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ABSTRACT

This case study investigated whether student talk and classroom discussion might help students find a voice in the academic community and pave the way for other forms of research and analysis that the academy expects of them. Participants were Bergen Community College (New Jersey) students (N=110) enrolled in a non-credit remedial English class. Emphasis was placed on collaborative conversation, turn-taking, silence, timing, and the absence of a traditional authoritarian teacher. Data were obtained by involving students in researching their own discussions. Like most action research on classroom talk, the study also explores methodology. The major means of data collection in this study consisted of audio tapes of classroom discussion, student surveys after discussion sessions, student notebooks, responses to readings, and essays collected throughout the course. Results suggest that: a series of discreet behaviors cannot be taught that will result in meaningful classroom talk; issues of authority between students and teachers in the classroom and between genders affect how students interact in discussion; in order to learn how to use talk to explore ideas, students need to assume an authority that conflicts with their roles as students and as gendered human beings; action research empowers students; and the act of mutual exploration and research engenders a voice of authority that can be shared. (LL)

"I Ain't No Teacher: Authority in Classroom Discussion"

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"I Ain't No Teacher:" Authority in Classroom Discussion

"Herein lies the psychological barrier to research-based teaching. It may leave me *in* authority, but it asks me to depreciate my claim to be *an* authority." (Lawrence Stenhouse)

I. The Problem

Ann Berthoff (1987) writes "I decided that unless I could get people to talk, there was not going to be any learning. But how was I ever to do that, to elicit any response from the bewildered people who faced me in sullen rows?" (p.76). She solved her problem by writing a line of poetry on the board, asking her students to move their chairs so that they faced each other, and telling them to talk to one another. Then she took off her scarf and tied it around her mouth! Her students began to talk, somehow miraculously, after she shut up (p. 77).

I wondered if shutting up is enough. Will that "something" that students do when teachers tie scarves around their mouths be effective classroom discussion? Berthoff notes that after she solved the problem of silence in her classroom, "an equally trying one [problem] was confused babble" (p. 83). This study asked, "Do students know what to do when we "shut up?"

In addition, I wondered if, in the case of underprepared college students whose uses of language do not match those of the academy, talking about classroom discussion might be a way to enter into academic discourse. Making their "talk" a topic of research might not only work to help students find a voice in the academic community, it might also pave the way for other forms of research and analysis that the academy expects of them.

II. Methodology

The students walked into the room. They were a diverse group, ranging in age from 18 to 40, including a variety of ethnic groups: Portuguese-American, Columbian, African-American, Puerto-Rican-American, and various European-American blends, including German, Polish, Irish, and Italian. They were alike in one way: they had received a low score on the New Jersey Basic Skills Placement Test. They were enrolled in "Developmental Skills," a five-hour per week reading and writing course that did not give them credits toward graduation. They were required to take this course before being allowed to take English Composition I and II, both requirements for graduation from Bergen Community College. Several of the students had learning disabilities and were in special education classes in high school, a few were non-native speakers of English, most were poor test-takers, a few were unmotivated students in high school, a few had been in vocational classes in high school and were unprepared for college, and a few had been away from formal schooling for months or years and needed to "brush up" on their reading and writing skills.

All of the students were discouraged about being placed in "remedial" English. Most of the students were the first in their families to attend college. All of them worked--from 12 to over 40 hours per week in addition to taking 12 credits. Most drove to campus, although a few used public transportation to the sprawling suburban megastructure located in Paramus, N.J. Most of the students chose to attend Bergen Community College because it was affordable and convenient. The majority planned to transfer to a "better" four-year school.

As they entered the classroom, they turned the desks that were arranged in rows into a circle—about eighteen desks, including one for the teacher. Paul,

the designated "recorder" had gone to the library and obtained an audio-tape recorder and set it up near his desk. A large 360 degree microphone was situated on a desk in the center of the circle. The room, which had aged-white walls and a scuffed white-tiled floor, echoed with sounds of desks scraping the floor, squealed with audio-equipment reverberating "testing-1-2-3-testing," and rumbled with students chatting about the parking lot and homework.

Prior to class, students had been reading books and writing dialectical journal responses to their reading. On the day before this class they met in small groups, traded journals, and discussed what they found to be important or interesting ideas in the reading. In a plenary session, the whole class decided on a topic which the group would "discuss" the next day. Students agreed to look over their texts and journals in light the of newly formed discussion question on the evening prior to class discussion.

