

Education Inquiry



ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/zedu20

Collective meaning-making in collegial conversations: teacher educators' talk about students' academic writing

Ingunn Ofte

To cite this article: Ingunn Ofte (2022): Collective meaning-making in collegial conversations: teacher educators' talk about students' academic writing, Education Inquiry, DOI: 10.1080/20004508.2022.2096840

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2022.2096840

9	© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Inforn UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.			
	Published online: 19 Jul 2022.			
	Submit your article to this journal 🗹			
dil	Article views: 451			
Q ^L	View related articles 🗗			
CrossMark	View Crossmark data ☑			



Original Article

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates



Collective meaning-making in collegial conversations: teacher educators' talk about students' academic writing

Ingunn Ofte

Department of Teacher Education, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway

ABSTRACT

This study explores ways in which a group of teacher educators co-construct knowledge about students' academic writing and aspects of academic writing instruction in collegial conversations. Analysing the communicative projects, communicative acts and types of talk in 22 episodes from four collegial conversations, it investigates how the teacher educators' talk and interaction may present opportunities for joint meaning-making in this respect. The analysis shows that the teachers' talk was predominantly cumulative and descriptive, reflecting a focus on collegial consensus. However, it also suggests that descriptive talk may hold transformative capacities in meaning-making contexts as it provides the teachers with opportunities to interthink about students' academic writing and aspects of their own instructional practices. Interestingly, while exploratory talk was employed in conversations about specific teaching practices, cumulative talk occurred primarily in conversations about perspectives on students' writing. It is also interesting to note that, with respect to students' academic writing, these teacher educators appear to perceive teacher education as its own disciplinary field with its own conventions. The study concludes that collegial conversations may provide spaces where teacher educators can engage in collective meaning-making, and that such conversations may promote a greater collective awareness of students' academic writing and academic writing instruction in teacher education.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 27 January 2021 Revised 24 May 2022 Accepted 29 June 2022

KEYWORDS

Teacher education; collective meaning-making; collegial conversations; students' academic writing; instructional practices

Introduction

Language, talk and social interaction are considered crucial to learning and knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1986). In this study, which is part of a larger project that explores students' writing and writing instruction in teacher education, I investigate processes of joint meaning-making in teacher educators' collegial conversations about students' academic writing. Collegial conversations involve "honest talk" (Selkrig & Keamy, 2015, p. 426) and risk-taking and requires a level trust between the parties involved "in order for the professional learning to be situated and complex" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, (2009), as cited in Selkrig & Keamy, 2015, p. 432). However, while several studies assert that such conversations can offer valuable sites for teachers' coconstruction of knowledge about professional practice (see, e.g. Hadar & Brody, 2016; Matre & Solheim, 2016), others argue that their learning potential is often not realised (see, e.g. Kvam, 2018; Ohlsson, 2013). As Opfer and Pedder (2011) point out, this discrepancy begs further investigation into how knowledge construction takes place in collaborative settings.

Academic writing is a central activity in teacher education which cuts across disciplines in different ways given their different traditions. However, research suggests that students often find such differences challenging to navigate (Arneback, Englund, & Solbrekke, 2017a), and points to the teacher's role in helping students gain such competence (Coffin & Hewings, 2003). In this study I analyse 22 episodes from four collegial conversations in which six teacher educators working at a Norwegian teacher training institution talk about students' academic writing and aspects of their own instructional practices. I ask the following research question: *How do teacher educators co-construct meaning in collegial conversations about students' academic writing?*

My main purpose for analysing the collegial conversations is to better understand how the teacher educators (hereafter: Teachers) co-construct knowledge about aspects related to students' academic writing and their own instructional practices; in particular, how interaction and the types of talk they employ offer possibilities in this respect. In order to explore the possibilities of the types of talk, I will also consider the topics of their conversations because what the teachers choose to talk about regarding students' academic writing may influence the kind of knowledge they construct. However, this issue will receive less attention as it is not the main focus of this study, and has been addressed elsewhere. I will also explore the potential of collegial conversations as sites for joint meaning-making.

Literature review

Two strands of research literature inform this study. Firstly, research dedicated to the implications of group interaction and collegial conversations in knowledge construction. Highlighting the possibilities such activities may offer for the construction of knowledge, Hadar and Brody (2016) argue that teacher conversations promote the development of teacher educators' own learning as well as their professional role because it helps them "reflect on their own practices" (p. 112). Similarly, other studies contend that engaging in such conversations can help teachers make their tacit beliefs transparent and broaden their understandings of various instruction-related practices (Carroll, 2005; Liu, 2019; So, 2013).

Research has also paid particular attention to the role of group talk and dialogue in collective meaning-making processes. In their study, Matre and Solheim (2016) found that acts of questioning, arguing and reasoning opened up dialogic spaces in the teachers' conversations, which presented possibilities for developing a shared understanding. Similar perspectives on the role of language and dialogue in teachers' joint knowledge construction are presented in studies by Orland-Barak (2006) and Warwick, Vrikki, Vermunt, Mercer, and van Halem (2016).

However, research literature also questions the learning potential of teacher conversations, arguing that they are generally practical rather than analytical in nature and that the teachers primarily share experiences and express collegial support (Havnes, 2009; Kvam, 2018; Ohlsson, 2013). Junge (2012), however, maintains that while new

knowledge may not be articulated in such conversations, sharing perspectives and experiences can still help teachers construct a shared understanding about what constitutes important aspects of teaching and instruction.

The second strand of literature relevant to this study addresses aspects of academic writing in teacher education. Research has established that different disciplines have different expectations for how to present knowledge academically, which implies that students meet different writing traditions when moving between disciplines (see, e.g. Arneback et al., 2017a; Coffin & Hewings, 2003). Moreover, writing in teacher education is characterised by what Wittek, Askeland, and Aamotsbakken (2015) call "theorypractice dimensions" (p. 17) which, among other things, implies that students are expected to combine practice-related experiences with relevant theory. Several studies have pointed out that students often find it challenging to navigate such disciplinary differences and theory-practice discourses (Arneback et al., 2017a; Erixon Arreman & Erixon, 2017). Coffin and Hewings (2003) also emphasise that the teacher plays an important role in helping students navigate such differences. In the conversations studied here, the teachers discuss challenges they perceive their students to have in the writing process, and the role the teachers' written feedback, especially on the students' written language, may constitute in this context. Research into this field finds that feedback on linguistic features promotes written accuracy (Birchener, 2008; Kang & Han, 2015).

