

Talking the Talk: A Close Examination of Teacher-Student Discourse Around Written Artifacts

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ABSTRACT

As part of an ongoing research collaboration with university-based researchers, Nancy and her teaching partner, Meredith, implemented a loosely defined system of portfolios to supplement the other forms of assessment in their classroom. School-based and university-based researchers interviewed children to assess children's perspectives of their growth and progress. Situated within this larger study, the primary focus of this article is to present a sociolinguistic analysis of talk between one English language learner, Unesha, and her ESL teacher, Nancy, as they discuss Unesha's written artifacts collected within her portfolio. Using methods from discourse analysis, the authors focus on a narrow segment of transcript to demonstrate the various discourse strategies Nancy uses to help Unesha explore and articulate her understanding of her growth and progress in relation to written artifacts.

The intent of this analysis is to help provide insights for other teachers and researchers who wish to explore how discourse strategies may scaffold a student's reflection and to provide insight into the challenges posed to teachers as they attempt to engage students in self-reflection around their work. Through a close reading of the transcribed interactions, the authors emphasize how the discussion affords an opportunity for the teacher Nancy to listen carefully to the student Unesha in order to discover what Unesha knows and to scaffold Unesha's explorations so that Unesha may talk in meaningful ways about her work.

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Teachers who use portfolios are often cautioned that a portfolio without self-reflection runs the risk of being nothing more than a glorified storage bin. Yet even experienced teachers, like those whose story we share here, are often anxious to learn just how to “talk the talk” when it comes to exploring portfolio artifacts. Although we can provide an increasing number of good examples of teachers implementing portfolios in their classrooms (e.g., Graves & Sunstein, 1992), and although researchers have made progress in painting a portrait of teachers and students deeply engaged in evaluation of student work (e.g., Hansen, 1998), we have comparatively few examples of students, particularly linguistically diverse students, engaging in self-reflection. We lack a clear sense of what these students can say about their own work, how such reflective talk can be facilitated, and what role teachers should play in supporting student reflection.

Focusing on a narrow slice of teacher-student talk, we highlight the ways in which the teacher’s talk supports the student and the types of knowledge the student demonstrates. We present our analysis to emphasize how this specific kind of talk helped Unesha articulate and describe her work and her learning in more meaningful ways than she had already done within the classroom.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Self-Reflective Talk

A growing body of work points to the important insights to be gleaned from using portfolios with multilingual students (Fu, 1992; O’Malley & Pierce, 1996; Rueda & Garcia, 1997) and with English learners evaluating their own writing (Blake, 1992; Samway, 1987, 1993). However, most investigations of portfolios and writing evaluation to date have involved native English speakers. Given the rapidly changing demographics, it is critical that teachers are provided with examples of multilingual students engaging in reflective practices. Such illustrations are beneficial in a number of ways.

First, illustrations from multilingual students provide positive examples of students who are in the process of acquiring English. Celebrating what these students know and can do is of critical importance since children whose first language is not English are sometimes seen as deficient—being viewed from the point of what they cannot do instead of what they can do. Second, illustrations of linguistically diverse children engaging in self-reflective talk can be useful for both English-as-a-second-language (ESL) and mainstream teachers. Analysis of reflective talk, such as the examples presented here, can help teachers think about how they can support student talk about written artifacts for students learning English and for native English speakers. In our investigation of student and teacher talk about written artifacts, we have used the metaphor of scaffolding to analyze and interpret Nancy and Unesha’s interactions.

Scaffolding

The concept of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) has become commonplace in talking about teachers' and children's interactions around literacy and covers a range of teaching and learning strategies. Teachers may make use of minimalist scaffolds such as explaining vocabulary in a one- or two-sentence definition (Truscott & Watts-Taffe, 1998) or by interacting with children in conversations that involve complex and intricate conversational moves learned over time (Goldenberg & Patthey-Chavez, 1995). Researchers typically distinguish between activities that break down tasks into discrete parts (for example, cloze exercises) and those activities which allow students to reflect on information and apply it in new ways (for example, collaborations around open-ended questions; see Applebee & Langer, 1983). In like manner, many researchers distinguish between conversational scaffolds and sedimented teacher scripts.

Conversational scaffolds lead children to think or use language in new ways and are withdrawn over time, whereas in other teacher scripts such as the traditional IRE (Initiate, Respond, Evaluate) sequence, teachers typically ask known-answer questions (Cazden, 1988), and there is little variation from a set pattern of discourse moves. Following Cazden (1983), we define a scaffold as "a temporary framework for construction in progress" (p. 6). The construction of a scaffold occurs in a zone where the child may not be able to articulate or explore her learning alone, but with the assistance of a more knowledgeable other—in this case the interviewer—the child is able to perform at a level beyond what she could accomplish by herself. Social constructivists refer to this as the zone of proximal development (Moll, 1990; Rogoff & Wertsch, 1984; Vygotsky, 1986). Scaffolds apply to the literacy and language use of both first- and second-language learners (Boyle & Peregoy, 1990).