I handed out "discussion note forms" which asked students to make preliminary responses to their discussion question. So the class discussion began in silence--each writing his or her own reflections about the question for the day. Next, one student volunteered to act as "facilitator," the person who would get things moving in the event of a communication breakdown in the group. This person would sum up, restate, or ask a question. Each student kept a checklist of the roles that he or she would perform in discussion.

Paul would turn on the recorder, but immediately prior to actual engagement in discussion, I would hand out a part of a transcript of a discussion that the group had held the week before. Sometimes we would read it over, acting it out like a play. We would talk about the transcript--pointing out parts we thought were interesting or important, analyzing the

talk from a variety of perspectives including participation and interaction, content, etc. Students were encouraged to reflect on their own role in the previous discussion and to try to change or improve their participation in the upcoming event.

Then, discussion would begin--for about twenty to thirty minutes. Students would attempt to talk to teach other, to carry on a collaborative conversation, about their question. They struggled with turn-taking, silence, timing, and the absence of a traditional authoritarian teacher, among other aspects of classroom interaction in addition to their ideas about their reading. Throughout the discussion, student took notes about the ideas being said as well as their roles as participants in discussion. After the discussion, we would reflect. Students wrote again. This time they wrote their responses to the discussion topic adding in new insights gained from classroom discussion. They would also evaluate the discussion and their own participation in the discussion.

This ritual was repeated, with modifications throughout the course of this research study as a way of obtaining data about class discussion and as a way of involving students in researching their own discussions. This method of research falls in the tradition of action research (also called practitioner research and teacher research) characterized in the work of Lawrence Stenhouse, Research as a Basis for Teaching (Rudduck and Hopkins, Eds., 1985). Like most of the research on classroom talk, this is a study which also explores research methodology.

There are a variety of methodologies that have been used in researching classroom talk, and no one single methodology has proven to be the one that is considered by scholars to be accurate and appropriate for education, in general and classroom talk, in particular. Large quantitative studies counting

and coding interaction have been done by university research teams, as well as focused microethnographies of small pieces of classroom discourse by single researchers. Each methodology carries with it a set of assumptions and methodological drawbacks. No one methodology has proven to be the most reliable or valid. In fact, because this field is in search of a research method, considerable experiementation has been done in an attempt to locate an appropriate methodology. While this study falls into an established research tradition, it borrows from other traditions and constitutes yet another attempt to find a methodology for studying classroom talk.

In her essay "Forming Research Communities among Naturalistic Researchers (1985)," Lucy Calkins describes the teaching case study, a form of action research. Teaching case studies "begin with tentative theories that inform their practices, and they observe the results of those practices. Those observations lead them to revise or develop their initial ideas, and the resulting theories are again translated into practices. . . . Always, the purpose is to affect practice for those within the setting and for a wider community of practitioners" (p. 131). This study looked at the classroom practice of discussion in the context of exploring the issue of their talk with the students. As data were collected, students-and-teacher-as-researchers analyzed the data, and the nature of their classroom talk was affected. The goal of this study was the improvement of classroom practice in the context where the research occurred, rather than generalizable findings about classroom talk for those outside of the context.

By the same token it is significant that the goal of this research was not "method testing," but rather a means to provide feedback for further building of the theory and method for classroom discussion. As Lawrence Stenhouse articulates, the results of teacher research are "not intended to discriminate

one course of action which would be better for you than another," rather the results "are intended to contribute to your perception of the situation" (Rudduck and Hopkins, 1985, p. 41). Clearly the findings in this study, then were tentative and were used, as Stenhouse suggests, to fuel further discussion and research in the class.

The major means of data collection in this study was audio tapes of classroom discussions. In addition, I surveyed students after each discussion session and asked them a consistent series of questions about each session. Various student artifacts including notebooks, responses to reading, essays, etc. were collected throughout the course of the study. A teaching log of informal analysis and response to the project was maintained throughout the study. Informal interviews were conducted with some students.