The strands of research outlined above provide important insight into knowledge construction in collegial conversations, and aspects of academic writing and instruction in teacher education. Through investigating teacher's collegial conversations about various aspects of students' academic writing and their own instructional practices, I aim to contribute additional insight into the processes of joint meaning-making in collaborative settings.

Theoretical perspectives

A sociocultural perspective on meaning-making undergirds my study. In this view, knowledge construction is understood as a joint endeavour negotiated and maintained in collaborative interplays, and dialogues represent opportunities for shared meaningmaking (Johnson & Mercer, 2019; Linell, 1998; Markovà, Linell, Grossen, & Salazar-Orvig, 2007; Vygotsky, 1986). Thus, dialogues can be understood as interactive arenas where joint knowledge construction occur in "the meetings between the different teachers' voices" (Matre & Solheim, 2016, p. 189). The conversations studied here may thus provide opportunities for the teachers to engage in collective meaningmaking through sharing and exploring their perspectives with their colleagues.

In collective processes of knowledge construction, spoken language comes to inhabit a central role as a tool for what Mercer (2000) calls interthinking. In the conversations investigated here, the teachers interthink about students' academic writing and aspects of writing instruction; they articulate their knowledge, and share and explore their perspectives and practices with their colleagues. Thus, these conversations also present the teachers with a chance to "see" their professional practices from the outside, reflect on and potentially develop a deeper understanding of them (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2006).

Another aspect of language which is important in order to gain insight into processes of joint meaning-making is how interlocutors shape their discourse. With respect to this, talk or dialogues may have different characteristics. According to Mercer (2000), in *cumulative talk* language is used to build a shared, intersubjective perspective on the topic of conversation. *Disputational talk* is characterised by an unwillingness to take on the other person's point of view. Finally, in *exploratory talk*, which often includes elements of the former two, participants engage constructively with each other's ideas for the purpose of "discovering new and better ways of jointly making sense" (Mercer, 2000, p. 103).

Talk also includes *listener support items* (Linell, 1998, p. 174). Most frequently used by the teachers in this study is "mhm", or *continuers*, which primarily serve to indicate listenership (Norrick, 2012, p. 574) and encourage the speaker to continue. However, the use of continuers as what Linell (1998) calls *weak affirmative utterances* (p. 186) also occurs intermittently. In this study, we will see how different types of talk, including listener support items, serve as tools for the teachers to collectively expand or develop shared understandings and co-construct knowledge in different ways.

Within a sociocultural perspective, writing is understood as a meaning-making activity rooted in the cultural and social contexts in which it occurs (Ivanič, 2004). Thus, learning to write (and read) within the disciplines - acquiring what Lea and Street (2000) call academic literacies - "constitute central processes through which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new areas of study" (p. 32). This perspective perceives student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities (Lea & Street, 1998). However, students in teacher education do not only write to acquire new disciplinary knowledge; they also write to gain mastery of genres typical to the teaching profession, and to develop various types of knowledge and competence which is relevant to them as professional practitioners. In this way, student writing in teacher education also represent a gateway into the profession (Blåsjö & Wittek, 2017, p. 44). Thus, acquiring academic literacies in teacher education not only involves developing a "communicative repertoire" (Lea & Street, 2000, p. 34); it also entails students employing writing to find their voices as future teachers. In this study, this perspective on writing may be reflected in the teachers' conversations about students' academic writing.

Methodology

Participants

The participants are six teacher educators working at a Norwegian teacher training institution: Mary and Mia from languages, Tracy and Dylan from the arts, and Jean and Evelyn from social sciences. They have been given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity. They were recruited based on their participation in a three-day inter-disciplinary writing seminar, and because they were assumed to have a particular interest in, and would be interested to talk more about, students' academic writing and writing instruction. I contacted 15 seminar participants and asked if they were willing to take part in the study, and six volunteered. Prior to the project's initiation, the participants received written information about the purpose, nature and content of the study, as well as



a letter of consent informing them about their rights as research participants. The study is approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research and Data.

Data collection, translation and transcription

The data material analysed and discussed here consist of 22 episodes from four collegial conversations conducted between September 2019 and April 2020. The 22 episodes were selected based on the following criteria: They contained elements of interaction which appeared to give direction to the meaning-making process, and they dealt with students' academic writing or aspects of academic writing instruction.² They also varied in length (see Appendix 1).

Each conversation lasted on average 100 minutes, and was recorded and transcribed by me. In my transcription I included pauses, hesitations and overlaps between the interlocutors, but no detailed transcription on sentence level, as my focus was on language in the context of shared meaning-making and thus did not require such levels of detail. Finally, the transcripts were translated from Norwegian into English. In this process, I paid particular attention to potential implications my translations might have on the overall meaning of the transcripts, in an effort to avoid aspects being lost in translation or altering the speakers' intended meaning.

Collegial conversations

As previously explained, the primary purpose for analysing the collegial conversations was to better understand how the teachers may co-construct meaning about students' academic writing, and aspects of their writing instruction practices, through talk. The collegial conversations investigated here share similarities with focus group interviews (Hennink, 2014) in that they were initiated by me, the researcher, for a specific scientific purpose. However, they differ in the sense that the teachers exerted considerable influence on the content and direction, as themes they brought up constituted the topics in subsequent conversations. On a couple of occasions, I also asked them to bring artefacts - assignment instructions and examples of feedback - to use in the conversations. As such, these collegial conversations share commonalities with semi-structured colleague mentoring groups, which are groups where colleagues participate in a variety of activities aimed at exploring their teaching practices and developing them (de Lange & Lauvås, 2018; Midthassel, 2003).

