about the reasons why one approach might be more effective than the other. She addresses the writer of the draft directly at the end of that turn, perhaps because it is not clear whether he was included in the "you guys" of the previous sentence. Though Carl is expressly included in Ellen's request, it is Michelle, one of the reviewers, who replies in the second turn. She suggests that Carl could frame Durning's rhetoric as too general, too impersonal.

Michelle's initial response suggests a point that Carl could make, but not a specific strategy for achieving an effective revision. In turn three, Ellen repeats Michelle's point, and asks "how would he support this claim?" Michelle tentatively replies "use textual evidence," although her unsure tone registers as more of a question than an assertion. Ellen continues to probe in turn five by saying "okay, what kind of textual evidence do you think would be appropriate?" Taken together, Ellen's conversational turns (one, three, and five) break down the complex task—making a supportable claim—into its component parts. Each of her questions ramps up to the next question, such that the analytic processes of the activity are dissected and externalized, put into a form the students can both observe and emulate. Ellen's questions provide a kind of scaffolding around the activity, which, as in Exchange #1, helps students perform at a level they might not achieve on their own, and therefore once again constitutes a kind of zone of proximal development.

But there is more going on here than scaffolding the activity of response. Michelle, Ellen, and even Carl are each woven into a complex web of participation that continuously repositions them as the conversation unfolds. In terms borrowed from the work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, they are all "legitimate peripheral participants" in this conference. Lave and Wenger

locate their theory of situated learning explicitly in opposition to Vygotskian ideas of internalization, which frames social interaction as an instrument by which learning might occur. In their discussion of situated learning, Lave and Wenger turn the relationship between learning and participation on its head, arguing instead that learning is "an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice" (31). Situated learning means that "learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and . . . the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community" (29). Learning and knowledge, then, are reconfigured from conventional concepts of skills-acquisition into a function of participation, within which learning is defined as "increasing participation in communities of practice" (49).

Social practice lies at the heart of this theory of learning. Lave and Wenger contend that "engaging in practice, rather than being its object, may well be a *condition* for the effectiveness of learning" (93). It would perhaps be a mistake to equate this view with the more familiar dictum that people "learn by doing," since for Lave and Wenger learning an activity and doing an activity are bound up inextricably with each other. In the exchange above, Michelle is not just learning to participate in the activity of peer response; her participation positions her as an engaged practitioner within a limited (and ad hoc) social matrix. This participation is what makes her learning possible in the first place.

In Lave and Wenger's terminology, Michelle—and everyone else present in the conference—is a "legitimate" participant. What legitimates participation differs from activity to activity, but in the case of a writing group, whether student-only or instructor-led, legitimacy stems at a basic level from the fact that each participant is enrolled in a course that employs such a teaching strategy. According to Lave and Wenger, the "form that the legitimacy of participation takes is a defining characteristic of ways of belonging, and is therefore not only a crucial condition for learning, but a constitutive element of its content" (35). That is to say, legitimacy may be a function of "belonging" to a class of composition students and having been asked by one's instructor to participate.

But legitimacy in the case of writing groups does not originate solely in an instructor's choice to use this activity. In turn six of this exchange, Carl, the writer of the draft under consideration, breaks in to the conversation by asking Ellen (somewhat jokingly) "I need some textual evidence in that part, too?" Up to this point, he has been on the periphery of the discussion of his draft, but he apparently senses that what is being said might mean more work for him as a writer. But Ellen does not answer Carl's question; Michelle does. In turn seven, Michelle responds to Carl, not really answering Ellen's previous question about how Carl could support his claim, but rather addressing his concern about the amount of work it might require. She suggests that he "just use key words" to connect the discussion of Durning's generality with evidence he had already presented earlier in his paper.

Michelle identifies—as, perhaps, only a fellow student could—Carl's anxiety over having to hunt down more evidence for this new line of argument. She then offers a practical solution to the problem, one which, it seems, had been discussed in class prior to this conference.

What I believe this part of the exchange suggests is that Michelle's participation is legitimized by more than the "apprenticeship" relationship between herself and the teacher. It is also grounded in an existing web of peer affiliations and common experience. Note that Michelle initially responds to Ellen's opening question like a student responding to a teacher's prompt, but as the conversation progresses, she addresses Carl directly as a peer. More important, Carl's apparent anxiety over the amount of revision he will have to do resonates with her, and she responds by minimizing the effort she thinks it will require: "just touch up on the things you mentioned already." She is telling Carl that he has done most of the work already, and simply needs to connect everything together with "keywords." Michelle's participation is therefore a fluid thing in this exchange, shifting quickly from "apprentice reviewer" to "sympathetic peer." Or rather, she is participating at both levels simultaneously, so that she manages to balance the two roles of "student" and "peer." It is as if Michelle voices both sides of a dialogue that, in the context of a student-teacher conference, might have occurred between Ellen and Carl.