Although the term scaffolding is widely used, Stone (1993) argues that scaffolding is more complex than it is often portrayed and suggests expanding the metaphor through consideration of the concept of *prolepsis*. Prolepsis refers to the "communicative move in which the speaker presupposes some as yet unprovided information" (p. 171; also see Cole, 1996 for an extended discussion of prolepsis). In light of a discussion around portfolio artifacts, this presupposition is particularly important because the teacher must think ahead about how to support the student's exploration of her work and how to help the student express ideas that she may have difficulty putting into words while at the same time, the teacher must allow the student to make a real contribution. In brief, the teacher must determine how to achieve her goal of assisting the student in reflecting on her work without "leading the witness." Concomitantly, the student must work at interpreting and understanding the teacher's questions or comments and determine how to reply.

In such situations, it is easy for teachers and students to default into the traditional IRE script involving known-answer questions. It is critical to differ-

entiate between this more limiting script and variations on this script that function to support student learning. For example, in an analysis of microteaching strategies, Wells (1999) argues that an IRF (Initiate, Response, Follow up) move parallels the type of scaffolding and extension that mothers do with their children when they are learning. He distinguishes between the teacher moves involving only known-answer questions and the evaluation of student responses and other more complex interactions where teachers follow up on student responses in ways that prompt a student to extend or expand her replies. Such opportunities to expand and extend children's thinking are a key part of instructional discourse. Cazden refers to this process as reconceptualization, noting that it "serves not to deliver a verdict of right or wrong but to induct the learner into a new way of thinking about, categorizing, reconceptualizing, even recontextualizing whatever phenomena (referents) are under discussion" (Cazden, 1988, p. 111).

In this article we address these issues through close examination of the discourse between an ESL teacher, Nancy, and a third-grade English language learner, Unesha, as they discuss several written artifacts that have been collected across the year in a portfolio. We address the questions: What does the student, Unesha, say about the portfolio artifacts? And, what does this response tell us about her growth and progress in English? What discourse strategies does Nancy employ to scaffold Unesha's talk during a review of her portfolio artifacts? And how do these strategies function to scaffold Unesha's talk about her learning?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The examples presented in this article were collected in the second year of a research and professional development collaboration at Skyline Village School. Skyline Village School was originally designed to accommodate the children of graduate and undergraduate students attending the nearby university. Over time, it has served an increasingly diverse group of children from almost all the 50 states and from an array of countries around the globe. At the time of our study, approximately 26% of the students at Skyline were enrolled in the ESL program, and over 50% were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. More than 30 native languages were represented in the school, and children represented a spectrum of social, economic, religious, racial, and cultural backgrounds.

Research Collaborators

The research collaboration involved three university-based researchers, David,

Laura, and Mary, and two school-based ESL teachers, Meredith and Nancy. The collaboration grew out of Meredith and Nancy's desire to find alternatives to standardized testing mandated by their district which they felt did not accurately measure their students' growth and progress over time. The standardized tests and the design of the pull-out ESL program had been mandated by the district in response to a review by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) which was concerned about the services provided to children labeled as limited-English proficient. Meredith and Nancy were conscious of their obligations to meet the criteria prescribed by the OCR and the district, while at the same time trying to balance these outside expectations with their own teaching philosophies.

The Student: Unesha

At the time of the interview Unesha had been in the United States for 18 months. Originally from Botswana, Unesha was mischievous and unpredictable, as illustrated by her approach to discussing her portfolio. The day before her interview, she pleaded with Meredith, Nancy, and Mary to let her talk about her portfolio immediately rather than returning to her mainstream classroom and without having to wait one more day. The next morning, immediately prior to her interview, Unesha declared to Nancy, "I don't want to talk to you [about the portfolio]." Such seeming contradictions were part of Unesha's character and a concern for her teachers and her mother. Unesha's ESL teachers, Meredith and Nancy, felt Unesha should be progressing more quickly in her reading and writing, and Unesha's mainstream teacher concurred; however, they were not specific in stating which skills and strategies Unesha needed to develop. During an interview with the research team, Mrs. Chinwe, Unesha's mother, expressed that she was quite pleased with Unesha's overall progress, but she also shared Meredith and Nancy's concerns about Unesha's sometimes unpredictable behaviors. All concerned wondered whether and to what degree Unesha's inconsistencies in behavior thwarted their ability to assess Unesha's genuine progress in acquiring English.