As mentioned earlier, while the content of the conversations was not the primary purpose of the analysis, it is nevertheless relevant to consider what the teachers choose to talk about because this may affect the type of knowledge they construct in the conversations. The main topics across the conversations can be summarised as follows: Perspectives on students' writing in teacher education; here, the teachers discussed the role of writing as a tool in students' learning processes. Another prominent topic was Students' academic writing; these conversations primarily pertained to challenges the teachers perceived students to have in the writing process. Writing instruction practices also constituted a central topic in the conversations. Here, the teachers discussed - and reflected on - their approaches to providing written feedback. Perspectives on assignment design made up the fourth topic. In these conversations,

the teachers discussed the explicitness of assessment criteria and explored individual teachers' rationale behind instructions they had given in formal assignments.

My role as researcher

My participation primarily involved introducing discussion topics, facilitating and moderating the conversations, keeping track of time, and asking follow-up questions. Taking a more withdrawn position was important so as to give the teachers more agency and ownership of the content and directions of the conversations. Another aspect which I had to take into consideration was the fact that the study was situated in my own professional field, at my own institution, and consequently the research participants were also my colleagues. I had to reflect on how these elements could assert influence on different stages of the research process, as well as the nature of data collected and the researcher-research participant relationship. For instance, I had to consider how my own tacit assumptions about students' academic writing could shape the kind of follow-up questions I asked, or impact the interpretive process.

Analytic approach

Prior to starting the analysis, I transcribed the conversations and read through the transcripts several times. This helped me organise and structure the material. The next step involved identifying episodes in the conversations which could help me gain insight into ways in which the interplay between the teachers provided opportunities for co-constructing knowledge about students' academic writing. Linell (1998) defines episodes as bounded sequences or discourse events which "are focused on, attend to or move within some kind of topic" (p. 187). As mentioned above, two criteria guided my selection of episodes: Most importantly, they contained elements of interaction which appeared to give direction in the meaning-making process and, secondly, they dealt with students' academic writing or aspects of academic writing instruction. I identified 22 episodes which met these criteria: four in the first, five in the second, five in the third and eight in the fourth conversation. Since the main goal of the analysis was to explore the teachers' joint meaning-making and types of talk in this respect, there will likely be topics related to students' academic writing in the conversations which are not included in the 22 episodes analysed here. The episodes were initiated by one of the teachers introducing a new aspect to the conversation, asking questions which re-directed the conversation, or making statements or claims which sparked reaction from their colleagues. They often ended with pauses or with weak affirmative utterances such as "mhm", which may indicate that "the prior topic is fading out" (Linell, 1998, p. 186), or with statements that summarised the conversation.

Having identified the episodes, I then conducted an analysis which consisted of two non-linear, closely intertwined processes. I started by identifying what appeared to be the purpose of the interaction, or the *communicative projects*, in the episodes. Linell (1998) argues that while speakers have a purpose for engaging in conversation, they are always dependent on each other's utterances to make meaning. Thus, Linell (1998) contends, speakers engage in communicative projects with the aim to solve "a communicative 'problem' of some kind" (p. 218). In this case, they revolved around aspects of students' academic writing and aspects of writing instruction. Using open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), I developed the following categories of communicative projects: (1) Establish common ground, (2) Explore perspectives, (3) Mentor colleagues, and (4) Reconsider one's teaching practices. In episodes where I identified more than one communicative project, I chose to let what I perceived as the dominating project decide which category the episode belonged to.

Parallel to this process, I identified the different types of discourses - the communicative acts - the teachers employed to co-construct meaning in the different communicative projects. Seeing communication as always dialogical, Linell and Markovà (1993) point to the collective nature of communicative acts (p. 181). Thus, such acts are not independent units but rather depend on "the activity, the teachers, and the context" (Otnes & Solheim, 2019, p. 703). Taking an inductive approach, I identified and then added the communicative acts to the specific communicative projects in which they were most prominent. Certain types of communicative acts which helped the teachers manage their understanding, such as asking for more information or clarification and explaining, were employed in all of the episodes.

As the analysis progressed, I identified types of talk in the different communicative projects using Mercer's (2000) categories. Finally, I collected the communicative projects, the communicative acts and the types of talk I had identified across the 22 episodes in a table to illustrate the result of the analysis (Table 1). Of the 22 episodes, I selected four for close analysis, one from each category of communicative projects. Two episodes are taken from the first conversation and two from fourth conversation. These four were chosen because they are representative of the types of talk found across the 22 episodes, and they aptly illustrate some of the topics the teachers brought up in the conversations. Most importantly, these four episodes constitute explicit examples of how the interplay between the teachers may constitute opportunities for coconstructing meaning about aspects of students' academic writing and writing instruction. The episodes will be discussed in detail below.

Table 1. Types of talk, categories of communicative projects, and communicative acts across the 22 episodes.

Type of talk	Number of episodes	Communicative projects	Communicative acts
Cumulative	10/22	Establish common ground	Describe activities, approaches Add to each other's contributions Rephrase to ensure understanding Express alignment, consensus, agreement
	5/22	Mentor colleagues	Ask for opinion, advice Seek affirmation of teaching practices Provide insight Offer collegial support, praise
Exploratory	4/22	Explore perspectives	Challenge practices, ideas Problematise, express doubt Provide and elaborate reasoning Defend, justify idea or practice
	3/22	Reconsider one's teaching practices	Evaluate, assess, think aloud Reconsider one's practices and perspectives

Analysis and results

Types of talk in the episodes

Table 1 shows the types of talk in the 22 episodes. We can see that exploratory talk occurs much less frequently than cumulative talk in the episodes; while 15 episodes are categorised as cumulative, only 7 are categorised as exploratory. In the cumulative episodes talk is predominantly descriptive, as reflected in that the teachers largely describe and explain their practices and perspectives, and identify similar experiences with students' academic writing. Many of these conversations revolve around aspects they perceive students to struggle with in relation to academic writing, and the teachers' approaches to helping students overcome these challenges. For instance, they express a shared concern that many students find it difficult to master the theory-practice dimension characteristic of academic writing in teacher education, and agree that providing feedback - also on linguistic features - is important in helping students master the genre. However, there are also episodes in which they seek their colleagues' advice and express support for each other's instructional practices, particularly when it comes to providing feedback. Thus, in these cumulative episodes, a common ground is reflected in a shared notion of where the shoe pinches with regards to students' struggles in academic writing, and a joint interest in helping students develop their academic writing skills. It is also evident in their collegial support of each other's instructional practices.

