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Writing Conference Purpose and How It Positions Primary-Grade Children as Authoritative Agents or Passive Observers

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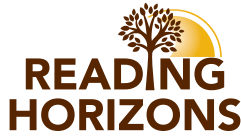Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons

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Writing Conference Purpose and How It Positions Primary-Grade Children as Authoritative Agents or Passive Observers

Lisa K. Hawkins, *Ball State University*

────────── **Abstract** ──────────

A common practice in today's primary-grade classrooms, teacher-student writing conferences are considered a vital component of instruction by accomplished writing teachers and advocates of process writing. Moreover, what teachers say and how they say it shapes those opportunities for student learning that are possible in classrooms. As such, building an understanding of the talk that ensues during primary-grade writing conferences, those purposes that such talk serves overall, and the significance of its pedagogical appropriateness is essential. Findings from a multiple-case study of conference enactment in both a kindergarten and a first-grade classroom illuminate the varying degrees of authoritative and dialogic discourses made available to child participants during conference interactions. These findings range from enactments that empower students to co-construct ideas and meaning with their teachers as dialogic partners (e.g., conferencing as verbal rehearsal, conferencing as criterion-specific collaboration), to those more indicative of traditional recitation patterns in which students are given little space to contribute to the conversation (e.g., conferencing as transcription activity, conferencing as find-and-fix correction). Findings also suggest the importance of conference purpose and writing-process phase in determining the role child writers are invited to assume within a given conference interaction.

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A common practice in today's U.S. primary-grade classrooms (Cutler & Graham, 2008), teacher-student writing conferences are considered a vital component of instruction by accomplished writing teachers and elementary process-writing advocates (e.g., Anderson, 2000, 2005; Calkins, Hartment & White, 2005; Freedman, Greenleaf, & Sperling, 1987; Graves, 1983). For instance, Calkins shares the following advice with teachers:

[I]n the classrooms of some teachers, children grow in leaps and bounds, while in the classrooms of other teachers, children make only modest gains. I am utterly convinced that the difference has everything to do with the two teachers' abilities to confer (Calkins, Hartman, & White, 2005, p. 4).

Furthermore, Anderson tells teachers in his often-cited practitioner text on the subject, "Writing conferences aren't the icing on the cake; they are the cake" (2000, p. 3).

It is suggested by Johnston (2004, 2012) that children learn how to become strategic thinkers and literacy learners through talk with knowledgeable others. If this is the case, then placing talk at the center of writing instruction, as recommended by advocates such as Calkins and Anderson, appears warranted. Furthermore, given the diverse needs of child writers, the possibility afforded by writing conferences to spend time with a knowledgeable other in one-on-one conversations tailored to students' unique writing needs seems promising. Yet, Johnston cautions that what teachers say and how they say it shapes those opportunities for student learning that are possible. As such, it is essential to build an understanding of the talk that ensues during primary-grade writing conference interactions, those purposes that such talk serves overall, and the significance of its pedagogical appropriateness.

In this article I share findings from a descriptive study of conference enactment in two primary-grade classrooms that explored conference talk in relation to conference purpose. Here, talk is examined alongside, and with strong regard to, the instructional functions it served in order to showcase how teachers' instructional goals for a particular writing conference influence those interaction patterns and instructional opportunities available to both teacher and child conference participants.

Writing Conference Enactment in Primary-Grade Classrooms

Primary-grade writing conference pedagogy is fueled largely by romantic conceptions of young children freely talking with teachers about their writing and authorial intentions—notions informed chiefly by exemplar scripts and prescriptive practitioner guides. Prior research into writing conference enactment between teachers and children in U.S. contexts, however, lends some concern as to whether interactions taking place in primary-grade classrooms fall short of this dialogic, conversational ideal. For example, Morse (1994) studied the conference enactment of ten K–12 teachers (of which several taught in primary grades) all identified by the Bay Area Writing Project as effective writing teachers that used conferences regularly. Morse found that, overall, the teachers were clearly in control and often utilized criticism or mandates in order to communicate problems they found with students' texts. Furthermore, they tended to often draw on directives and closed-ended questions, rather than active or reflective listening.

In a study of four first-grade writers' conference interactions with one teacher across time, Nickel, Power, and Hubbard (2001) highlighted several roles that teachers might take

up during a writing conference, including: (a) teacher as audience, (b) teacher as writer, (c) teacher as teacher, and (d) teacher as communicator of expectations. They also found that children responded well when the teacher served as an authentic audience who was sincerely interested in their stories; but retreated from this same teacher when she tried to change their already completed stories, offered a plan for the future direction of their stories, asked questions that they did not understand, or asked questions that they deemed part of a "hidden agenda" to take ownership of their work.

More so, according to the larger body of literature, documented writing conferences across U.S. intermediate, secondary, and postsecondary classrooms were frequently not student-led conversations in which student writers expressed their intentions and sought authentic feedback from readers. They instead functioned largely as sites for delivering conventional teacher-driven instruction via traditional discourse structures (e.g., Black, 1998; Daiute et al., 1993; Haneda, 2004; Jacob, 1982; Jacobs & Karliner, 1977; Michaels, 1987; McKeaney, 2009; Park, 2012; Ulichny & Watson-Gegeo, 1989, Wong, 1988).

The Role of Instructional Purpose in Writing Conference Enactment

Alexander (2006) contends that dialogic teaching need not privilege any one discourse structure, and instead argues for a repertoire of forms and functions that, when taken together, can be characterized as "reciprocal, collective, supportive, cumulative, and purposeful" (p. 28). Furthermore, Scott, Mortimer, and Arguiar (2006) make a case for the occurrence of appropriately varying degrees of authoritative and dialogic talk in classrooms. Within writing conference interactions, it is not only the structures that teacher-student talk embodies, then, but the purpose that such talk serves overall that is significant in determining pedagogical appropriateness. It is this notion of purpose that is oddly lost in much of the scholarship surrounding conference enactment in general, and primary-grade conference enactment in particular.