Because school was not in session the day Mrs. Chinwe, Unesha's mother, was interviewed by the research team, Unesha attended her mother's interview, and this allowed an opportunity for Unesha to talk with her mother about the portfolio. Unesha willingly did so, and after several minutes chose to go outside and play while her mother continued to talk about Unesha's growth and progress. Mrs. Chinwe was concerned about how Unesha was doing at school in the United States, yet she was very proud of her daughter. She especially felt that the expectations for writing in third-grade classrooms in the United States were comparable to what was covered in fifth-grade curriculum in Botswana. She compared what she saw as Unesha's quick growth and progress with her own struggle to read and write in English to complete her graduate coursework.

Mrs. Chinwe reported that at home she spoke to Unesha in both English

and her first language, Setswana, in order to help Unesha improve her English. Because Mrs. Chinwe's husband had been unable to come with her to the United States, she was solely responsible for Unesha's care, and she described the difficulty she faced maintaining her own graduate program at the university while simultaneously helping Unesha adjust to schooling in the United States. She explained that because of her own studies, she could not always attend school events that Unesha wished for her to attend and that Unesha was unhappy about this. Although the broader social context of Unesha's life—adjusting to the change in cultural surroundings, family structure, and language—is not our main focus here, the impact of these factors on children's schooling is well documented (Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Valdés, 1996).

Data Sources

In the first year of collaboration around alternative assessments, we explored a number of alternative assessment tools (e.g., anecdotal records, informal reading inventories) to record student growth and progress. We also began exploring how students and their parents made sense of a student's growth and progress (McVee, Pearson, McLellan, Svoboda, & Roehler, 1997). In the second year of our collaboration, Meredith and Nancy expressed an interest in implementing portfolios. This article presents one snapshot of their learning and the in-process nature of that work as they began to use portfolios with a group of seven third-grade ESL students whom they co-taught.

In this article we address these issues through close examination of the discourse between an ESL teacher, Nancy, and a third-grade English language learner, Unesha, as they discuss several written artifacts that have been collected across the year in a portfolio. We address the questions: What does the student, Unesha, say about the portfolio artifacts? And what does this response tell us about her growth and progress in English? What discourse strategies does Nancy employ to scaffold Unesha's talk during a review of her portfolio artifacts? And how do these strategies function to scaffold Unesha's talk about her learning?

Interviews

Originally, Meredith and Nancy planned to collect artifacts from the children's writing, oral reading, and speaking and put these pieces into a temporary storage portfolio. They then planned to allow children to talk about the pieces in the portfolio and to choose items that would become part of a growth portfolio compiled by the children and the teachers. However, as with many teachers who take on portfolio implementation, their goals exceeded what they were

able to carry out. As various pieces of writing were created, Meredith and Nancy actively discussed these pieces with their students in whole group and individual settings. Such interactions supported and encouraged students to make revisions of their writing but did not engage the children in overall reflection across the portfolio. In the first half of the year, they had the children choose a favorite piece from the storage portfolio and talk about it with another child, but this was a very limited reflection. Nancy and Meredith also used the portfolios in discussions about progress with the children's mainstream teachers. Midway through the academic year, the ESL classes were reconfigured to accommodate new arrivals and changes in mainstream class schedules, again interrupting the teachers' development and implementation of the portfolios. Consequently, the growth portfolio turned out to be more of a storage portfolio for written work and was much more teacher controlled than Meredith and Nancy had originally planned. Despite this fact, Meredith and Nancy were determined to talk more explicitly with the children across the pieces in their portfolio and raised this possibility with the university-based researchers after the mid-year break.

Drawing on what we learned from children the previous year, we all expected the children would have much to say about their own work. As part of our ongoing research agenda, we audiotaped and videotaped our interviews with children. Later we cataloged and transcribed all interviews. Our purpose in collecting and analyzing interviews was twofold. We wanted to learn more about the students, but we also wanted to learn more about ourselves and use the research process to reflect on our own discoveries and understandings as researchers and teachers, a topic which we have discussed elsewhere (McVee & Pearson, 1997). The interviews with the children thus became a tool to help answer our questions about student growth and progress and to help our professional development. As we carried out our analysis we became particularly interested in the interaction between Unesha, a struggling student, and Nancy, the teacher interviewer.

Transcript Segments

Nancy and Unesha talked for almost 30 minutes about Unesha's work. Although Unesha had initially expressed some resistance, she quickly warmed up to the task of looking at her work. She was excited to be videotaped and asked if she could see the videotape when we were finished. Rather than being co-constructed, the first few minutes of the interview were fairly teacher-directed. Nancy began the interview by talking about the artifacts that were in the portfolio and occasionally asking simple questions of Unesha (e.g., "You wrote this letter to a friend?" and "Which part did you have in this play?"). As Nancy talked, she and Unesha grouped related artifacts; for example, they put

the letter drafts together, all of the poetry together, and several word lists together.