The talk in the exploratory episodes have exploratory traits, as seen in the fact that the teachers more actively engage with each other's perspectives, posing questions and seeking clarifications which spurs reflection, elaboration and justification. These conversations mainly concern a particular aspect of the teachers' instructional practices, namely their approaches to providing written feedback. In particular, they discuss the use of scaffolding in feedback and how this may most effectively support students in their writing process. The exploratory aspect is also seen in the fact that in some of the episodes, they explore their own feedback practices based on what their colleagues have shared. Finally, there are also examples of the teachers jointly challenging and exploring each other's interpretations of and rationale behind specific elements of assignment design.

Interestingly, while the talk in these episodes contain exploratory traits, and some even disputational talk, we see that the teachers are careful not to alienate each other it appears that any disagreement or criticism regarding teaching academic writing is minimised. Thus, the exploratory episodes also have cumulative traits and, similar to the cumulative episodes, upholding collegial harmony and alignment appears important.

Communicative projects

The analysis reveals that in 10 of 22 episodes, Establish common ground constitute the dominant communicative project. In these episodes, which occur in all four conversations, the teachers appear concerned with making explicit inter-subjective stances on aspects related to student's academic writing. They do so through identifying similar experiences in this respect. The teachers build on each other's contributions and add information of their own, and in this way they co-construct a shared understanding of the topics discussed in a "mutually supportive, uncritical way" (Mercer, 2000, p. 31). Thus, these episodes have cumulative characteristics.

In five of the episodes, Mentor colleagues comprises the prominent communicative project. Interestingly, these episodes occur in the first and fourth conversations, where the teachers have brought artefacts in the form of assignment instructions and written feedback to use as discussion openers. The analysis shows that these episodes take on characteristics of collegial mentoring, in that the teachers take the opportunity to ask for and provide - collegial advice and support on specific aspects of their writing instruction practices, and especially on approaches to written feedback. Similar to the first category, this suggests a concern with establishing and upholding collegial harmony and alignment, and consequently these episodes are also cumulative in nature.

The third category of communicative projects, Explore perspectives, contains four episodes from the first and third conversations. Here, the teachers seem particularly interested in exploring their colleagues' rationale behind approaches to students' writing, for instance regarding how detailed the written feedback should be. They also explore aspects of assignment design, and enquire about their colleagues' rationale behind including specific elements. However, we also see that in instances where there are traces of disagreements, the teachers refrain from challenging each other's perspectives critically to any significant degree. Thus, these episodes have both exploratory and cumulative characteristics. Still, sharing viewpoints in this manner may help make explicit different perceptions and interpretations in the group, and thus promote a shared understanding of the aspects discussed.

The final category of communicative projects, Reconsider one's teaching practices, only contains three episodes, all of which occur in the final conversation. While also categorised as exploratory, they differ from the ones in the previous category in that here, individual teachers engage in explicit self-reflection. All 22 episodes can be said to include aspects of reflection; however, in these three episodes the individual teachers use the space provided by the conversation as an opportunity to engage in a kind of dialogue with themselves. Here they evaluate, assess and reconsider their rationale behind specific aspects of their writing instruction practices in light of the perspectives brought up in the on-going conversation. In this manner, the talk in these three episodes is both reflective and exploratory, which may contribute to expanding the teachers' understanding of specific aspects of their academic writing instruction practices.

Communicative projects and communicative actions in the episodes: Four examples

Example 1: Establish common ground

This episode is from the first conversation. Here, Evelyn and Mary discuss something they perceive their students to struggle with in their writing; namely, successfully combining experiences from practicum with relevant theory. Two assignment instructions, designed and brought to the group by Mary and Dylan respectively, function as artefacts.

1	Evelyn:	Yes, what I can see in both assignment instructions is that one expects the ability to combine experiences from practicum and didactics. ³ [] but when I look at the texts they [the students] submit, if you have problems it is often linked to that you must be able to break down the examples
2	Mary:	Mhm.
3	Evelyn:	you must be able to find the bits you can apply didactics to.
4	Mary:	Yes.
5	Evelyn:	And should this expectation be made more explicit [in the assignment instructions] or is it a skill they [the students] should master before they get this far?
6	Mary:	Yes, because an analytic ability which is perhaps required [] which is perhaps implicit here [in the assignment instructions]. [] One thing is to find examples from teaching practice and analyse them and take out the most essential which can illustrate what you are going to discuss.
7	Evelyn:	Yes, and I think it stops there for many students. They haven't cracked the code
8	Mary:	Mhm.
9	Evelyn:	and then you will not be able to write the assignment successfully.

Evelyn initiates the interaction, bringing attention to an aspect she perceives that many students struggle with in their writing (1, 3).⁴ In her next utterance (5), she asks whether the students should be explicitly taught how to combine practicum-based aspects with theory in their writing, or whether one should expect them to master it at this level. While her question goes unanswered, it may function as food for thought within the group. Mary adds to this by pointing out that while this "analytic ability" is perhaps required, it is most often implicit in the assignment instructions (6), which perhaps suggests that she thinks this is problematic. In her subsequent utterances, Evelyn builds on this perspective, stating a concern that not being able to combine elements from teaching practice with relevant theory stops students from mastering academic writing successfully (7, 9).

It is worth noticing that despite being from different disciplines, Mary and Evelyn do not challenge or debate each other's ideas; there is no negotiation or exploration of perspectives. Instead, they identify similar understandings, as reflected in their shared concern for the challenges this implicit requirement pose to many students in their writing. This suggests that a consensus already exist between the two. This assumption is perhaps supported by their use of "yes" (1, 4, 6, 7) and "mhm" (2, 8) throughout, which may serve to further underline a mutual alignment with each other's perspectives.