Much of the literature on writing conferences in which frequent use of traditional classroom talk patterns were observed explicitly involved a completed text that was revised/edited during the interaction. It is possible that when conducting writing conferences teachers purposefully don a more authoritative role and draw upon more traditional classroom discourse patterns during revising and editing phases of the writing process yet elect to structure talk in a different manner during preceding phases. Strauss and Xiang (2006) have noted that the ratio of teacher-student talk during earlier planning and drafting conferences in one postsecondary classroom exhibited a well-balanced distribution, lending some empirical evidence to the possible importance of conference purpose in determining appropriate construction for a conference. Sperling (1990, 1991) found that interaction patterns in one ninth-grade classroom often varied not only for different students, but also for the same student, as the type of writing conference, its purpose, or its place in the sequence of written tasks varied. Moreover, Ricks et al. (2017) documented student-

directed interactions occurring in one sixth-grade classroom during what they described as content-focused conferences, which tend to occur during earlier planning, drafting, and revising phases.

When attempting to build an understanding of talk and how it is utilized by teachers and students in primary-grade writing conference interactions, examining the overt structures used by conversational participants alone is not enough—especially when such work involves interactions that are performed largely for the same instructional purpose (revising/editing). Doing so risks isolating the function of such talk to how it operates within a particular moment in a writing conference (and within only a particular type of writing conference at that) while ignoring the greater function such talk might play in the conference as a whole.

Methods

In order to best honor the situated nature and complexity of writing conference talk occurring in the primary grades, a case study design (e.g., Dyson & Genishi, 2005) was used to address the following questions:

1. What instructional purposes do experienced writing teachers draw upon when conducting writing conferences with primary-aged students?
2. How, in general, do experienced writing teachers and young children enact writing conference talk?
3. How, if at all, does this talk vary in relation to specific instructional purposes?

Furthermore, descriptive and sociolinguistic approaches and analyses were drawn upon.

Context and Participants

Two primary-grade classrooms were studied. The first was a kindergarten classroom taught by Mrs. Linda Kelly. The second, was a first-grade classroom taught by Mrs. Maggie Malone (all names are pseudonyms). Both Linda and Maggie, veteran teachers each with 16 years' experience in the classroom, possess strong local reputations as writing instructors. Writing conferences in these classrooms occur daily. In general, Linda and Maggie confer with each student once a week, meeting with four to six students a day. To facilitate this schedule, they often circulate around the room, joining students they intend to confer with at their table or writing spot. Maggie, on occasion, would also ask a group of students back to her table to address a similar writing concern prior to conferring individually with these selected students. During this investigation, Linda and Maggie engaged in multiple writing conference interactions with a combined 46 students, 42 of whom (19 kindergarteners and 23 first-graders) consented to participation in the study.

Sources of Data

Linda and Maggie both consented to allow documentation of conference enactment in their classrooms in the months of October and November. During this time, separate but

co-occurring 14-day (in kindergarten) and 15-day (in first grade) units on crafting personal narrative texts were taught. Over the course of these units, students planned, drafted, and revised several personal narratives on self-selected topics, with participants eventually taking one piece of writing through to publication.

Several sources of data were collected across the units. First, each writing period was documented through observational notes and video recordings, and all artifacts germane to writing instruction or conference activity (e.g., handouts, rubrics, copies of curricular materials, photographs of anchor charts, etc.) were collected. Second, all writing conference interactions were video-recorded for later transcription and analysis. Third, all student writing completed during each writing period was scanned, dated, and saved. Finally, interviews were conducted with both teachers to gather demographic information and descriptions of writing philosophy and practice.

Data Analysis

Identification of writing conference instructional purposes. In order to examine the range of instructional purposes drawn upon by study teachers, 88 writing conference interactions were identified and transcribed from recordings collected across both observed writing units. Focal teacher interviews, observation notes, corresponding curricular guides, and student writing samples were also consulted for any insight they might provide. Initially, this analysis led to the identification of two primary instructional purposes for conferring, mainly: (1) content generation and (2) content transcription. However, upon further inspection, these primary purposes were divided into four secondary purposes: (1) student-led content generation, (2) collaborative content generation, (3) drafting-oriented transcription, and (4) correction-oriented transcription. It was these four secondary purposes that seemed to profoundly influence the way in which conference talk in the dataset operated, and the positioning of students and teacher during the conference; ultimately, determining the work participants could accomplish.

Analysis of conference talk in relation to its instructional purpose. In a second round of analysis, talk within each writing conference was analyzed in order to search for patterns in the data that could help explain the seemingly different instructional work occurring across the four identified secondary purposes found in these two classroom contexts.

Patterns of participant interaction. One way to explore talk and how it operates within a particular conference is to examine patterns of participant interaction. Patterns of participant interaction were investigated through two means. First, two common measures of speaker involvement (percentage of total words spoken per participant, number of words spoken per utterance per participant) were calculated for each conference transcript. Second, a qualitative analysis of conversational turn-taking was performed. Here, each

conference transcript was first coded for common turn-taking structures drawn upon, including adjacency pairs (e.g., question-answer, request-grant; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) and triadic dialogue patterns (e.g., Initiate-Response-Evaluate, Initiate-Response-Feedback; Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979). Furthermore, when triadic dialogue included the use of follow-up moves (Wells, 1999) in the third turn to further probe students' responses, as opposed to initiate new topics, the sequence of resulting teacher and student utterances was recoded as either closed chaining (when the sequence concluded with teacher evaluation or feedback) or open chaining (when teacher evaluation and feedback was absent from the final move of the sequence).