This short review of Unesha's portfolio allowed Nancy and Unesha to revisit the portfolio's concept and to organize the artifacts. Nancy then asked Unesha to identify which pieces were her favorites or ones she "liked doing the most." Unesha first identified a timed word list. In this activity students had generated their own word list within a span of 7 minutes, using words they knew or words they saw in the classroom. Meredith and Nancy had introduced this activity as a quick, scaffolded means to get one benchmark of each child's growth and progress at the beginning and middle of the school year. Unesha, like many of the children we interviewed, was proud that her second word list contained many more words than the first and that she had carried out the activity without help from others. For Unesha, it was a tangible and easily understood measure of progress. After a very brief discussion of the word lists, Unesha and Nancy talked about the other piece Unesha had chosen as her favorite. This piece was the draft and final copy of a letter Unesha had written to a friend in Botswana.

Data Analysis

Originally the research team interviewed six children; all interviews were audio-taped and videotaped and then cataloged and transcribed. In our first steps of analysis, we looked across all the transcripts of these interviews to examine the types of questions that interviewers asked and the responses given by children. We then looked closely at the conversational turns (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) between the interviewers and the children, and we began to notice that students seemed to have the most to say about their work when teachers could find ways to support students' talk. The interviewers' scaffolds were not always phrased as explicit questions, but varied from direct approaches such as making a statement directing the child to look at an artifact or asking the child to comment on her work, to more subtle tactics such as revoicing what a child said in order to encourage a child to extend her thinking (O'Connor & Michaels, 1996).

We also began to code how conversational scaffolds appeared to function. For example, a scaffold such as the direct question, "What else did you learn?" may function as a prompt to help Unesha talk about her work. The same scaffold, in this case questioning, can serve more than one function; in some instances interviewers also used a question to clarify what a child meant (e.g., "Can you explain so I can understand?") or to expand on what they child had been talking about by introducing a particular term (e.g., "So you learned something about punctuation?").

As we continued to code all the interviews for forms and functions of scaf-

folding, we were surprised to notice that there was one segment of talk between Nancy and Unesha that exemplified the types of scaffolding we had identified across the children's interviews. We were surprised by this because we recalled Unesha's resistance to talking about her work on the day of the interview. Yet, despite that reluctance, she and Nancy constructed talk around the portfolio artifacts that demonstrated how Nancy's careful scaffolding allowed Unesha to express many important ideas about her growth and progress in English. We also found this interesting because Unesha was not the most expressive student in the class. Her talk with Nancy revealed Unesha's areas of growth as well as some of Unesha's misconceptions.

To look closely at the discussion of portfolio artifacts and instances of scaffolding via discourse strategies, we conducted a fine-grained analysis of Unesha and Nancy's talk based on what we learned from coding across all transcripts. We returned to the audiotapes and videotapes of Unesha's interview and elaborated on the transcription by marking pauses, overlapping speech, stress, gestures, and markers such as "um" or "uh." (see transcription key in Appendix). We re-examined the conversational turns (Sacks et al., 1974) for Nancy and Unesha in the interview and again coded responses for two features: (1) the type of scaffold (e.g., question, revoicing, directing to an artifact) and (2) the type of knowledge reflected by Unesha's comments (e.g., form, function, process, misconception). Three researchers were involved in this close analysis of Unesha's transcript. We individually coded the transcript for Unesha's interview and then met to discuss the coding and refine our categories and definitions. Where researchers disagreed on their coding, we worked toward a consensus on what was taking place.

Because the knowledge constructed during interviews was largely mediated by spoken discourse (Cazden, 1988), we focused closely on oral scaffolds. Taking Wells' (1999) work into consideration, we examined the scaffolds to determine whether they seemed to limit or encourage the student response. Although we focused on the talk between interviewers and students, written artifacts were also important in mediating children's understandings of their progress and acted as occasional scaffolds in Nancy and Unesha's talk (Palinscar, 1998).

We identified nine strategies that Nancy used in talking with Unesha. They are summarized in Table 1 on the following page. In the following section, we present a transcript to explain these strategies.