In total, I taped over sixty hours of classes and involved 110 students enrolled in remedial English courses at Bergen Community College in the 1990-91 academic year in various stages of this research. Transcriptions were made of selected classes--about 12 hours in all. Various analyses were performed on the transcripts depending on teaching context and needs of the group at the time. For example, at one time we used a schedule similar to ones used by Flanders to look at the interaction of our class, trying to categorize the discussion on one of our transcripts as direct or indirect, open or closed. At another time, we tried to name the role that each speaker played in a given transcript and discuss the function of that role in the interaction. Differences in the perception of those roles were interesting. Another time we looked at the questions and categorized them. Still other times we looked at pauses, interruptions, and other discourse markers for patterns in our interaction. All of these activities, involving analysis techniques used by researchers of talk over the last twenty-five years were both curricular and

research activities, and as such were consistent with the goals of teacher-research.

III. Data Analysis

I started out my research by asking *what* is it that students must be able to *do* in order to have good classroom talk, and I later learned that the better question is "*who* is it that students must *be*, in order to have good classroom talk." I discovered that we cannot merely teach a series of discreet behaviors that will result in meaningful classroom talk. Rather, I found out that issues of authority between students and teachers in the classroom and between genders affect how students interact in discussion. In order to learn how to use talk to explore ideas, students need to assume an authority that conflicts with their roles as students and as gendered human beings. This section contains the evolution of my thinking about these issues and the story of the teaching as I researched a piece of their classroom discourse with students.

Adrienne was talking about The Color Purple. She described Celie's husband, Mr.____, whom she thought had changed throughout the course of the novel: "In the beginning of the book, I don't think he really cared about or acknowledged a lot of beauty around him, and nature, and the scenery. And by the end of the book, he said that his eyes opened up to a lot of different things" (05).[1]

Before Adrienne could finish, Chris interrupted her, "What do you think made him change?" (21). Without breaking the flow of her speech, Adrienne

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[1] I have translated a brief segment of a class discussion into narrative style for the development of this article. A transcript of the exact interchange is in the Appendix. Please note that the transcript is missing a 30 second digression which does not pertain to the issues of this article and which I have eliminated to save space. Parenthetical references correspond to speaker's turn numbered in second column of transcript.

stammered, "maybe...alright, I don't know..." (22). Chris grinned. There was a sort of nervous laughter in the room, and without much pause, Adrienne went on, "I'm not exactly sure, but, maybe since he went through all that, everything that happened to him in his life and um..." (22).

"Like what?" (23) Chris interrupted quickly, looking straight into her eyes. There was more tittering this time. Adrienne didn't give up. She choked on her words and spit out, "When, uh, Shug..." (25). Without waiting for an answer, Chris interrupted again "Do you think Shug had anything to do with it?" (26).

"Let her answer," I admonished (27). The little giggles echoed again.

Undaunted, Adrienne pressed on, "Yes, I believe that Shug had something to do with it, and when Shug left, and also when Celie left, it made him realize that people aren't going to take shit from him any more. And he had to start living on his own. And I guess while he lived on his own, he realized what was going on in the past and..." (28).

But she was interrupted again--this time by Jeff. "Yeah, but what makes you say that he just didn't want her back to do the work?" (29).

"I ain't no teacher. I'm just trying to think, here," Adrienne responded, frustrated (30).

A. Early Reflections

As this was happening, I was delighted with the initiative that Chris displayed when he began to engage Adrienne in a line of questioning. It indicated to me that he was doing some active listening and that he was trying to play a new role in the class discussion. In a mini-lesson before, I had encouraged students to try to attempt new types of behavior in the discussion. I suggested they use the techniques that I use in discussion: ask for restatements, ask for clarification, ask for examples, make restatements, make

clarifications, or talk about how the discussion is moving. I wrote a list of possibilities on the board and we began our discussion. The interchange between Adrienne, Chris, and Jeff occurred only 1:24 minutes into the discussion.

Since it foilowed so rapidly on the heels of my mini-lesson, I was pleased to hear Chris try out this role of questioner. I even went so far as to interrupt the exchange, when the giggling started to tell the class, "Don't laugh. That's exactly what you should *all* be doing" (24). I meant I wanted them to be listening carefully to each other, and I hoped they would listen with a critical ear and a questioning mind. Chris appeared to be doing this.