Patterns in communicative forms drawn upon. Another way to explore conference talk is to examine those communicative forms found within a writing conference. These communicative forms were derived from theory and prior sociolinguistic discourse work. All teacher and student utterances were coded for communicative form. More specifically, each teacher utterance was coded as one of the following: (a) question (authentic initial question, authentic contingent follow-up question, display question), (b) directive (directive to read the text, direct statement directive, hint directive, prompt for response directive, query directive), (c) didactic statement, (d) explication, (e) read-aloud of text, (f) revoicing of student words, or (g) evaluative feedback statement (evaluation of student response, evaluation of student text). Each student utterance was coded as either: (a) elaborated response, (b) succinct response, (c) written response to teachers' question or directive, (d) explanation response, (e) question, (f) teacher requested read-aloud of student text, or (g) statement challenging prior teacher utterance.

Results

Four distinct writing conference enactments—each tied to one of the earlier identified secondary instructional purposes—were found in the data, each labeled according to the work it immersed students and teachers in: (1) conferencing as verbal rehearsal, (2) conferencing as criterion-specific collaboration, (3) conferencing as transcription activity, and (4) conferencing as find-and-fix correction. What follows are descriptions of these enactments, along with a discussion of those patterns of participant interaction and communicative forms of talk characteristic of each. Qualitative examples from the data are also provided in order to illustrate how patterns of participant interaction and communicative forms typical to each conference enactment aptly structured talk towards each distinct instructional purpose. The number of writing conferences observed in the data per conference enactment, along with associated conference purposes, writing process phases, general conference content addressed, characteristic patterns of participant interaction, and communicative forms are shown in Table 1. Furthermore, the appendix displays total counts for turn-taking patterns and communicative forms coded in each conference enactment.

Table 1 Summary of Conference Enactment Observed by Conference Purpose

Primary Conference Purpose	Secondary Conference Purpose	Writing Process Phase	Conference Content	Conference Enactment	Characteristic Patterns of Participant Interaction	Characteristic Communicative Forms of Talk	Number of Writing Conferences Observed
Content Generation	Student-Led Content Generation	Planning; Revising (to add content)	Initial Planning; Planning New Content (e.g., Next Page of Text)	Verbal Rehearsal	Allotted greatest opportunity for sharing of conversational floor; Heavy reliance on elongated chains of dialogue	Authentic Questions; Revoicings; Query Directives; Praise and Encouragement; Elaborated Student Responses	33
Content Generation	Collaborative Content Generation	Revising (to add, rearrange or change content)	Topic Selection; Text Structure Organization; Adding Detail and Dialogue to Un-freeze Characters; Adding Detail to Clarify Meaning; Setting the Scene; Crafting Endings	Criterion-Specific Collaboration	Allotted some opportunity for sharing of conversational floor; Heavy reliance on elongated chains of dialogue	Authentic Questions; Revoicings; Query Directive; Didactic Statements; Critical Feedback; Elaborated & Succinct Student Responses	27

Table 1 Continued

Primary Conference Purpose	Secondary Conference Purpose	Writing Process Phase	Conference Content	Conference Enactment	Characteristic Patterns of Participant Interaction	Characteristic Communicative Forms of Talk	Number of Writing Conferences Observed
Content Transcription	Drafting-Oriented Transcription	Drafting	Spelling Capitalization Punctuation Spacing	Transcription Activity	Alotted greatest opportunity for sharing of conversational floor. Heavy reliance on repsonse-grant, IRE, and short chains of dialogue ending in t eacher evalualtion	Display Questions Prompts for Student Response Direct Statement Directives Teacher Read-Alouds of Student Text Evaluative Feedback Succinct Student Reposnses & Responding by Adding to Text	19
Content Generation	Collaborative Content Generation	Editing	Spelling Capitalization Punctuation Spacing Adding, Sub-tracting, amd Changing Wording to Make Sure Text Makes Sense	Find-and-Fix Correction	Alotted little opportunity for sharing of conversational floor. Heavy reliance on repsonse-grant, IRE, and short chains of dialogue ending in teacher evalualtion	Display Questions Authentic Questions Prompts for Student Response Direct Statement Directives Didactic Statements Evaluative Feedback Teacher Requested Read-Alouds of Student Text Succinct Student Responses & Responding by Adding to Text	9
							Total 88

Conferencing as Verbal Rehearsal

During the production of narrative text, the enactment of conferencing as verbal rehearsal afforded students an open space to discuss, try out, and orally rehearse new text or ideas for text with an interested and supportive listener prior to committing words to the written page. Within this enactment the teachers in this study dialogued with students to: (a) build a shared understanding of students' narrative focus, (b) encourage elaboration of student ideas, and (c) periodically reformulate students' oral expressions to better approximate written registers and support future text transcription.

Characteristic patterns of participant interaction. Of the four ways in which observed conferences were enacted in these two writing classrooms, the verbal rehearsal conference enactment allotted teachers and students the greatest opportunity for sharing of the conversational floor, with a mean percentage of total words spoken per writing conference of 68% for teachers and 32% for students. Moreover, teachers' and students' words were generally spread over fewer utterances and more closely aligned in terms of the average number of words per utterance than in other conference enactments, permitting longer, more detailed exchanges between participants to occur (teachers averaging 13 words per utterance to students' nine words per utterance).

Furthermore, a heavy reliance on long chains of dialogue was present in this enactment. Unlike simple Initiate-Response-Evaluate, Initiate-Response-Feedback, question-answer, or response-grant patterns of turn-taking, chaining occurs in a conference when teachers use their customarily third turn to engage with and further probe students' responses to their initiating move (Wells, 1999). One way this chaining is accomplished is through contingent questioning (Boyd & Rubin, 2006) designed to clarify, expand, or challenge students' responses, which elongate the classic three-move sequence of classroom talk and allow for deeper exploration of the conversational topic at hand. Take for instance the following chaining sequence:

01	Linda Kelly:	What are you working on right now as a writer?
02	Student:	I'm working on . . . My cat is my best friend. And she went on the deck one time. She doesn't like going outside.
03	Linda Kelly:	Oh, she's not supposed to go outside and she did it. So touch thepages and tell me what the cat's gonna do.
04	Student:	My cat is walking on the deck to see if she gets scared, 'cause my cat's afraid.
05	Linda Kelly:	Oh, so what's going to happen?