FINDINGS

In this section, we foreground one segment of talk between Nancy and Unesha. In doing so, we hope to provide a more authentic feel for the conversation that occurred between Unesha and Nancy around the written artifacts. Examining a

Table 1.
Discourse Strategies Used to Scaffold Exploration of Portfolio Artifacts

Discourse Strategies	Examples	Explanation
Questioning to:		
Prompt	"What else did you learn?"	Nancy uses a straightforward prompt to elicit a response.
Clarify	"Can you explain so I can understand?"	Authentic clarification questions are asked to clear up misunderstandings or confusion.
Expand	"But they [the words] were needed?" "So you learned something about punctuation?"	Questions Nancy asks to build upon, extend, or direct Unesha's attention in new ways, for example, by introducing terms or ideas which Unesha implies but does not state directly.
Summarize	"Oh, something didn't make sense and so then you added some words so it would make sense?"	Questions asked more as a vehicle for Nancy to recap what Unesha has said or perhaps tie together various details without expanding.
Revoicing to:		
Clarify	*No examples.	On the surface many revoicing statements have the look of clarification. A closer look reveals that all of these revoicings are introduced by Nancy to expand upon Unesha's comments rather than truly clarify confusions.
Expand	"O.K., you learned about how to write a closing in a letter, an ending."	Nancy restates Unesha's ideas or words to build upon, extend, or direct Unesha's attention in new ways. In the example here, she introduces the formal term "closing" with Unesha's term "ending."

Table 1. (continued)
Discourse Strategies Used to Scaffold Exploration of Portfolio Artifacts

Discourse Strategies	Examples	Explanation
Summarize	"You talked about learning some words, how to spell them, and you talked about where to start your letter and how...."	These statements recap what has been discussed immediately prior to their introduction without expanding on Unesha's ideas. Revoicing ideas allows "wait time" for Unesha to think and provides a list of ideas talked about.
Statements to:		
Direct to an artifact	"Here I see one. And here" <i>[pointing to artifact]</i>	
Expand	"It stands for post script." "Postscript means this is something added after you've finished your letter."	These statements expand or add to concepts related to the discussion but are different from revoicings. Nancy introduces knowledge in a direct way rather than drawing on ideas previously articulated or implied by Unesha.
Summarize	*No examples.	We have categorized summary statements as "revoicing" because Nancy uses them to recap what has just been discussed in the prior conversation rather than to provide comprehensive summaries.

longer chunk of transcript instead of parsing up many interviews and presenting brief exchanges also allows us to carefully unpack the types of strategies used by Nancy and the types of responses constructed by Unesha. In the transcript segments to follow, we identify and explain the nine strategies (see Table 1) that Nancy used while talking with Unesha. Although the transcripts also portray some missed opportunities and breakdowns in communication, most of the interactions between Unesha and Nancy reveal Nancy's role in helping Unesha to explore and expand her explanations and knowledge. As such, they

demonstrate the importance of a teacher's talk in scaffolding student reflection and the role that discourse plays in mediating reflection on portfolio artifacts.

In the excerpts following, we pick up the conversation between Nancy and Unesha as they discuss the drafts of Unesha's letter and what Unesha says she learned. (For ease in discussion, we divided the longer transcript into three smaller segments which are numbered consecutively.) Immediately prior to the talk, Nancy asked Unesha to talk briefly about the letter. Unesha told Nancy that she liked the letter because she "really wrote a lot." She also described the details she put into the letter—how in the United States, she had classes such as gym and music and a special class to learn English. As Nancy and Unesha continued their talk, they often referred to the two drafts by pointing or reading them silently. Such references demonstrate the role that the artifact itself plays in supporting Unesha and Nancy's talk (Palinscar, 1998).

To help readers visualize the way in which Nancy and Unesha oriented themselves to the text as a tangible scaffold for their talk, we have italicized physical gestures made while exploring the letters. The Appendix contains a transcription key to explain other markings used in transcribing. The transcript excerpts presented demonstrate Nancy's attempts to scaffold Unesha's talk and Unesha's ability to actively engage in exploring her own knowledge of language forms and functions.

Transcript Section One: Revoicing

We pick up the conversation after Unesha has described how she wrote the draft by herself but then worked with the teacher to make some changes.

- 1 N: So you were working with a teacher to find out what changes
- 2 you needed to make before you wrote this nice final draft.
- 3 *[Runs her hand over the top page of the final draft.]*
- 4 U: Not mine *[Looks at the top draft which is a photocopy of her*
- 5 *final letter.]* // This is mine. // *[Points to draft underneath the*
- 6 *final.]*
- 7 N: What changes, do you remember? Are there some things you
- 8 learned in making those changes? What kind of changes did
- 9 you have to make? *//// [Lifts final draft to reveal rough draft.]*
- 10 U: Like I had to change, um, // I didn't really know how to spell
- 11 "teacher" so I just, that, I just had to sound it out because
- 12 sometimes tea::cher, tea:::, did that and then the teacher came.
- 13 I asked if it was right and somebody said... *inaudible.*
- 14 N: So you learned some new spellings for words like "teacher."
- 15 U: Yes.
- 16 N: Anything else you had to change that you learned something
- 17 from? *//////// [Unesha is looking at the letter.]* I see some little