Thus, in this episode we see how Evelyn and Mary establish a common ground through making explicit shared perspectives on some students' problems with combining theory and aspects from practicum in their writing. This act of interthinking may serve to raise their own, and their colleagues, awareness of the challenges this particular aspect of academic writing in teacher education poses to many student writers. It may also serve to encourage the teachers' reflection on how to approach this particular aspect in their own teaching of academic writing, to make it more explicit to the students and help them master it.

Example 2: Mentor colleagues

This episode is from the final conversation and concerns a particular feedback practice Dylan sometimes employs, namely rephrasing poorly worded sentences in his students' written drafts. Dylan, Mary and Evelyn collectively engage in reflections on the use of this approach:

1	Dylan:	[] what I often do in my response to the students, this is a question to all of you, is that I take an example from their text and revise it in a way which I think could improve the text. What do you think about that, do you, could you do the same?
2	Mary:	Mhm. I can sometimes do that.
3	Dylan:	Mhm.
4	Évelyn:	Yes, me too. [When] I understand what they want to say but they are not able to express it, then I can say "what if you say it this way?". [] Especially when I notice that students struggle with expressing what they think.
5	Mary:	[] that is often the problem that they are not able to express their thoughts, as Evelyn says. [] To get an example of how it can be done is good supervision so I think you're doing something right, Dylan, if you do that
6	Dylan:	Mhm.
7	Mary:	there's good help in that.

Through his opening question, Dylan seeks his colleagues' opinions about this practice, perhaps perceiving it as potentially contested (1). Taking Dylan's question as a starting point, Evelyn and Mary jointly reflect on the use of this particular feedback approach. First confirming that they sometimes correct students' language (2, 4), thus aligning with Dylan, they provide a rationale for when, and for what purposes, they may apply this specific practice in their feedback (4, 5). These elaborations may work to clarify their stances, and to further express support for Dylan's use of the practice. Mary then addresses Dylan directly, and states that she thinks the approach may be useful to students, thus expressing her support once more (5, 7). Interestingly, Dylan does not actively contribute his own perspectives to the conversation, instead using "mhm" (2, 5). This indicates that here, "mhm" perhaps serves as a continuer; a way for Dylan to confirm that he hears their responses, and encourages them to continue.

Despite the teachers being from different disciplines, the episode reflects a strong sense of collegiality and a commitment to supporting each other's practices, as reflected in Mary and Evelyn's responses to Dylan's question. By adding to and building on each other's contributions in this manner, Evelyn and Mary make their thoughts explicit to themselves and others, thus potentially broadening the perspectives within the group of the potential usefulness of this feedback practice. At the same time, their elaborations may contribute to raising the group's awareness of when to use different types of feedback for different purposes, and consequently enhance the teachers' reflections on an important aspect of writing instruction.

Example 3: Explore perspectives

In this episode, which is also from the first conversation, Jean and Mary collectively explore the purpose of a component in an academic writing assignment Mary has given her students. The component is called "Important to remember" and states that the writers should position themselves within the disciplinary field and relate their reflections to course literature.

2	(· -
_	1.4

1	Jean:	[] what purpose does "Important to remember" have [in the assignment]?
2	Mary:	Yes, I think it is important.
3	Jean:	Yes, but is it formally a part of the writing assignment?
4	Mary:	Yes, yes it is.
5	Jean:	Because the wording "Important to remember" gives me, at least, the impression that this is advice
6	Mary:	Mhm.
7	Jean:	But the criteria themselves are sort of [] it is not fair to base the assessment on advice.
8	Mary:	Mhm, I understand what you mean.
9	Jean:	That the text above this line [she points in the assignment] is the assignment itself ["Important to remember" is placed under the line].
10	Mary:	Yes, I agree. At the same time, I think that what's below the line provides an additional explanation which is important to the understanding of the final text that is to be submitted because, as Mia mentioned [] applying examples from practicum in combination with didactic considerations becomes a sort of reflection.
11	Jean:	Yes, yes, yes.
12	Mary:	But instead of using that word "reflection" we have tried to phrase it differently so that it becomes clear that you are going to discuss, but that you can't only base it on personal experiences, you must also use course literature and apply relevant examples from practicum.

Jean initiates the interaction by asking Mary about the purpose of the component in the assignment (1), which may indicate that this is unclear to her. In her subsequent utterances (3, 5, 7, 9), Jean brings attention to aspects of "Important to remember" which she finds unclear, for instance whether it is meant to be advice or if it constitutes a part of the assessment. Jean's questions and subsequent utterances challenge Mary to think through the purpose of the component and explore the rationale behind including it in the assignment instructions (10, 12).

Consequently, Jean's probing for more information and clarification contributes to giving the episode an exploratory character. Moreover, it also suggests that her stance regarding the component differs from Mary's. This is made evident towards the end of the episode where Mary's position becomes more explicit. First, Mary states "Yes, I agree" in response to Jean's statement, before adding "[A]t the same time" (10). She then provides a rationale for including the component in the assignment (10, 12). Thus, this episode contains an element of dispute - or at least different interpretations - of the component's purpose in the assignment, which is negotiated through asking questions and presenting arguments which prompt explanations, elaborations, and justifications. Whether Mary and Jean's different interpretations stem from the fact that they represent different disciplines is not clear, as such epistemological aspects are never referred to. Nevertheless, their collective exploration may sensitise both to alternative interpretations of the purpose of the component. On a more general level, it may heighten the groups' attention to different approaches to another aspect related to academic writing instruction, namely assignment design.

Example 4: Reconsider one's teaching practices

This episode is also from the final conversation, and here Mia thinks aloud about her approach to providing written feedback on student writing. She does so in light of the



on-going conversation, which focuses on the practice of providing feedback on linguistic features to help the students improve their written accuracy.

1	Mia:	Yes, ehm I think it is interesting because I have never provided a concrete example of paraphrasing [in student texts] myself [] and I think the reason is that I want to be careful not to influence their texts too much.
2	Mary:	Mhm.
3	Mia:	But now, when I hear you say that you can give [the students] concrete examples, I think that there is much learning in seeing a more precise wording. There is much learning in that. [] So perhaps combining it [paraphrasing] with "you must continue working with this" can be a good thing, to provide support and encourage independent work.
4	Dylan:	Mhm.
5	Mia:	Yes, perhaps I should do that when I give feedback, provide concrete examples.
6	Mary:	Mhm.