06	Student:	And she actually got paid attention.
07	Linda Kelly:	What do you mean?
08	Student:	Like she got petted.
09	Linda Kelly:	Who petted her?
10	Student:	My daddy and my papa and me.
11	Linda Kelly:	Oh, so my cat went on the deck to see if it was scary . . . So we petted her. And then what happened?
12	Student:	And then she saw it wasn't scary.
13	Linda Kelly:	And then she saw it wasn't scary. I like that! Okay, so let's put your words down here. My cat went on the deck to see if it was scary. . .

Here, Linda employed a series of contingent questions in order to build upon and clarify a student's story idea prior to suggesting wording for her text, leading to a deeper, more elongated exchange between conversational participants. This excerpt also exemplifies the lengthier turns of talk and a more equal talk distribution characteristic of the conferencing as verbal rehearsal enactment and discussed earlier.

Characteristic communicative forms of talk. By far, authentic questions (whether initial or contingent follow-up) made up a large portion of the communicative forms drawn upon by study teachers when enacting conferencing as verbal rehearsal. For instance, in the previously provided example we see that Linda utilized authentic questions in utterances 01, 05, 07, 09, and 11. Furthermore, many of these questions built upon what was said previously and functioned to clarify for Linda (and I would contend for the student as well) the events and sequence of the student's personal narrative as they coplanned and orally rehearsed each page of her text.

Along with authentic questions, teacher revoicings of students' words was a key communicative form. Here, revoicing was often used as a means to offer a reformulated version of students' words in the form of a query directive (i.e., suggestion) for possible transcription. Linda, in particular, drew upon conferencing as verbal rehearsal often in order to scaffold kindergarten students' oral to written language. As such, she followed many revoicings with direct statement directives instructing students to "put your words down" on their paper (e.g., utterances 11 and 13), further strengthening the oral language to written text connection central to this enactment. Revoicing was also sometimes used to give prominence to students' words, encourage them to say more, or assure shared understanding of an idea. For instance:

Student:	THEN IT WENT DOWN.
Maggie Malone:	Then it went down?
Student:	Yeah 'cause, umm, I meant to say it went up in the air like this and then went down. But I forgot.

Noticeably lacking, however, were more traditional display questions and didactic statements. Moreover, evaluations of students' ideas or written texts was seldom provided, and critical evaluations were nonexistent in the data for this particular enactment. When evaluation was present it consisted, exclusively, of praise.

Student utterances within verbal rehearsal conference enactment consisted, largely, of elaborated responses most often preceded by authentic questions about students' story content from teachers. As expected, succinct responses were sometimes observed as well. These frequently followed teacher directives and presented as verbalized agreement or nods of the head. On occasion, students showcased a willingness to challenge teacher utterances in this enactment. For example:

Maggie Malone:	I think you need to add some words. Do you want to say something like it went up in the air?
Student:	No. I'm gonna write, it did a wheelie.
Maggie Malone:	It did a wheelie! Perfect.

When such challenges occurred—always in response to query directives suggesting possible content—teachers were quick to withdraw offending suggestions and praise student efforts.

Conferencing as Criterion-Specific Collaboration

The enactment of conference as criterion-specific collaboration afforded students a collaborative space to revise and generate narrative text content towards explicit criterion expectations with a knowledgeable, and sometimes critical, listener. Within this enactment, teachers in this study once again dialogued with students to build a shared understanding of students' narrative focus but did so in relation to improving students' texts in substantive ways so that they better reflected an understanding, though arguably a simple one, of what "good stories have" or elements "readers expect to see" in a personal narrative. Within the two classrooms, such conferences often attended to: (a) "setting the scene" of a story, (b) "unfreezing" characters and events through the addition of detail and dialogue in order to create metal images for readers, (c) "zooming in" and "telling a story in itsy-bitsy steps" so that it retained a singular topical focus, and (d) drafting appropriate endings.

Characteristic patterns of participant interaction. When measured in terms of percentage of total words spoken per writing conference, participant interaction within criterion-specific conference enactment was comparable to transcription activity and find-and-fix correction conference enactments (both examined in subsequent sections), with a mean percentage of 15% of total words spoken per writing conference articulated by students and 85% by teachers. Yet this statistic is a bit misleading and downplays the importance of student contributions found within this enactment. Although, on average, students did not speak for as long as they did within a verbal rehearsal conference enactment, students did

converse openly with teachers and contribute substantive responses overall. They did this, however, between long stretches of teacher talk (teachers averaging 24 words per utterance to students' 6 words per utterance). For example:

01	Maggie Malone:	Can I see what you have?
02	Student:	Yeah.
03	Maggie Malone:	Okay, so where are you at in your story?
04	Student:	Right here.
05	Maggie Malone:	Why don't you read that part.
06	Student:	WE JUMPED AND JUMPED AND JUMPED. IT WAS FUN.
07	Maggie Malone:	Great. You know what I love. I love how you said jumped three times. When you say jumped and jumped and jumped that really helps me picture it as the reader. It helps me picture that you must have done a lot of jumping that day.
08	Student:	We did it for two hours.
09	Maggie Malone:	Wow! So, it sounds like you're almost ready to end your story.So what do you think we could say here at the end? We want to stay close to the story.
10	Student:	Then we went back home.
11	Maggie Malone:	What could you say instead of then we went back home? . . . You know what, sometimes writers like to end their stories with a big feeling. Like how they felt about the story. Like they might say something like, umm . . . Anthony's birthday party was so much fun, I love having Anthony as my friend. That's a big feeling. It helps your reader understand how you felt by the end of the story. That's one option. What do you think? Something that's connected and helps us stay right in the moment.
12	Student:	I could say that it was the end of jumping.
13	Maggie Malone:	You could say it was time to end the party. I had so much fun.
14	Student:	But we had a sleepover.
15	Maggie Malone:	Oh, it was a sleepover. Well when . . . So wait though, you're not jumping at Anthony's house are you?
16	Student:	No. I already added that detail.
17	Maggie Malone:	Oh, you did.
18	Student:	Here. WE ARE AT THE PLACE. IT IS CALLED SKYZONE.