- 18 carets here *[pointing to draft]*. Is that
 19 U: Yes
 20 N: where you made some changes?
 21 U: No. I just thought, I just left some leftover words out and then
 22 I had to like put some words // I had to put, when I did my
 23 final draft, I didn't like have to put a caret. *[Points to draft.]* I
 24 just had to keep on going with the words which have a caret I
 25 had to put them straight.
 26 N: Do you remember why those words were added? *[Taps her*
 27 *finger at edge of paper.]*
 28 U: Because I didn't use them ///
 29 N: But they were needed?
 30 U: Yeah
 31 N: Why were they needed?
 32 U: Because **itdidn'tmakesense**
 33 N: Oh, something didn't make sense and so then you added some
 34 words *[points to where words were added]* so it would make
 35 more sense?
 36 U: Yeah.
 37 N: Hmm. So is that something that you learned.
 38 U: Yeah. /// And if I write a letter, I need to start by the name.
 39 *[Points to greeting.]* I have to indent.

The transcript above begins with Nancy revoicing and expanding upon a comment that Unesha had made about the process of constructing her letter. Unesha had acknowledged that a teacher helped her with some parts of the letter. Nancy's responses, both the gesture of running her hand across the final draft and introducing the term *final draft*, expand upon the knowledge Unesha had previously introduced in talking about changes and drafts. However, rather than replying, in Lines 4 and 5 Unesha ignores Nancy's statement and says, "Not mine. This is mine."

Although Nancy does not ask for clarification, Unesha made a similar comment when she showed her portfolio to her mother. During that interview, it became clear that Unesha was referring to the photocopy when she said, "Not mine." She knew she had done a final draft, but the one she saw in front of her came from a machine. She then recalled that her teachers had given her the original handwritten final draft so that she could mail it to her friend. In juxtaposing the two discussions, we see that Unesha was trying to voice a legitimate concern. She was unable to immediately put her intended thought into words. It is likely that her word choice—rather abruptly delivered: "Not mine. This is mine"—was interpreted by Nancy as another gesture of resistance, and this led Nancy to ignore Unesha's remark rather than choosing to follow up. Despite this misunderstanding, Unesha continues to read from both drafts of the letter

as she and Nancy continue to talk about it, and it does not seem to affect her ability to examine her understanding.

As noted above, Nancy does not respond to Unesha's comment that the letter is not hers. Instead Nancy asks Unesha to say more about the process of taking the letter from the rough to final draft. In Line 7 she uses straightforward prompts such as "What changes, do you remember?" To help Unesha think about how her drafts have changed, Nancy introduces three questions about changes. In repeating the word *change* Nancy picks up a theme that was originally introduced by Unesha. Nancy's repetition of the word *change* reiterates the importance of the writing process and also what Unesha learned in making changes. The rephrasing of several questions related to change also allows time for Unesha to begin thinking of a response.

Unesha responds that she needed to change the word *teacher* because she didn't know how to spell it, a point that Nancy echoes. Nancy then asks what else Unesha learned, but she does not get an immediate response, so she directs Unesha to a particular part of the letter by pointing out the carets Unesha had used and asking if they represent changes. As a student still learning English, Unesha's response is a bit unorthodox and ambiguous as she states that the carets are there because she "just left some leftover words out" and that in the final draft she "just had to keep on going with the words" and left the caret out. Thus, it is not immediately clear if she used the carets to add words or to leave them out. Nancy pushes her to explain why the words were added. Unesha's answer that the words were left out because she "didn't use them" is again ambiguous, and it is not clear if she really understands the reason why they were added. Nancy then asks the question, "But they were needed?" which expands upon Unesha's reply and also contains information which directs Unesha toward a particular response which she comes to in Line 32 when she says, "Because it didn't make sense."

Unesha's last response is particularly revealing. She says, "Because it didn't make sense" with emphasis and almost as one word with a hint of exasperation as if to say to Nancy, "I know why it was needed. Why don't you?" Unesha's emphasis on meaning makes it clear that her use of the caret in the editing process is more than just a mere skill or convention she has acquired as part of the editing process. Unesha grasps that one underlying function served by a caret is to add extra words so that a sentence makes sense. Nancy plays a critical role in this exchange by providing questions that serve as prompts and as supports to help reveal Unesha's knowledge about the function of an editing convention. In so doing Nancy demonstrates what Stone (1993) refers to as prolepsis—the act of anticipating and projecting what Unesha knows in order to scaffold Unesha's talk and reflection so that she can express her ideas clearly.