As this happened, I also admired what Adrienne was doing. She appeared to be using her talk to help her think: "I'm just trying to think here" (30). Later she had a short monologue where she thought of evidence to support her initial idea that Mr._____ had really changed throughout the course of the novel. Her thoughts appeared to emerge as she heard her own words. The wonderment in her speech and the exploratory risks she took delighted me.

I was also pleased with Jeff's involvement. His question indicated that he was following the exchange between Chris and Adrienne. I was most pleased to see student-to-student exchanges, rather than the teacher-student-teacher pattern that is common in most classroom discourse (Mehan, 1979; Cazden, 1988). All three students remained on the topic and were referring to text-related issues. This seemed to be a real breakthrough to me.

B. Second Thoughts

Later though, I thought more about Chris and Jeff. I listened to the tone of their voices on the tape, as I played the tape over and over again in preparing

a transcript. What bothered me was that Chris didn't seem to want to know the answer to his questions, really. Neither did Jeff Both young men, while their *words* were interrogative, *acted* like interrogators. The young men seemed to be making statements rather than asking questions; they appeared to be challenging Adrienne, or playing a game of academic cat and mouse. They were trying to back her into a corner. Their questions seemed out of place, and the laughter and nervousness in the group verified this. They were stepping beyond the usual boundaries of their behavior in class.

What did this mean? What did the nervous laughter indicate? Adrienne appeared to think that they were treating her like a teacher--but most of us know that basic readers don't typically ask teachers those kinds of questions. So, what Adrienne probably meant was, "I don't have all the answers like teachers do," or "I don't have the authority to answer you."

I doubt that Chris and Jeff thought that Adrienne was the teacher either. Only with a peer would Chris and Jeff feel safe enough to make the challenges that their questions posed. Chris and Jeff were ganging up on Adrienne, muscling her thoughts, flexing their muscles. There was a power struggle going on here, I think, and their questions represented some sort of act of defiance.

In "Wanderings: Misreadings, Miswritings, Misunderstandings," David Bartholomae (1986) discusses the roles that basic readers must play in order to read critically. "Interpretation," he writes, "thus begins with an act of aggression, a displacement, an attempt to speak before one is authorized to speak..." (93). Did Chris and Jeff have to be aggressive to ask their questions? Was there a degree of authority that Chris and Jeff had to assume in order interpret Adrienne's remarks and then speak? Did they have to push against *her* thoughts, in a way, to make *their* inquiries? Did Chris have to think,

"OK. You showed *how* he changed, but you never explained *why*"? So he asked, "What do you think made him change?" Did Chris think that Adrienne's remark was too general and needed more specific support, so he asked, "Like what?"

In each case, Chris had to challenge Adrienne's remarks and not passively accept them. He didn't just listen and nod agreement. He must have thought his own idea was as important or more important than Adrienne's to be able to ask his question. His voice was not the voice of a student or a peer, but rather the voice of defiance, defiance in assuming authority over another person.

So what I initially thought was Chris playing the role of a questioner, I later saw also as an act of aggression. Chris was asserting his authority over one of his peers. It now seemed that it was Chris, not Adrienne, who was assuming the role of a teacher, and that he thought that the role of a teacher implied some sort of aggressive authority over others. Were Chris and Adrienne acting out some sort of parable of the political relationship between students and teachers?

As this idea about authority was percolating in my thoughts, Bartholomae's words continued to gnaw at me and began to shed new light on the exchange between Chris, Adrienne, and Jeff. I began to object to Bartholomae's "masculinist" idea of reading: "interpretation begins with an act of aggression." I had this vision that he thought that texts had to be *ravaged* and that heretofore *virgin* texts had to be pursued and accosted by the minds of our students. I thought Bartholomae was sexist in his interpretation of the act of critical reading. I was sure that reading and interpretation were different for women readers.

So I returned once again to the exchange between Chris, Adrienne, and Jeff with the idea of gender roles in mind. It seemed to me that Chris was being aggressive and defiant. He looked Adrienne straight in the eyes. He rushed her, he didn't wait for her to respond, and he talked over her. Jeff jumped on the bandwagon--it was two against one. And, Adrienne was a woman. Was it because Adrienne was a young woman and Chris and Jeff were young men that they could assume the authority they needed to commit their "act of aggression?" Or was it an "act of aggression" because Chris and Jeff were doing it? Had Marisol or Teresa asked questions of Adrienne, would they have been different because they were young women? More importantly, would Marisol and Teresa have felt the authority to ask questions given their gender?