19	Maggie Malone:	Ah. I see. So you know what, maybe you could end it by saying it was time to go back to Anthony's house for our sleepover. What do you think?
20	Student:	Or we could add pages.
21	Maggie Malone:	You could. But you know what, a Small Moment story really takes place in one moment in time. So you could add your ending here, and then you could have another book of what happened at the actual party at his house.
22	Student:	Okay.
23	Maggie Malone:	Why don't you think about those couple of thoughts we just put together, and you think about how you'd like to end it. Okay.

Furthermore, once a conference focus was determined, commonly through a combination of simple Initiate-Response-Feedback, Initiate-Response-Evaluate, response-grant, and question-answer patterns of turn-taking (e.g., utterances 01–09), and in conjunction with cues provided by students' written texts, participants tended to draw on prolonged chaining patterns to accomplish work pivotal to conference goals. This pattern is exemplified in utterances 09–23 of the example.

Characteristic communicative forms of talk. Those communicative forms most often found in verbal rehearsal conference enactment were also those drawn upon frequently by teachers in criterion-specific collaboration conference enactment. Authentic initiating and contingent questions functioned, largely, to clarify (e.g., "So wait though, you're not jumping at Anthony's house are you?") and extend (e.g., "So what do you think we could say here at the end?") student content as before. Yet these questions often also served to probe students' thinking, grounded in criterion expectations for writing shared by teachers, as demonstrated in utterances 09 and 11 of the example excerpt.

Along with authentic questions, revoicings of students' words, and, in particular, query directives consisting of teachers' reformulations of students' words and ideas (e.g., utterances 11, 13, 19, and 21) were key communicative forms for scaffolding student thinking in this enactment. Moreover, teacher didactic statements (i.e., teacher telling) were observed in each writing conference within the data identified as invoking criterion-specific conference enactment. For instance, in utterance 11 Maggie states:

> You know what, sometimes writers like to end their stories with a big feeling. Like how they felt about the story. Like they might say something like, umm . . . Anthony's birthday party was so much fun, I love having Anthony as my friend. That's a big feeling. It helps your reader understand how you felt by the end of the story.

As such, teacher didactic statements could be considered a defining characteristic of this enactment in conjunction with a focus on content generation (as opposed to content transcription).

Student utterances within criterion-specific collaboration conference enactment consisted, largely, of both succinct and elaborated responses to teacher questions, comments, and suggestions. While within a verbal rehearsal conference enactment all content suggested by students that "made sense" was accepted and praised, teachers set a higher threshold for content generated during a criterion-specific collaboration conference enactment, often questioning and reworking content that did not meet expectations while sharing explicit reasons for doing so. For instance, in utterance 21 Maggie states:

> You could. But you know what, a Small Moment story really takes place in one moment in time. So you could add your ending here, and then you could have another book of what happened at the actual party at his house.

However, true to writing workshop tenants advocated by Graves and Calkins, within this enactment students were still, by and large, granted primary-knower status in terms of their content and allowed final say on what was ultimately chosen for inclusion in their texts (e.g., utterance 23). Furthermore, students showed a willingness to challenge teacher utterances within this conference enactment as we see this student do in response to Maggie's suggestions in utterance 14 (in which he offered additional information negating her suggestion) and utterance 20 (in which he countered her suggestion with one of his own), with teachers only occasionally exerting primary-knower status and defending their earlier claims through further explication as Maggie did in utterance 21.

Conferencing as Transcription Activity

The enactment of conferencing as transcription activity afforded students an opportunity to draft written text under the close guidance of a knowledgeable other that more closely approximated conventional norms of the culture (in terms of alphabetic letter formation, spelling, capitalization, spacing, and punctuation) for word- and sentence-level construction during the production of narrative text. Within this enactment, the teachers in this study led students to transcribe sentences word by word, pausing when mistakes were made or when students were unable to comply independently to assist by means of: (a) facilitating strategic routines for problem-solving, (b) stimulating recall, or (c) providing additional information.

While, on occasion, teachers and students entered a transcription activity conference with content students had previously developed on their own, it was far more common that this enactment was evoked immediately following verbal rehearsal or criterion-specific conference enactment. Although this transcription activity conference enactment tended to occur alongside another enactment within the same teacher-student interaction, due to the abrupt and noticeable shift in the discourse it produced, these co-occurring enactments

were regarded as separate consecutive writing conferences in this research.

Characteristic patterns of participant interaction. In direct contrast to verbal rehearsal enactment, transcription activity conference enactment permitted teachers and students the least opportunity for sharing of the conversational floor; with a mean percentage of total words spoken per writing conference of 92% for teachers and 8% for students. This discrepancy is further displayed when comparing mean words spoken per utterance per conference. Here, both teachers' and students' words were spread over a larger number of turns of talk in comparison to other enactments, with students averaging only one word/utterance/writing conference to teachers' nine words/utterance/writing conference. This pattern of fragmented teacher phrases punctuated intermittently by student phonetic sound or single-word responses is showcased in the following conference segment:

01	Maggie Malone:	Okay, he . . .
02	Student:	[Student writes HE on her paper.]
03	Maggie Malone:	Felt . . . You're going to put up a finger for every sound in this one.
04	Student:	/F/ /E/ /L/ /T/. [Student writes FLT on her paper.]
05	Maggie Malone:	Yep. HE FELT soft . . .
06	Student:	/S/ /O/ /F/ /T/. [Student writes an S on her paper.]
07	Maggie Malone:	/OOO/ . . . put the octopus.
08	Student:	[Student adds an O on her paper after the S.]
09	Maggie Malone:	/S/ /O/ /F/ /T/.
10	Student:	[Student adds an F on her paper after the O.]
11	Maggie Malone:	/T/.
12	Student:	[Student adds a T on her paper after the F, writing SOFT.]
13	Maggie Malone:	Yep. HE FELT SOFT and . . .
14	Student:	[Student writes AND on her paper.]
15	Maggie Malone:	Furry. . .
16	Student:	/F/ /UR/. [Student writes an F on her paper.]
17	Maggie Malone:	/UR/.
18	Student:	[Student adds an R to her paper following the F.]
19	Maggie Malone:	And when you hear /EE/ at the end of a word, what letter is it usually? . . . It's usually a Y, so add that.
20	Student:	[Student adds a Y to her paper following the R.]
21	Maggie Malone:	Yep. Good.