Here, we see how Mia takes the opportunity to explore, reflect upon and reconsider a particular aspect of her feedback practices. She opens by admitting that she never rephrases sentences in her students' drafts because she does not want to interfere too much with their texts (1). Spurred by the perspectives that has been shared in the conversation, she then thinks aloud about potential advantages with providing her students with concrete examples (3). Following this, she gives an example of how she can revise her practice based on what she's heard (3). She then ponders the idea that she should perhaps try out an adapted version of this approach herself (5).

A key phrase in the context of meaning-making is "... but now when I hear you say that" (3), because it implies a reconsideration prompted by hearing somebody else's perspective. This reflects how Mia engages in what Orland-Barak (2006) calls a "parallel dialogue", in which she thinks aloud about her own feedback practices, mediating her thoughts in dialogue not only with herself but also with her colleagues' perspectives. Interestingly, while Mary and Dylan do not contribute directly to Mia's reflections by posing questions or making comments, their use of "mhm" (2, 4, 6) appears to serve to "encourage and sustain" Mia's "exploration and mediation" on her own practices throughout the episode (Orland-Barak, 2006, p. 27).

Consequently, the conversation presents a space for Mia to negotiate the rationale behind her feedback practice and explore potential revisions, prompted by her colleagues' perspectives. In this way, Mia's parallel dialogue might help make her tacit knowledge explicit and expand her understanding of her approaches to feedback. However, since her parallel dialogue is also a response to – and builds on – the ongoing conversation, it may also contribute to collective meaning-making by expanding the group's understanding and perception of feedback practices in the context of developing students' academic writing skills.

Discussion

We see that in terms of talk, the teachers' interactions are predominantly cumulative and descriptive (Mercer, 2000) and reflect a focus on consensus. This is most evident in the fact that, in the interactions, the teachers take the opportunity to identify and share similar understandings and experiences, as Mary and Evelyn do in their discussion of students' challenges with successfully mastering the "theory-practice dimensions"

(Wittek et al., 2015) of writing in teacher education (ex. 1). Moreover, they often seek advice or support from colleagues, as Dylan does when he asks for their opinions about an aspect of his feedback practice (ex. 2). Even in more exploratory interactions where slight differences in perspectives surface, as in Mary and Jean's discussion of "Important to remember" (ex. 3), such differences are seldom dealt with critically. Instead, the teachers seem concerned with hearing colleagues' rationale behind various choices or practices. Thus, potential criticism is presented in a non-threatening manner, as what Warwick et al. (2016) call "positive professional critique" (p. 562). This non-threatening approach to criticism, combined with the emphasis on identifying and sharing similar understandings and experiences with students' academic writing, and providing collegial support for instructional practices, underlines the descriptive and cumulative nature of these conversations. It also highlights a focus on maintaining collegial consensus. These findings echo previous research which also finds that in collegial conversations, teachers often provide collegial support and share personal experiences instead of taking the opportunity to solve problems or develop new knowledge (see, e.g. Havnes, 2009; Kvam, 2018; Ohlsson, 2013).

The findings outlined above, and especially the focus on consensus, correlate closely with a second observation relating to what the teachers talk about in the conversations: There is a lack of disciplinary disagreements between the teachers, despite them representing different disciplines. Instead, they appear to agree on the topics they discuss related to students' academic writing and instruction, for instance when it comes to aspects they find students to struggle with in the writing process, and that written feedback on linguistic features may be useful in helping students improve their written accuracy. Interestingly, this inter-disciplinary focus on consensus does not correlate with views reflected elsewhere in research, which maintain that in teacher education, as in higher education in general, there are epistemological differences between disciplines when it comes to how knowledge is presented, and consequently academic writing looks different in different disciplines (Arneback, Englund, & Solbrekke, 2017b; Coffin & Hewings, 2003; Lea & Street, 2000).

This inter-disciplinary consensus may also indicate that the teachers perceive teacher education as a disciplinary field in itself, with its own conventions, and consequently they understand academic writing in teacher education to contain specific aspects that are characteristic to the field (e.g. teacher education) which the students must master regardless of their subject of study (e.g. mathematics, social sciences, English, etc.). This assumption is further substantiated by the fact that they discuss aspects related to students' academic writing and instructional practices which are common across subjects in teacher education, such as students' challenges in the writing process, approaches to feedback and elements of assignment design, rather than aspects specific to writing in their subjects. Thus, these findings suggest that the teachers look at writing as a tool for acquiring the epistemologies characteristic of teacher education as a discipline. This reflects a perception of writing as a way for the students write themselves into the discipline (Blåsjö & Wittek, 2017), and develop their identities and voices as future professional practitioners.

Another reason for the lack of disciplinary differences could be that the teachers' own understanding of academic writing instruction is tacit, or at least not explicitly grounded in specific theories on academic writing and writing instruction. At the same

time, the general consensus could reflect a notion of teacher education as a consensusseeking culture (Vanassche & Kelchterman, 2014), and consequently the teachers may not be concerned with seeking out potential disciplinary differences.

Finally, the focus on consensus and the lack of disciplinary differences may be grounded in the project's research design. First of all, the collegial conversations were presented as sites for sharing experiences with and perspectives on students' academic writing and instructional practices, and thus the teachers may not have perceived of them as a space for critical discussion or exploration. Secondly, the discussion prompts that I supplied could perhaps have been more exploratory in nature; this could potentially have brought out a greater degree of disciplinary diversity regarding perspectives on students' academic writing and writing instruction in the collegial conversations. Finally, the fact that the teachers are colleagues, working at the same institution, may also have had an impact. Chances are that all these elements influenced the ways the teachers approached each other in discussions and how they shaped their contributions.