C. Talking about the Talk

Still wondering, I returned to my class for more information. I made a transcript of the exchange between Adrienne, Jeff, and Chris. The students read the transcript aloud, taking parts, making a play out of their own dialogue. After we read the dialogue, I asked Chris. "Did you really want to know the answer to the questions you addressed to Adrienne?" "Yeah," he insisted. "'Cause I didn't read the book, so I wanted to hear the answer." "Ohhh," I nodded. "So when you said, 'like what?' you wanted more details because you hadn't read the book?" "Yeah," Chris confirmed. So what I interpreted as an act of defiance, Chris said was genuine curiosity. Jeff also claimed to have wanted to know the answer to his questions. In retrospect, Adrienne said: "I didn't think he really wanted to hear the answer. I thought he was just saying it..."

The question of Chris' sincerity inspired considerable speculation when I shared this transcript and tape in a workshop at the College Conference on Composition and Communication in Boston in 1991. Members of the group also thought that Chris's tone of voice and the rapid-fire pace of his interruptions indicated that he was insincere in his questions. This was especially interesting given that the students were questioning the sincerity of Mr._____'s transformation in the novel.

In addition these teachers thought that Chris was overpowering Adrienne with his questions, and doing what researchers have described as typical of men in mixed-sex conversations: dominating and controlling through interruption: "men rarely interrupt one another; it is when they are talking to women that they use interruptions...when talking with women, men seem to use interruptions and delayed minimal responses to deny women the right to control the topic of conversation. Men disobey normal turn-taking rules in order to control topics" (Coates, 1986, pp. 100-1). Given Chris's admission that he hadn't read the book, perhaps he was attempting to control the topic to satisfy his own agenda, rather than actively listening to what Adrienne had to say. From the outset of the discussion, Chris called on Adrienne, controlling the start the discussion (02), silenced her with his interruptions (21, 23, 26), and told her to read at the end of this portion of the dialogue (42). It seems evident that he was attempting to control the movement of this discussion and that he was using tactics that men use in mixed-sex conversations. These tactics, interestingly, are not unlike the ones that teachers use to control the flow of discussion in the classroom, so I wondered if Chris was acting out of his own gender socialization or his understanding of a teacher.

I shared my hunch about gender roles in their discussion with my students. I thought it might demystify the authority they needed to explore ideas in class discussion. So, in addition to examining their transcript with them as was the custom throughout this research project, I also gave students copies of an early draft this essay, containing my initial analysis of their exchange. I wanted to know what they thought of my theory. I also wanted to provide students with an illustration of how I would write about our research process.

Adrienne and other students in the class thought I made it seem more "aggressive" than it actually was. "You made it sound like they had this big aggression over me," Adrienne said. "When it all was happening ... it didn't seem that way to me." But, she admitted, that my theory did make some sense to her.

Chris objected to the notion that he was being aggressive towards a woman. He didn't like my inference that he was acting out his gender socialization in our discussion. He pointed out that, in subsequent discussion, he had "stepped up" to Steve. I suggested that maybe he felt more comfortable with Steve because Steve was a friend of his. He added, "I guess I felt more comfortable talking to her [Adrienne], I don't know why. I trust what she says." So maybe Chris' questions weren't an act of aggression, but they represented where he felt a degree of safety.

However, Chris used the expression "stepped up" to describe what he did to Steve. This sounds like "facing off" to me. It implies some sort of stand off where two people are eye-to-eye, where there is a challenge involved. Chris dropped his gauntlet in front of Steve and Adrienne. This *does not* strike me as a stance basic reading students would risk with a teacher, and it *does* strike me as having an aggressive quality to it.

D. Shifting the Nature of Authority

Two equally strong and opposing social forces are working on Jeff and Chris in this discussion. First of all they act like men in a mixed-sex conversation with Adrienne. Consistent with that role, they dominate and control the conversation with interruptions. However, they are also in more or less powerless positions as students in a classroom. As students their role is NOT to control conversation or dominate topics. When they actually try it, they are taking on a role, possibly the role of teacher, that is not appropriate. The inappropriateness of their roles is noticed by class members who laugh at several points in the dialogue (02, 21, 23, 27, 30). Chris and Jeff seemed like they were trying to mitigate or rationalize the authoritarian stance they took; they had to "save face" for stepping out of their roles as students (Coates, 110). Hence, they apologize, in a sense, to Adrienne, and their classmates, with "you volunteered" (31, 32).