Likewise, when juxtaposed in terms of conversational turn-taking, transcription and content generation-focused enactments (i.e., verbal rehearsal and criterion-specific collaboration) again deviate widely from one another. In transcription activity conference

enactment participant turn-taking was comprised extensively of response-grant and Initiate-Response-Evaluate triadic dialogue patterns. When chaining did occur, it consisted of short stints of connected dialogue centered on problem-solving the transcription of a particular sound, word, or written convention. The provided example conference segment nicely illustrates how these patterns (response-grant, Initiate-Response-Evaluate, and chaining) functioned collectively in this enactment as teacher and student worked to transcribe a sentence. For instance, Maggie began the conference utilizing response-grant and Initiate-Response-Evaluate patterns of talk in utterances 01–05. Yet, when the student showed signs of difficulty in transcribing the word "soft," Maggie shifted to a closed chaining pattern in order to assist in utterances 05–13. Movement between simple response-grant/Initiate-Response-Evaluate and brief chaining patterns of talk continued across the conference in this matter until full transcription of the sentence was accomplished.

Characteristic communicative forms of talk. Directives assumed a large role in transcription activity conference enactment in these classrooms. Moreover, display questions, evaluative feedback on students' responses, and teacher read-alouds of student text were notable communicative forms. The example conference segment showcases how each of these forms of teacher talk tended to operate within this enactment. For instance, prompts for student response—the most prominent communicative form in this enactment—were utilized in several ways. First, prompts, along with teacher read-aloud of student text, were employed in a majority of teacher initiating moves in order to draw attention to the current word of focus and urge students to attempt transcription independently (e.g., utterances 01, 03, 05, 13, 15). Second, prompts provided teachers a means to cue answers without directly providing them (e.g., "/OOO/ . . . put the octopus."). Last, prompts offered an indirect method (although at times overt if rendered in conjunction with a direct statement directive as in utterance 03: "Felt . . . You're going to put up a finger for every sound in this one.") for modeling "stretching a word out across one's fingers"; a common spelling strategy used with primary-aged children.

As with prompts, display questions were also applied in order to stimulate recall of previously learned information and cue answers without openly supplying them (e.g., "And when you hear /EE/ at the end of a word, what letter is it usually?"). When prompts and questions failed, teachers drew on direct statement directives to specify remedies ("It's usually a Y, so add that."). Furthermore, evaluative feedback tended toward nondescript praise, signaling that an acceptable approximation had been reached and shifting focus to the next word (or element of the sentence) in need of transcription (e.g., "Yep. HE FELT SOFT and . . .").

While teachers drew on a variety of communicative forms in transcription activity conference enactment, student utterances were generally succinct (e.g., 04, 06, 16) and frequently nonverbal (e.g., utterances 02, 08, 10, 12, 14, 18). This is unsurprising given

that students' primary responsibility in this enactment involved deciphering teacher cues in order to transcribe acceptable approximations of words and end marks. Moreover, those responses that were vocalized were often produced so as to further facilitate this transcription (e.g., "/F/ /E/ /L/ /T/."

Conferencing as Find-and-Fix Correction

Analogous to conferencing as transcription activity, conferencing as find-and-fix correction also affords students an opportunity to better word- and sentence-level transcription during the production of narrative text so that it more closely approximated conventional norms of the culture (in terms of alphabetic letter formation, spelling, capitalization, spacing, punctuation, grammar, and word choice) under the close guidance of a knowledgeable other, only this time doing so in the course of editing previously written text. The find-and-fix [a term originally coined by Ulichny and Watson-Gegeo (1989) to describe a similar iteration of conference interaction found with older students] correction conference enactment involves teachers and students in a particular correction routine, or series of routines, in which teachers: (a) draw attention to often word-level errors found in students' texts (e.g., misspellings, incorrect verb tense, punctuation errors, poor word choice), (b) provide various cues to the nature of the correctable, and (c) set up slots which students are expected to fill with correct answers.

This enactment was drawn upon by teachers in this study under only two circumstances. The first was when students had finished drafting and/or revising text and, thus, were ready to move to publication. The second was if students' attempted transcriptions varied too far from accepted norms and impeded teacher or student readings of the text.

Characteristic patterns of participant interaction. Find-and-fix correction conference enactment, like transcription activity enactment before it, was, for the most part, teacher dominated, with a mean percentage of total words spoken per writing conference of 84% for teachers and 16% for students. More telling, however, is the difference in mean spoken words per utterance per writing conference. Here, we see teachers average 15 words/utterance/writing conference in contrast to students' 3 words/utterance/writing conference. As suggested by these numbers, teacher utterances tended to be longer within this enactment than those witnessed in transcription activity conference enactment. On the other hand, with teacher-requested read-alouds of the text removed, student utterances mirrored those of the transcription activity enactment, once again punctuating teachers' words in short bursts. Take, for example, the following conference excerpt:

01	Maggie Malone:	What are you working on today?
02	Student:	When I went to the Halloween party.
03	Maggie Malone:	Alright, what do you have so far?
04	Student:	ME AND MADELINE WENT TO THE