Michelle's participation, then, lies along a nexus of dialogic negotiation, and this positioning affords her certain resources for learning. Just as Lave and Wenger speak of participation in situated learning as "legitimate," they also frame it as "peripheral." The term "peripheral participation" is not to be contrasted against some idea of "central" or "complete" participation, but rather as a way to consider a person's movement "toward full participation in a community of practice" (29). Any kind of writing group contains members who participate in that group at different levels of engagement. But there is more to peripherality than simple membership. For Lave and Wenger, the peripherality of participation, "when it is enabled, suggests an opening, a way of gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement" (37). Operating here is the idea that learners need access to the modes of understanding and action present within a community of practice. Lave and Wenger describe a failed version of apprenticeship among butchers, wherein newcomers, whose job was to package the meat cut by veterans, were physically separated from sites where the more advanced tasks of actual butchery occurred. In having their access to other activities within their community of practice thus limited, the apprentice butchers lacked opportunities to observe the more advanced tasks related to the job, and therefore had difficulty developing their own skills beyond merely packaging the meat (Lave and Wenger 76-78). Their participation was legitimate and peripheral, but the form of that peripherality—essentially distanced from other knowledge within the community—hindered those apprentices from moving toward full participation in their chosen line of work.

Likewise, student-only peer response groups may cut students off from teachers' practices of reading, response, and evaluation. As I mentioned earlier, it is not a matter of whether student-only groups involve legitimate and peripheral participation in an activity; they clearly do. The question, instead, is what "sources for understanding" are available to students through participation in such groups? If a teacher provides students with review worksheets, evaluation rubrics, or other explicit instructions for providing feedback (as Spear suggests), then there is, to be sure, a certain degree of access to more expert modes of response. However, as noted earlier, such direct, or "frontloaded" guidance may not fully represent a teacher's actual embodied practices of reading and responding to student texts.

In a student-only peer response group, the most immediate "sources for understanding" are other students, who may have developed certain ideas about academic writing and review from other classroom activities, and from current and previous writing instruction, but who are nonetheless still developing academic literacies. Assuming that students tend to read one another's texts in similar ways and through similar filters (see Newkirk), then access in these groups to a teacher's practices of reading, writing, and response is relatively limited. Like Lave and Wenger's novice butchers, students in a peer-only group are legitimate peripheral participants, but in a circumscribed way. Peripheral participants are, in Lave and Wenger's terms, supposed to "develop a view of what the whole enterprise is about, and what there is to be learned" (93). In a composition course, the "whole enterprise" often involves developing students' capacities for engaging in academic literate practices, or of becoming fuller participants in a larger academic community of practice. For student-only groups, access to these broader aims exists, but is in some ways more restricted than when a teacher is included as a face-to-face participant.

Student-only peer response groups provide students access to the collective understandings and meanings of their peers, with less clear ties to larger classroom or academic dispositions and values. In noting how students in student-only groups tend to treat surface-level errors in their peers' writing, Spear suggests that this tendency seems like an unsuccessful attempt to mimic the practices of the teacher. She argues that what typically happens in student-only peer response groups is that "students ape the teacher, overlooking the strengths of real teachers' behavior and emulating the weaknesses" (55). Spear blames this student misunderstanding on a tradition of "teacher-centered education" (7), and she certainly has a point. But one might also argue that this misunderstanding of the teacher's role happens precisely because a teacher's practices of reading, responding, and evaluating are not ordinarily made visible or accessible *enough* to students. Perhaps it is inevitable that students in most writing courses would interpret the role of the teacher primarily as an evaluator and corrector of errors, given that most student anxiety occurs at the site of their own evaluation by the teacher, and that many instructors tend to frame the grades they assign

students with comments that highlight deficiency over performance. Students can therefore end up emulating an incomplete version (or even caricature) of teacher's practices when then respond to one another.

Things are potentially different in an instructor-led peer conference. In both of the exchanges examined here, Ellen as the instructor focuses much of her energy on helping student reviewers give feedback rather than providing her own feedback to student writers. Nevertheless, her participation in the conferences does extend to students' access to her practices of reading, responding, and evaluating student writing. In each exchange, Ellen begins the conversation by directing students' attention to specific issues or "troublesources" (to borrow Nystrand and Brandt's terminology; 211) in the drafts. In each case, this focusing of attention is phrased in the form of a question or prompt, but it also indicates what priority the instructor has assigned to these concerns. In other words, these questions allow Ellen to signal her own concerns about the drafts, while at the same time soliciting feedback from students. Her aim is to direct students' attention to what she considers most important or salient. So, instead of simply emulating their existing vision of teacher's practices (evaluating, correcting errors), students are asked to attend to specific issues in the drafts and consider how they would address them.