Rather than back down and run away from the challenge, though, Adrienne herself became defiant at this point--"OK. What was your question?" (33). This represents a significant turn-around in the authority roles in this discussion, I think, and constitutes the seeds of a new kind of authority. There were two different kinds of authority present in this little piece of discourse. It wasn't just authority *in general* I wanted my students to learn, but a certain flavor of authority that would result in exploratory classroom talk that Barnes (1976) describes in From Communication to Curriculum. At turn 33, Adrienne took some authority for herself and asked Jeff to restate his question. She followed his response with yet another bid for authority by asking for further clarification, "What--in the beginning or the end?" (35). Next, her response to Jeff's question reveals a shift in the nature

of Adrienne's assumption of authority (37). At first she is uncertain and hesitant, vacillating between the use of pronouns "you" and "I." She uses "I", it seems, to qualify and soften the authority she had just taken by asking questions of Jeff: "You could tell. Well, I could tell the difference..." Or perhaps the pronoun shift indicates the opposite, a movement from the softer generic "you" to staking a personal claim of authority with "I could tell." Midway through her response Adrienne expresses self doubt, and talks in short choppy phrases: "Enough. I don't know. You could tell. The things he did. I think. It wasn't. No. Because he was getting along fine without her." Then with a stronger and faster voice she finishes her remarks with confidence and assurance. By the end of her twenty-second monologue, the nature of Adrienne's authority has shifted. In a sense, Adrienne has become the teacher. She stands up to the challenge and does not back down. She assumes an authority she did not start with. But Adrienne's authority emerges from her thinking about her reading. It is authority *about* her ideas, not authority *over* another person. While Chris' authority struck me as aggressive, Adrienne's was empowered.

E. Powerless Talk in the Classroom

The gender issue opens up a whole host of questions about the politics of authority in the classroom and the part this plays in the dynamics of classroom discussion. It seems somewhat easier for men students than for women students to make the shift in roles to talking like a teachers. For women students the idea of talking like a teacher is compounded by the fact that that *as women AND as students,* they are socialized into silence in conversation. Can I expect students to engage in exploratory conversations like the ones Douglas Barnes (1976) writes about when their traditional roles

as students don't allow them the authority they need to do it? In addition, is the critical inquiry that I hope to encourage in students a masculine way of thinking--one I've learned in my years of higher education and one that I can assume because of my authority as a teacher? I wonder if Chris was the first to make inquiry because he was a man, and I am curious about what must happen for women students who need to assume this authority.

The work of O'Barr and Atkins (1980) about courtroom language is interesting in light of this concern about authority and gender in classroom discourse. O'Barr and Atkins describe the features of what they call "Powerless Language." These features include hedges (e.g. *sort of, kind of, I guess),* super polite forms (e.g.*would you please, I'd really appreciate it if...*) tag questions, use of emphatics (e.g. *so, very, really*), empty adjectives, and questioning intonation in declarative contexts (Coates, 1986, pp.112-13). These feature were the same features that Robin Lakoff (1975) originally identified as "Women's Language." O'Barr and Atkins argue that "powerless language has been confused with women's language because, in societies like ours, women are usually less powerful than men. Many women therefore typically use powerless language, but this is the result of their position in society rather than their sex" (Coates, p. 114). O'Barr and Atkins found that in a courtroom setting, both men and women displayed these features, but that social status and experience in the courtroom correlated with use of these language features. So O'Barr and Atkins renamed Lakoff's "women's language" "powerless language." O'Barr and Atkins also suggest that there is a range of "powerless language" depending on experience and social status.

If we acknowledge that the role of the student in the classroom is one of low social status, that they have little experience in academic discussion, and that developmental skills students have a limited sense of authority about

their roles as students in general, "powerless language" might certainly be characteristic of their talk. In what ways were Adrienne, Chris, and Jeff using powerless and powerful talk?