		HALLOWEEN PARTY. AND I WAS ELSA . . . FOR THE . . . HALLOWEEN PARTY. AND . . . MADELINE WAS . . . RAINBOW DASH. WE WENT . . . TO THE . . . HOUSE AND WE GOT . . . umm . . . /TH/ . . .
05	Maggie Malone:	Hmm, you know what I'm noticing here is that I think that you're forgetting to reread what you write. You know how I know, 'cause a lot of it isn't making sense. So you notice how we're realizing that as we reread it. Remember how we talked about how writers always want to stop and reread to make sure what they're doing is making sense? So let's practice that right now. Reread it with me.
06	Student:	ME AND MADELINE WENT TO THE HALLOWEEN PARTY.
07	Maggie Malone:	Does that make sense so far?
08	Student:	Yeah.
09	Maggie Malone:	Yes, okay. AND I WAS . . .
10	Student:	ELSA FOR THE HALLOWEEN PARTY AND MADELINE WAS RAINBOW DASH.
11	Maggie Malone:	Now does this make sense?
12	Student:	Uh-ha.
13	Maggie Malone:	Okay. Let's reread this and make sure this part makes sense. WE WENT TO THE . . .
14	Student:	HOUSE.
15	Maggie Malone:	Who's house?
16	Student:	Mine.
17	Maggie Malone:	Okay, so you need to say mine instead of THE, right. WE WENT TO my. Write my right here.
18	Student:	[Student crosses out THE and writes MY on her paper.}
19	Maggie Malone:	Okay. WE WENT TO MY HOUSE AND WE GOT ...
20	Student:	Home?
21	Maggie Malone:	But we already said—
22	Student:	There?
23	Maggie Malone:	Does that make sense? WE GOT TO OUR HOUSE AND WE GOT—
24	Student:	--Candy.
25	Maggie Malone:	Okay. WE GOT TO OUR HOUSE AND WE GOT CANDY.

26   Student: [Student writes CANDY on her paper.]
27   Maggie Malone: AND WE GOT CANDY. Okay, that makes sense.
                         Then what does this say?

In terms of conversational turn-taking patterns, participants applying find-and-fix correction conference enactment showed a tendency to employ an eclectic mix, with chaining displaying sizable use. Such chaining was most often utilized in this enactment when correctables arose that students were unable to fix on their own (e.g., utterances 19–27). Outside of these chaining events in which teachers assisted students in achieving suggested edits to their texts, much of the remaining participant turn-taking made use of response-grant and nonchaining Initiate-Response-Evaluate triadic patterns.

Characteristic communicative forms of talk. Unlike transcription activity enactment, selection of the find-and-fix correction conference enactment was seldom predetermined. Instead, teachers often initiated these writing conference interactions with authentic questions to students in order to ascertain what they were currently working on as writers. Students' responses to such questions, along with visual cues from students' written text, were generally utilized to establish if a focus on find-and-fix correction was warranted (e.g., utterances 01–05). Therefore, it is not unexpected in this enactment to see a portion of teacher utterances coded as authentic initial questions. Furthermore, authentic contingent follow-up questions sometimes occurred within the body of a find-and-fix correction conference when teachers required clarification of students' words or content in order to determine if they "made sense" as written (e.g., "Who's house?").

Directives comprised a large portion of teachers' total utterances per conference. Yet these directives tended to operate somewhat differently from those in transcription activity conference enactment. Teachers still employed display questions and prompts (although to a lesser extent) in order to stimulate recall of previously learned information and cue answers. However, a greater reliance on direct statement directives, didactic statements, and teacher-requested reads-alouds of student text were present as well. Through use of these communicative forms, teachers directed students to first reread their texts so as to determine if something they wrote "looked right, sounded right, and/or made sense." Then, they requested that students fix text that did not meet these expectations, assisting in this process as needed. This teacher move, which modeled for students a strategy for editing that could be exercised in future contexts (reread written text to see if it looks right, sounds right, and/or makes sense; make changes as necessary), is displayed prominently across the example conference segment. Moreover, while evaluative feedback of student responses was largely reliant on praise, critique of student text at the word- or sentence-level was offered.

Aside from somewhat more elaborated responses to teachers' opening authentic questions (e.g., utterance 02), student utterances consisted largely of succinct responses

(e.g., utterances 08, 12, 16, 20, 22, 24), responding by adding text (e.g., utterances 18, 26), and teacher-requested read-alouds of students' texts (e.g., utterances 04, 06, 10, 14). Furthermore, although a small percentage of students did show a willingness to challenge teacher utterances within this enactment, teachers tended to exert primary-knower status and defend their earlier claims through further explication.

Discussion and Implications for Practice

Findings illuminate the varying degree of authoritative and dialogic discourses made available to participants during writing conference interactions within a given context. These range from conference enactments that empowered students to co-construct ideas and meaning with their teachers as dialogic partners (e.g., conferencing as verbal rehearsal, conferencing as criterion-specific collaboration), to those more indicative of traditional recitation in which students are given little space to contribute to the conversation (e.g., conferencing as transcription activity, conferencing as find-and-fix correction). Moreover, findings demonstrate the importance of instructional purpose and writing process phase in determining the role a student is invited to assume during a conference interaction. One important question, however, remains: What does this all mean for teachers of primary-grade writing? Findings indicate that what is often considered in the pedagogical literature to be the same approach to individual writing instruction in primary classrooms (the teacher-student writing conference), is actually unlikely to be the same at all. These findings mimic earlier discussed research conducted by Sperling (1990, 1991) and Strauss and Xiang (2006) with secondary and postsecondary students.

Case in point: writing conferences utilizing a conferencing as verbal rehearsal enactment functioned, in essence, to provide student participants a supportive space in which they might, with assistance, orally generate, structure, and rehearse future narrative text content—an especially important task for young developing writers (McCutchen, 2006). Given that the principal purpose of verbal rehearsal conference enactment was student content-generation, students were afforded primary-knower status (Berry, 1981), a role traditionally reserved for teachers. Teachers, on the other hand, were, in general, facilitators, listening to students' ideas, asking authentic questions in order to clarify and encourage student content, and parroting back students' own words. Although criticism of content itself was avoided, teachers were allotted the opportunity to scaffold (Bruner, 1996) students' oral-to-written language, which was accomplished through reformulated revoicings of earlier generated content and offered as suggestions for inclusion in students' texts. This approach is the vision of conferring most often presented as ideal in popular elementary practitioner texts (e.g., Calkins, 1994; Calkins, Hartman, & White, 2005; Graves, 1983), with conferences that deviate from this image often evaluated as undesirable.