However, the fact that the teachers' talk in the interactions is predominantly cumulative, descriptive and consensus-focused does not mean that co-construction of meaning does not occur. I argue that the teachers' acts of sharing their practices and having them recognised by their colleagues could in itself constitute a learning potential because, as Hadar and Brody (2016) also assert, it may help them reflect on their practices and the rationale behind them. Mia's parallel dialogue on her approach to written feedback (ex. 4), and Mary's justification for including "Important to remember" in her assignment instructions (ex. 3), both illustrate this aspect. Moreover, in line with Junge (2012) I argue that engaging in such conversations may enhance the teachers' perceptions and encourage the co-construction of a shared understanding about students' academic writing and writing instruction practices. For instance, Mary and Jean's conversation (ex. 3) may serve to make themselves as well as the others more alert to different interpretations of the purpose of a particular component in the assignment instructions. Thus, the analysis suggests that in knowledge construction contexts, descriptive talk may carry the potential to be transformative as it provides the teachers with a tool to verbalise their knowledge and elaborate on perspectives in dialogue with colleagues. In this way, my analysis illustrates a dimension of descriptive talk in collegial conversations which gives nuance to how knowledge construction may occur in collaborative settings (cf. Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

A final reflection on the relationship between types of talk and the topics of the conversations helps make explicit that how the teachers talk and interact also shape what they co-construct knowledge about. While there is a certain degree of overlap, we see that cumulative talk and consensus occur primarily when the teachers discuss perspectives on students' academic writing and writing instruction. This is illustrated in Evelyn and Mary's conversations about challenges students face in the writing process (ex. 1) and feedback practices (ex. 2), where they identify and build on similar understandings and perspectives. Exploratory talk, on the other hand - which also includes cumulative characteristics - more often occurs when the teachers discuss specific teaching practices. This is evident in Mia's case (ex. 4), where we see how hearing her colleagues' perspectives encourages her to explore potentials for developing her feedback practice. Similarly, Jean's questions (ex. 3) spur Mary to explore her reasons for designing the assignment in a particular manner. Thus, in line with Matre and Solheim (2016), this study suggests that collegial conversations present opportunities for joint meaning-making, and that, as Orland-Barak (2006) contends, the teachers' dialogues provide opportunities for "co-constructing different kinds of understanding about practice" (p. 29) related to students' academic writing, including academic writing instruction.

Conclusion

In this study, I have explored how a group of teacher educators participating in collegial conversations co-construct knowledge about students' academic writing and aspects of their own writing instruction practices. While limited in scope, the study nevertheless adds valuable insight into the role of talk and interaction in joint processes of meaning-making, and the potential of collegial conversations as sites for co-construction of knowledge.

Confirming previous research, I found that the teachers' talk was predominantly cumulative and descriptive, and focused on upholding collegial harmony and consensus. However, my findings also point to a more precise understanding of the function of descriptive talk in meaning-making contexts, by suggesting that such talk may carry the potential to be transformative as it provides the teachers with a tool to verbalise their knowledge and elaborate on perspectives in dialogue with colleagues. Thus, I argue that my analysis illustrates a dimension of descriptive talk in collegial conversations which adds perspective how knowledge may be constructed in collaborative settings.

I also found that, while exploratory talk usually occurred when the teachers discussed explicit teaching practices, cumulative talk - and consensus - primarily concerned perspectives on students' academic writing and writing instructional practices. Another interesting finding was an apparent inter-disciplinary consensus among the teachers regarding academic writing in teacher education. This is perhaps surprising, considering that they belong to different disciplines. This apparent alignment may suggest that, rather than conceiving of teacher education as a multidisciplinary field in which academic writing looks different in different subjects, these teachers perceive teacher education as its own disciplinary field with its own conventions.

Finally, my analysis suggests that collegial conversations hold potential for shared meaning-making in collaborative settings, and that they may present opportunities for promoting a greater collective awareness regarding practices and perspectives relevant to students' academic writing and academic writing instruction in teacher education. However, more research into whether such conversations may bring about actual change in teachers educator' academic writing instruction would be beneficial, as it will help us gain a deeper insight into the transformative capacities of collegial conversations in teacher education in general.

Notes

- 1. For a detailed analysis of the content of the conversations, see Ofte and Otnes (2022).
- 2. For more details about the episodes, see "Analytic approach" in the methodology section.
- 3. The term didactics is here used as an equivalent to pedagogical content knowledge.
- 4. Throughout this section, the digits in brackets correspond with the utterances in the episodes discussed.



Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- Arneback, E., Englund, T., & Solbrekke, T. D. (2017a). Student teachers' experiences of academic writing in teacher education - On moving between different disciplines, Education Inquiry, 8 (4), 268-283.
- Arneback, E., Englund, T., & Solbrekke, T. D. (2017b). At skriva sig till profesionell identitet -Tre förskollärarstudenter. In P. O. Erixon & O. Josephson (Eds.), Kampen om texten. Examensarbetet i lärarutdanningen (pp. 55–77). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Birchener, J. (2008). Evidence in support of written corrective feedback. Journal of Second Language Writing, 17(2), 102-118.
- Blåsjö, M., & Wittek, L. (2017). Skrivandet i professionsutbildningar Forsningsöversikt och teoretiska utgpångspunkter. In P. O. Erixon & O. Josephson (Eds.), Kampen om texten. Examensarbetet i lärarutdanningen (pp. 31–51). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Carroll, D. (2005). Learning through interactive talk: A school-based mentor teacher study group as a context for professional learning. Teaching and Teacher Education, 21(5), 547-573.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2009). Teacher research as stance. In S. Noffke, & B. Smoekh (Eds.), The SAGE Handbook of Educational Action Research (pp. 39-49). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Coffin, C., & Hewings, A. (2003). Writing for different disciplines. In C. Coffin, M. J. Curry, S. Goodman, A. Hewings, T. Lillis, & J. Swann (Eds.), Teaching academic writing: A toolkit for higher education (pp. 45-72). London, UK: Routledge.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.
- de Lange, T., & Lauvås, P. (2018). Kollegaveiledning i høyere utdanning En empirisk analyse av veiledningssamtaler. Uniped, 41(3), 259-274.
- Erixon Arreman, I., & Erixon, P. O. (2017). En gränsöverskridare på väg mot ett professionelt habitus. In P. O. Erixon & O. Josephson (Eds.), Kampen om texten. Examensarbetet i lärarutdanningen (pp. 79-96). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Hadar, L. L., & Brody, D. L. (2016). Talk about student learning: Promoting professional growth among teacher educators. Teaching and Teacher Education, 59, 101-114.
- Havnes, A. (2009). Talk, planning and decision-making in interdisciplinary teacher teams: A case study. Teachers and Teaching, 15(1), 155-176.
- Hennink, M. M. (2014). Focus group discussions: Understanding qualitative research. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ivanič, R. (2004). Discourses of writing and learning to write. Language and Education, 18(3), 220-243.
- Johnson, M., & Mercer, N. (2019). Using sociocultural discourse analysis to analyse professional discourse. Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, 21, 267-277.
- Junge, J. (2012). Kjennetegn ved læreres kollegasamtaler, og betydningen av disse for læringspotensialet i samtalene. Norsk pedagogisk tidsskrift, 96(5), 373-386.
- Kang, E., & Han, Z. (2015). The efficacy of written corrective feedback in improving L2 written accuracy: A meta-analysis. The Modern Language Journal, 99(1), 1-18.
- Korthagen, F., & Vasalos, A. (2006). Levels in reflection: Core reflection as a means to enhance professional growth. Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 11(1), 47.
- Kvam, E. K. (2018). Untapped learning potential? A study of teachers' conversations with colleagues in primary schools in Norway. Cambridge Journal of Education, 48(6), 697-714.
- Lea, M. R., & Street, B. V. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. Studies in Higher Education, 23(2), 157-172.