First of all, if we go back over the exchange and isolate only the times when Chris and Jeff talk, we get the following list of comments:

02	Chris	Adrienne
21	Chris	What do you think made him change?
23	Chris	Like what?
26	Chris	Do you think Shug had anything to do with it?
29	Jeff	Yeah, but what makes you say that he just didn't want her back to do the work?
31	Chris	You volunteered.
32	Jeff	Yeah, you volunteered.
34	Jeff	What makes you think that he really was sincere and didn't just want her back to do to take care of the kids, wash, clean, cook?
36	Jeff	The end.
43	Jeff	You should say "yes."

None of these comments contain the characteristics of powerless talk. There are no hedges, use of emphatics, super polite forms, or tag questions here. Chris and Jeff use direct questions, which are aimed at Adrienne (not softened by being directed at anyone in the group), and they respond in direct statements, which are also devoid of the qualities of powerless talk. In addition, many of the comments made by Chris and Jeff are made when Adrienne hedges with "um" or by outright interruption, both of which are characteristic of powerful talk. It is also interesting that all of Jeff's and Chris's talk is directed at Adrienne--not to the rest of the class or to the teacher.

In this interchange, the teacher is another person who might, because of her authoritative position in the class, have used powerful talk or because of her gender, used powerless talk. She talked six times in the interchange.

01	Teach	OK. Does anyone want to start?
04	Teach	You're going to be the initiator. Alright Adrienne.
19	Teach	Um. Go ahead. Um. Yeah. He was actually helping her sew the pants.
24	Teach	Don't laugh. That's exactly what you should all be doing.
38	Teach	I think you (*pointing to Jeff*) asked a valid question and I think you (*Adrienne*) gave a good answer. It would be good if we could find the parts in the book where they are/
40	Teach	What page?

None of the teacher's talk is powerless talk unless one considers the hedging and hesitation going on at turn 19 as powerless talk. In this line, however, the teacher was trying to get the group back onto the original line of discussion after a student had initiated a digression. It seems a move of seizing control and using the hesitation to get the groups' attention refocused.

Adrienne's comments, on the other hand, which take up most of the time in the discussion (over 2 minutes) are rampant with powerless talk. She repeats herself frequently, she hedges with "um," "uh," "like," "you know," "I don't know," "alright," etc. She uses emphatics like "really" and she uses empty adjectives like "much better like" and "more human like." She uses short choppy incomplete phrases--almost stammering at times.

In this short dialogue, then, it is only Adrienne who uses powerless talk. It might be that Adrienne was exposed as using powerless talk simply because she is the only speaker with extended monologues, while all other participants are making brief statements. Maybe the length of her talk made it powerless? Maybe its was Adrienne's gender that made her use powerless talk or maybe it is her role as a student in the class. It is interesting and ironic that she seems to be taking on a stance of authority, she is acting like a teacher in that she is answering the questions of her peers. But instead of responding with

powerful talk, Adrienne's talk is powerless. What is alsointeresting, I think, is that Chris and Jeff who are equally powerless in the classroom social setting as Adrienne is, use powerful talk and they use it in response to Adrienne.

IV. Findings: Authority and Knowledge

I am also still plagued by the aggression idea and wonder if Bartholomae is right, given the political setting of the classroom. Until the nature of authority in the classroom is clarified, perhaps, assuming it, is indeed, an "act of aggression." I worry that because of their socialized gender roles some students will assume "authority over" each other rather than "authority about" their ideas. Various feminist pedagogues write about teachers and students working equally as *teachers/learners* (Belenky, et. al., 1986; Bunch and Pollack, 1983). So maybe what we need is a new sense of what it means to teach and learn. This is easy for me to imagine because I sit in the privileged seat of authority. For my students, however, it is a difficult and risky shift in perspective. They have to imagine how to think like teachers, feel like teachers, BE like teachers. They have to assume an authority they have been socialized to think is not theirs.

In writing about teacher research, Garth Boomer's essay "Addressing the Problem of Elsewhereness: A Case for Action Research in Schools" (1986) introduces the important connection between knowledge, authority, and research:

> Basil Bernstein argued at a conference in Canberra in 1978 that schools breed citizens with two distinctly different consciousnesses and world views. One group, those who succeed, tend to believe that they are capable of seeking, possessing, and banking on knowledge. The other group, those who fail, tend to believe that knowledge is "elsewhere," not to be possessed, to be deferred to,

> rebelled against, or distrusted. Thus a kind of knowledge capitalism is reinforced from generation to generation (p. 5).