Although well suited to early-stage content generation and planning in the personal narrative genre, such content generation is one of many instructional purposes a writing conference might serve. Take for instance those writing conferences employing transcription activity conference enactment. In many ways, this enactment deeply resembled the teacher-dominated, product-centered conferences documented in research and often cautioned against. However, instead of discounting such conferences as unsuccessful, why not consider why these conferences proceed as they do and whether such enactment is appropriate to meet participants' goals? Unlike older students, many primary-aged children do not yet have a firm grasp on the basic conventions of writing (McCutchen, 2006). When crafting written text, young children frequently struggle with recording their ideas on the page. Deficiencies in basic transcription skills have been shown to adversely affect writing production and quality (e.g., Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, & Harris, 2012). As such, devoting time to these skills is understandable in primary-grade contexts and, perhaps, even warranted. Because teacher participants were far more versed in English conventions for transcribing written text, it seems reasonable that they would assume primary-knower status and enact conference talk in ways that allowed them to efficiently impart knowledge. Yet, this same pattern of talk would make little sense if they wished to, instead, invite dialogue and allow their students a place to formulate and try out ideas.

Educators, for this reason, need to consciously enact writing conferences in ways that are best suited to their intended instructional purpose for each unique conference interaction and also responsive to students' needs in the moment. To lead from behind, by purposefully structuring their talk in relation to those overarching goals they and their students are trying to achieve is no easy task. While educators often give thought to the content of their talk, how they deliver that content receives considerably less attention (Alexander, 2006; Cazden, 2001; Christie, 2002). Yet, how talk functions is of critical importance to the success of writing conferences as a pedagogical tool.

Conceptualizing conference practice as consisting of diverse enactments that might be selected to meet differing purposes, provides a means within which to think about the type of talk used and to what end. Accordingly, this concept can be drawn upon by literacy coaches and teacher educators to assist classroom practitioners in reflecting on and building a stronger understanding of conferencing practice, as it provides a metalanguage that can be employed to evaluate practice and how it aligns, or not, with philosophies and goals for conferring. Doing so has the potential to directly improve teachers' writing conference practices as they become more aware of their and their students' own language and more sensitive to the notion of purpose in their talk.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study showcased four distinct conference enactments whose discourse structures functioned in diverse ways to accomplish four different instructional purposes.

It is important to note, however, that other conference enactments are possible. Continued examination of writing conference enactment in settings that are similar, as well as contrasting settings showcasing diversity in factors such as teacher experience, cultural and linguistic identification, grade level, instructional philosophy, and text genre are needed. Such observations could be used to both affirm and revise the depictions offered here. Prolonged exploration could also better define additional conference purposes and associated enactments. Moreover, such work might be utilized in future research to examine how talk occurring in various conference enactments manifests itself in children's texts.

If writing conferences are, as Linda, Maggie, and other workshop advocates believe, a huge piece of the puzzle without which it would be difficult for children to reach their full potential as writers, then they deserve close attention. Examining writing conference enactment alongside conference purpose provides a fresh and potentially potent avenue for such study, from which teachers might better grasp exactly what work conversational participants are capable of performing within its boundaries.

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Appendix
Turn-Taking Patterns and Communicative Forms
Coded Total Counts per Conference Enactment

Measures of Speaker Involvement				
Code	**Verbal Rehearsal**	**Criterion- Specific Collaboration**	**Transcription Activity**	**Find-and-Fix Correction**
% Teacher Words Spoken/Writing Conference	68	85	92	84
% Student Words Spoken/Writing Conference	32	15	8	16
Avg. Words/Teacher Utterance/Writing Conference	13	24	9	15
Avg. Words/Student Utterance/Writing Conference	9	6	1	3
Turn-Taking Patterns				
Code	**Verbal Rehearsal**	**Criterion**	**Transcription Activity**	**Find-and-Fix Correction**
Pairs of Utterances	28	20	132	13
Question-Answer	10	2	4	0
Request-Grant	18	18	128	13
Triadic Dialogue	15	7	48	13
IRE	0	2	43	10
IRF	15	5	5	3
Chaining	64	52	53	29
Open	19	16	20	9
Closed-Ending in Teacher Evaluation	1	7	33	14
Closed-Ending in Teacher Feedback	44	29	0	6

Appendix Continued

Communicative Functions of Teacher Talk				
Code	Verbal Rehearsal	Criterion	Transcription Activity	Find-and-Fix Correction
Question	186	164	63	38
Authentic	185	155	8	17
Initial	95	74	0	9
Contingent	90	81	8	8
Display	1	9	55	21
Directives	102	151	439	98
Directives to Read the Text	22	27	41	23
Direct Statement Directives	27	46	107	49
Hint Directives	9	14	8	3
Prompts for Student Responses	3	10	277	16
Query Directives	41	54	6	28
Revoicings	97	63	4	9
Didactic Statements	1	37	13	10
Explications	0	6	0	2
Read-alouds of Student Text	23	27	64	28
Feedback-Evaluations of Student Responses	26	20	77	124
Feedback-Evaluations of Student Text	3	19	1	9

Communicative Functions of Student Talk				
Code	Verbal Rehearsal	Criterion	Transcription Activity	Find-and-Fix Correction
Elaborated Response	144	67	3	11
Succinct Response	75	95	120	51
Responses by Adding to Text	4	10	232	37
Explanation Responses	15	4	0	2
Questions	0	0	0	0
Teacher-Requested Read-alouds of Student Text	24	27	30	25
Willingness to Challenge the Teacher	4	12	0	2