In addition to questions that prompt Unesha's talk about the artifact (e.g., "Is that where you made some changes?"), Nancy also voices some of what

Unesha says. Revoicing, a term we borrow from O'Connor and Michaels (1996), is a restatement, summary, or paraphrase of words or ideas expressed by a student. O'Connor and Michaels note that a "teacher's revoicing gives added time and space, and heightened clarity or elaboration to the original student contribution" (p. 80). In Lines 1–2 and 14 above, Nancy revoices Unesha's comments. In the first lines, Nancy expands upon Unesha's talk about drafting and revision. In the second instance, Nancy revoices to summarize what Unesha has been telling her about making changes to spelling. In a similar manner, some of Nancy's questions sometimes function to summarize (e.g., "Oh, something didn't make sense and so then you added some words so it would make more sense?") or to expand as when Nancy helps Unesha articulate why she used the carets to add words by asking, "But they [the words] were needed?" Using revoicing and questioning as strategies, Nancy assists Unesha in exploring the process of editing and revising as well as a purpose for revising—sense making. We see that Unesha talks about what she did and, more importantly, why she did it.

Transcript Section Two: Missed Opportunity to Reconceptualize

In the next excerpt Nancy and Unesha talk about the greeting of the letter and about indenting. As we will see, the discussion does not go as smoothly as that in the previous excerpt.

- 38 U: Yeah. /// And if I write a letter, I need to start by the name.
 39 *[Points to greeting.]* I have to indent.
 40 N: Oh, where you started the first sentence, you wanted to indent.
 41 U: So if I start like at "Dear," without indenting *[points to dear]*,
 42 I would have, I would just like write another, not like a real
 43 letter just... *inaudible*.
 44 N: Okay. I'm looking at the second page of your letter. *[Turns to*
 45 *final draft page 2.]* I see that at the beginning you indented, but
 46 I see other places where you indented. Do you remember
 47 anything about that? // Here I see one. // And here *[pointing to*
 48 *the paper.]*
 49 U: Because I was starting another sentence so I had to indent some
 50 other parts *[pointing to paper in various places.]*
 51 N: But you were starting another sentence here too. *[Points to*
 52 *paper.]*
 53 U: No, I didn't say how.
 54 N: Can you explain how so I understand?
 55 U: I had to indent some of the ending parts because I didn't know
 56 why I did. *[Runs her hand across the paper.]*
 57 N: But you didn't understand the reason you needed to indent?

- 58 U: No. [*Shakes her head.*]
59 N: Was there anything else that, um, you remember learning from
60 this?

Unesha volunteers two pieces of information that she has learned: that in starting a letter she should write someone's name and that she should indent. Nancy revoices what she believes Unesha has said, that the first sentence should be indented. However, Unesha is talking about indenting the greeting, "Dear." She indicates that "Dear" serves to make the letter a "real letter," but she seems unable to express her thought, and her voice becomes softer. Nancy chooses to focus on Unesha's comments about indenting rather than her comment about a "real letter." In an attempt to clarify and to expand Unesha's awareness, Nancy directs attention to the letter, pointing out where Unesha had indented the first sentence. Still somewhat confused, Unesha states that she was indenting because she was starting a new sentence. The confusion leads Nancy to ask several questions directly tied to clarification, for example, "Can you explain so I can understand?" When she finally determines that Unesha did not understand why she should indent, Nancy introduces another question prompt to encourage Unesha to reflect on what she has learned.

In this instance, both Nancy's attempt to scaffold Unesha's exploration of indentation and Unesha's attempt to explain the underlying function of indentation are unsuccessful. Unesha is clearly familiar with the term *indent* but cannot clearly articulate its function or how it is used. Ultimately, it is clear that Unesha has an understanding of the form of letters and paragraphs, that there is a place for indenting, but she is not clear why various sentences are indented and others are not. Nancy's comments and attempts to scaffold appear to make Unesha a bit defensive as in Lines 47 and 51, where Nancy points out that Unesha had not indented every new sentence and Unesha replies, "I didn't say how." This ultimately results in Unesha's admission that she "didn't know why" she was indenting. Nancy asks for further clarification of this when she asks, "But you didn't understand the reason you needed to indent?" Following this, Nancy moves on to another general prompt rather than attempting to clarify Unesha's understanding of indentation.

One of the dilemmas in talking with English language learners about their work is that it is, at times, difficult to determine whether their reflection is limited by their semantic and syntactic knowledge or whether they are confused about a concept. In the excerpt above, it is plausible that Unesha is unable to express herself and that Nancy is unable to help because Unesha lacks knowledge in English rather than an understanding of writing conventions. We do have evidence, however, that Unesha's struggle here went beyond finding the right words to express her ideas. During the interview with Unesha's mother, Mrs. Chinwe also pressed Unesha to explain why she started a new paragraph. Even with support from her mother and the interviewer, Unesha was unable to

state, even in vague terms, when to start a new paragraph. In this instance, Unesha's learning has not progressed beyond the skill level. She understands some sentences must be indented, but she does not appear to understand the underlying functions.