Students who find themselves in developmental or remedial classes in college are in the group who have "failed" and no doubt believe that knowledge is "elsewhere." This feeling of the elsewhereness of knowledge might be connected to the issue of powerless talk. Adrienne's frustrated comment, "I ain't no teacher" suggests this. According to Adrienne, teachers do possess knowledge, and since she sees knowledge as elsewhere, "she ain't no teacher."

Stenhouse writes that the traditional modes of education (called banking methods by Freire), keep students away from the power of knowledge. He goes so far as to suggest that "the *uses* of knowledge are reserved for an elite, while the *burdens* of knowledge are imposed on the generality by an imperious pedagogy" (p. 123) [my emphasis]. The elite are those who are successful in education, who do research, who enquire, who see how knowledge is constructed through research. According to Stenhouse, teacher research is a way to shift the power structure in the classroom. "Research-based teaching, conceived as enquiry-based teaching, shifts the balance of power towards the student" (p. 120).

Similarly, Boomer suggests that the special nature of teacher research will solve the problem of the "elsewhereness" of knowledge:

> I think it has something to do with ownership. Most "big R" Research, as I call it, could be defined as institutionally legitimate inquiry into problems which exist in their chronic form elsewhere than with the researcher....By "owned," I mean "owned by the person or group doing the research. This is their *own* research into their *own* problem so that the consequent action is also "owned." The resultant action will be a modification, however minimal, to their *own* behavior (p. 7).

The method used in this study offers ownership of the problem to the students by involving them in the research process. It eliminated the incongruence between authority and knowledge by asking students to construct knowledge through enquiry. Unlike other research papers that they might have written where they reported others' knowledge, in this project they explored a problem and attempted to try out solutions. By becoming researchers of talk, these students discovered the authority to talk like teachers. "To call for research-based teaching is, I suggest, to ask us as teachers to share with our pupils or students the process of our learning the wisdom which we do not possess so that they can get into critical perspective the learning which we trust is ours" (Stenhouse, 1985, p. 114). By involving students in this research, it was clear that I did not have the knowledge, but that we would find it together. This had the effect of shifting the source of authority in the classroom, which is precisely what students needed to do to improve their discussions.

As is consistent with this kind of research, the "findings" are used by the researchers to alter their *own* behavior. I did not attempt to prove or even document my students improvement in discussion, nor could I attempt to document their increase in authority. What is interesting about this kind of research is the questions it raises and the solutions it suggests. However, I do have evidence that is anecdotal and informal.

In surveys, most students evaluated their own performances in discussion as improved at the end of the semester. My own sense is that discussions improved, as well. I participated less and the control of the talk was with the students. There was a change in the character of the kind of talk that occurred. Early in the study students thought discussions were a place to express their opinions. Later in the study there was more exploratory talk. Students began

to see discussion as a place to open up and expand ideas. Students listened more in the end of the semester. Students tried on different roles in discussion, and students expressed that they felt gratified about them when they did.

Clearly there is a need for further research in the area of authority and classroom talk. I would like to know more about students' preparedness for class in connection to their sense of authority in discussion. Adrienne was teacher because she has read the book. Chris used an "authority-over" strategy because he hadn't read the book. I would like to explore more about students own awareness of their authority or powerlessness in classroom discussion. I would like to know more about the relationship between remediation and powerlessness.

V. Conclusion

So, it is more than superficial behaviors that students and teachers must learn to have meaningful talk; in order to promote the dialogic conversation necessary for critical reading and writing, teachers must change the roles that they play as authority figures in the classroom, and teachers must help students unlearn their roles--as students and as gendered human beings.

One crucial element in fostering a climate for good classroom discussion is an individual participant's authority to speak. But it's not as simple as pumping up and seizing authority, like taking the baton in a relay race. Instead we have to explore how power works in the classroom and between genders in a group; we have to explore nuances in the meaning of authority like the difference between authority *over* others and authority *about* ideas. My research methodology of involving the students as researchers is way of doing this. As explorers in the issue of classroom discussion we empowered ourselves. We looked and looked again at our talk and taught ourselves

about it. It's not a matter of teachers giving up authority; it's sitting with our students and looking together at what we do. The simple act of mutual exploration and research will engender the voice of authority we all can share.

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