- Lea, M. R., & Street, B. V. (2000). Student Writing and staff feedback in higher education: An academic literacies approach. In M. R. Lea & B. Stierer (Eds.), Student Writing in Higher Education. New Contexts (pp. 32-46). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Linell, P., & Markovà, I. (1993). Acts in discourse: From monological speech acts to dialogical inter-acts. Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 23(2), 174-195.
- Linell, P. (1998). Approaching dialogue. Talk, interaction and contexts in dialogical perspectives. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Liu, Y. (2019). Situated teacher learning as externalizing and mobilizing teachers' tacit knowledge through talk in a language teacher professional community. Research Papers in Education, 34 (3), 330-351.
- Markovà, I., Linell, P., Grossen, M., & Salazar-Orvig, A. (2007). Dialogue in focus groups: Exploring socially shared knowledge. London, UK: Equinox.
- Matre, S., & Solheim, R. (2016). Opening dialogic spaces: Teachers' metatalk on writing assessment. International Journal of Educational Research, 80, 188-203.
- Mercer, N. (2000). Words and minds: How we use language to think together. London, UK: Routledge.
- Midthassel, U. V. (2003). Kollegaveiledning Er det verdt å bruke tid på? Norsk pedagogisk. tidsskrift, 87(3), 168-174.
- Norrick, N. R. (2012). Listening practices in English conversation: The responses responses elicit. Journal of Pragmatics, 44(5), 566-576.
- Ofte, I., & Otnes, H. (2022). Collegial conversations about writing instruction in teacher education: Positions, perspectives, and priorities. In R. Solheim, H. Otnes, & M. O. Riis-Johansen (Eds.), Samtale, samskrive, samhandle. Nye perspektiver på muntlighet og skriftlighet i samspill (pp. 163–185). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Ohlsson, J. (2013). Team learning: Collective reflection processes in teacher teams. The Journal of Workplace Learning, 25(5), 296-309.
- Opfer, V. D., & Pedder, D. (2011). Conceptualizing teacher professional learning. Review of Educational Research, 81(3), 376-407.
- Orland-Barak, L. (2006). Convergent, divergent and parallel dialogues: Knowledge construction in professional conversations. Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 12(1), 13-31.
- Otnes, H., & Solheim, R. (2019). Acts of responding. Teachers' written comments and students' text revisions. Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 26(6), 700-720.
- Selkrig, M., & Keamy, K. (2015). Promoting willingness to wonder: Moving from congenial to collegial conversations that encourage deep and critical reflection for teacher educators. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 21(4), 421–436.
- So, K. (2013). Knowledge construction among teachers within a community based on inquiry as stance. Teaching and Teacher Education, 29, 188-196.
- Vanassche, E., & Kelchterman, G. (2014). Teacher educators' professionalism in practice: Positioning theory and personal interpretative framework. Teaching and Teacher Education, 44, 117–127.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). Thought and Language (translated and edited by A. Kazoulin). Cambridge, MA: MIT.
- Warwick, P., Vrikki, M., Vermunt, J. D., Mercer, N., & van Halem, N. (2016). Connecting observations of student and teacher learning: An examination of dialogic processes in lesson study discussions in mathematics. ZDM Mathematics Education, 48(4), 555-569.
- Wittek, A. L., Askeland, N., & Aamotsbakken, B. (2015). Learning from and about writing: A case study of the learning trajectories of student teachers. Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, 6, 16-28.



Appendix 1: Episodes

Date	Episode	Duration	
30 September 2019	1	01.15-05.00	3 min 45 sec
	2	40.52-43.48	2 min 56 sec
	3	45.20-51.14	5 min 54 sec
	4	1.04.10-1.09.54	5 min 44 sec
3 Dec 2019	1	53.02-54.52	1 min 50 sec
	2	1.01.03-1.02.39	1 min 36 sec
	3	1.02.59-1.04.01	1 min 2 sec
	4	1.04.15-1.05.59	1 min 44 sec
	5	1.15.21–1.17.26	2 min 5 sec
12 Feb 2020	1	34.57–40.32	5 min 35 sec
	2	42.56-48.42	5 min 46 sec
	3	53.20-1.01.47	8 min 27 sec
	4	1.14.55-1.21.06	6 min 11 sec
	5	1.30.57–1.33.45	2 min 48 sec
20 April 2020	1	39.10-41.33	2 min 23 sec
	2	41.49–44.37	2 min 56 sec
	3	55.59-57.16	1 min 17 sec
	4	58.53-1.00.55	2 min 2 sec
	5	1.12.01-1.14.44	2 min 43 sec
	6	1.14.52-1.16.39	1 min 47 sec
	7	1.23.26-1.26.10	2 min 44 sec
	8	1.28.12-1.30.40	2 min 28 sec