Again, Ellen's choices in these exchanges need not be explicit or even conscious. As a writing instructor, she represents a full participant in a larger community of academic writers. She is, to use an archaic expression, a kind of "oldtimer" in certain practices that circulate within academia, and as such is positioned to afford students access to a range of reading, writing, and response practices valued in that context. This is not to say that any instructor is an absolute authority on academic literate practices, but rather that she is (ordinarily and hopefully) someone who shares a repertoire of understandings, meanings, and values with other participants. Under this view, the instructor functions as a kind of "master" to student "apprentices," where for Lave and Wenger "mastery resides not in the master but in the organization of the community of practice of which the master is part" (94). Part of the whole enterprise of writing instruction is to make the practices and meanings of academic writing accessible to students. This may be accomplished in classroom instruction, conferences, or even student-only peer response groups where students bring their own experiences and understandings to the process. But what an instructor-led peer conference does is enable a kind of foregrounding of an instructor's practices of reading, responding, and evaluating. This "making visible" of the academy occurs when the instructor models (whether intentionally or tacitly) the kinds of revision she might perform on a student's text, or the kinds of feedback a person could offer the student who wrote that text.

Ellen's praise of Michelle serves this apprenticing function in at least two ways. First, it validates her own sense of what needs to be done to these drafts, and therefore legitimates her contributions in the conference.

Such affirmation encourages Michelle to continue to offer similar kinds of specific feedback. Second, this praise also does some important work for the instructor. It is clear in turn eight of this exchange that Ellen considers it important that students learn to use "key words" in the way described. It is unclear, though, whether she already considered this a good strategy for Carl to use before Michelle introduces it. That is to say, Ellen does not introduce the idea of using "key words" here, but expresses approval when Michelle does. The form of that approval—"That's right. Michelle's got it—key words"—might sound as if Ellen already had this strategy in mind and was pushing students toward this conclusion, but it is equally possible that she arrived at it on her own, or as a result of previous conversations in class or in this conference. In either case, what is important is that Ellen has gotten Michelle to do much of the heavy lifting, and therefore Michelle becomes a fuller participant in the activity.

This is not to say that we should view Ellen's participation in these conferences as minimal or passive. In each of the exchanges examined here, she operates as an initiator of dialogue and as a kind of coach for the reviewers, prodding them to formulate more elaborated feedback for the writer than they initially offer. The reviewers have also performed impromptu revisions on other student's drafts, and the instructor has shaped the nature of those revisions. This impromptu revision, I believe, is crucial to the enterprise of response here. Learning to treat another student's draft critically is an important step toward treating one's own work that way. Michelle's initial comment in turn two is really just an observation, a relatively easy judgment that the "global is too general" in the kind of arguments being discussed. Ellen's follow-up questions urge Michelle not only to identify the problem, but also to explore possible solutions to that problem. Instead of simply critiquing Carl's draft, she begins to think of it in terms of what she might do to it herself. She does not literally rewrite this section of Carl's draft, since the problem she has identified requires more than a quick, surface-level revision. Nevertheless, Michelle articulates (in terms that the instructor has been helping students adopt) a strategy for dealing with this issue. It is not, she claims, a matter of introducing more quotes, since Carl's draft already contains enough of those, but instead a matter of pointing back at quotes that are already there by using "key words"—a rhetorical strategy that had apparently been discussed previously in class. Through such oral revision, key practices of reading, responding, and writing are all brought to the foreground.

Legitimate peripheral participation does not in itself guarantee access and membership to a particular community, nor are the notions of access and membership themselves unproblematic. Lave and Wenger point to these issues when they suggest that "hegemony over resources for learning and alienation from full participation are inherent in the shaping of the legitimacy and peripherality of participation in its historical relations" (42). In writing classrooms, various configurations of hegemony and/or alienation are pos-

sible. Some students may find themselves in a position similar to Lave and Wenger's apprentice butchers, with access to academic communities limited by an instructor's hegemony over (and restricting of) its practices. What is potentially ironic here is that one of the strategies meant to empower students in such classrooms—putting students into response groups with their peers—might actually have the effect of restricting access to the practices of fuller participants in writing communities, thus maintaining the instructor's hegemony over those practices. Neither student-only nor instructor-led groups are inherently more egalitarian or liberating than the other, despite assertions that peer-only interactions are better at maintaining student autonomy (see Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning"; Gere).

Conclusion

This vision of apprenticeship in these exchanges is a highly localized one, something I might be tempted to call a "micro-apprenticeship." Learning to compose an academic essay—or learning to read and respond to one—is not the equivalent of learning a profession or trade. Instead, it is a process of gaining access and exposure to the grounded (and embodied) practices of reading and writing valued by a particular institutional configuration of course, teacher, assignment, and student. Ellen's students are not so much entering into a new community as they are engaging in new practices that require them to reconfigure their relationships to each other, to the task, to the institution, and to literacy in general. These apprenticeships in reading and writing need not have a strict teleology; in fact, they need not last beyond the scope of completing a particular assignment. But a local and contingent apprenticeship is an apprenticeship nonetheless.

As I stated earlier, specific pedagogies do not carry with them guaranteed results. What I have tried to expose here is how the inclusion of an instructor in a conference might enable interactions and points of articulation that differ from those that typically occur in a student-only peer response group. Of course, just because those features are enabled does not mean that the instructor's mere presence will necessarily have a positive effect, or any specific desired effect. It is not a magic bullet. Instead of treating the instructor-led peer conference as an occasion for collaborative problem solving, as Ellen does, teachers might instead choose to ignore or squelch student feedback and present their own comments as authoritative. Success, I believe, depends on going into these conferences with the express purpose of engaging in dialogue with students about their writing and about their responses to one another. Teachers should even be open to disagreement, since some of the most productive negotiations come out of them. As a teacher who uses instructor-led peer conferences myself, I have always appreciated it when students convince me to see one of their peer's drafts from a different perspective.

While the success or failure of such engagements depends a great deal upon the way authority is enacted in conferences, it is not possible to dis-

pense with authority altogether, either in instructor-led peer conferences or in any other form of response to student writing. It might be possible to mask institutional authority, but not efface it completely. And if it is not possible to dispense with authority altogether, teachers must think long and hard about the various forms authority might take, how it could be configured to encourage desirable learning outcomes. Melanie Sperling has argued that "how one may fully and richly encounter . . . others in the process of learning to write in school is what writing pedagogy must really be about" (159). In other words, literate practices of writing—and responding—are shaped over time in meaningful dialogue with others. What I have attempted to show here is that the instructor-led peer conference offers a space for teachers to collaborate productively with students while responding to student writing.

Notes

1. The context for Dene and Gordon Thomas's discussion of "Rogerian reflection" is the instructor-led peer conference, but their focus was not the format itself. Susan Miller's piece on "Using Group Conferences to Respond to Essays in Progress" provides practical advice for teachers employing such conferences.
2. I have necessarily expanded this concept of apprenticeship from popular understandings of the term. Taken literally, apprenticeship usually indexes a particular relationship between a master tradesperson and a novice learner of that trade. As Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger note, "the uses of 'apprenticeship' in cognitive and educational research [is] largely metaphorical" (31). The term has not found wide circulation in Composition Studies, though see Diane Belcher's "The Apprenticeship Approach to Advanced Academic Literacy." I am using apprenticeship as a descriptor for a particular intersection between collaboration and learning. See Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning* and Barbara Rogoff, *Apprenticeship in Thinking,* for extended discussions of apprenticeship. See also my discussion of situated learning, below.
3. Bruffee makes these connections in "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'" and "Writing and Reading as Collaborative or Social Acts."
4. This movement from the "interpsychological" to the "intrapsychological" plane is not simply matter of transference, nor is it straightforward or unproblematic. Though somewhat similar, Vygotsky is not reproducing Piaget's notion of assimilation. See James Wertsch's *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind* for a useful discussion of this process of internalization.
5. Bruffee does acknowledge the issue of "more capable peers" at one point, when he asks "how can student peers, who are not members of the knowledge communities they hope to enter, who lack the knowledge that constitutes those communities, help other students enter them?" ("Collaborative Learning" 644). His answer is that no student is "wholly ignorant or inexperienced," and that by "pooling the resources" of a peer group, some kind of access to that new community is possible (644). In other words, Bruffee takes it on faith that any group of peers will contain individuals who are "more capable" in some respects than the others in the group. While it is true that students often bring different strengths and competencies to writing groups, such differences in capability are not likely to arrange themselves in neatly demarcated ways. One student may have a better ear for academic tone, while another student might

have a keener sense of argumentation. Bruffee assumes that the "pooling of resources" is enough to fill in the gaps, but making the various strengths match up with the various weaknesses in a group seems to me a task far beyond the abilities of most teachers, as there is no efficient or clear mechanism by which differentiation in capability may be monitored or regulated.

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