In the second excerpt above, although Nancy is able to come to some clarification about what Unesha appears to understand or misunderstand, she does not attempt to reteach or clarify Unesha's misunderstanding about paragraphs. In this sense, Nancy's choice represents a lost opportunity for reconceptualization (Cazden, 1988). Here, Nancy might have engaged Unesha in the process of constructing an understanding or categorizing knowledge about paragraphing, providing critical instruction and reteaching about a concept which Unesha has not yet grasped.

Transcript Section Three: Reconceptualizing

In the next section Unesha and Nancy talk about the closing of the letter. Their talk demonstrates how Nancy uses numerous statements that encourage Unesha to expand and extend her knowledge in the ways advocated by Cazden's (1988) definition of reconceptualization.

- 59 N: Was there anything else that, um, you remember learning from
60 this? You talked about learning some words, how to spell them,
61 and you talked about learning where to start your letter and
62 how, what information to write in your letter so that your
63 friend would know about your new school.
64 U: The end. [*Points to the closing.*]
65 N: Okay, you learned about how to write a closing in a letter, an
66 ending.
67 U: Yeah.
68 N: Yeah. Anything else?
69 U: I wrote "Love // Unesha" because like, um, if I just wrote
70 "Unesha," [*points to paper*] it should just be like "sincerely,"
71 "from," like that. But if I didn't, I have a question.
72 N: I do too. Do you wanta ask yours first or do you want me to
73 ask mine first?
74 U: You.
75 N: So am I understanding clearly that you knew there were
76 different choices like "from," "love," or "sincerely," and you
77 chose "love" in your closing? [*Points to paper.*]
78 U: Yeah
79 N: Okay
80 U: And I put, You should always put a, whatever that is. [*Points to*
81 *the page.*]

- 82 N: This? *[Points to the comma.]*
 83 U: Yeah
 84 N: Comma?
 85 U: Yeah. Should always put a comma after your, um, at the ending
 86 because if, if you say “from” it, it, it’ll sound like this:
 87 “fromunesha.” *[Reads as if it is one word. Moves her fingertip*
 88 *back and forth across the closing.]* And it won’t really like make
 89 a lot of sense. It has to make quite good sense.
 90 N: So what if, with the comma in there, what would it sound like?
 91 U: It would say, “Love, Unesha”
 92 N: So it’s slower and there’s kind of like a pause in the middle?
 93 U: Yeah.
 94 N: So you learned something about punctuation?
 95 U: This p.s.
 96 U: This p.s. *[Points to paper.]*
 97 N: Oh, yeah. Can you explain that?
 98 U: This p.s. it means like if you wrote a letter and then you
 99 wanted somebody to write you back, you have to put the p.s.,
 100 “Please write me back.” like that. So the p.s., I don’t know what
 101 it stands for.
 102 N: You don’t know what it stands for? But you like to put it on the
 103 end *[points to the p.s.]* so that you can write the message
 104 “Please write me back”?
 105 U: I don’t know what it stands for. Tell me, you told me.
 106 N: It stands for postscript. *[Points to p.s.]*

Nancy begins with a typical question prompt, “Was there anything else that you remember learning from this?” but follows this with several sentences to recap what Unesha has already talked about. Following on the heels of Unesha’s unsuccessful attempt to explain indenting, the recap is important because it allows Nancy, as teacher, to point out what Unesha has been able to do. Supporting students’ achievements and developing a positive disposition toward writing and language learning were a major concern for Nancy in the classroom. Nancy thus validates Unesha’s previous talk and invites her to continue. In addition, Nancy’s recap once again provides Unesha with a chance to pause and think.

Unesha quickly takes up Nancy’s invitation by saying that she has learned about “the end” of letters. Nancy revoices this and expands it by introducing the formal term *closing* for a letter’s ending. As Unesha continues to talk about the closing, she introduces the idea that there are different types of closings to choose from and that choosing “love” is different than other closings such as “sincerely” or “from.” At this point Unesha states that she has a question. Nancy replies that she also has a question, and she offers to let Unesha choose

who asks a question first. After Unesha indicates Nancy should ask her question, Nancy begins, “So am I understanding clearly” and goes on to clarify that Unesha did in fact understand that there were different closings in a letter. In this instance we might expect Nancy to make the next conversational move to allow Unesha to ask the question she had referred to in Line 71; however, it is Unesha who directs the conversation to the letter to point out that the greeting is always followed by a “whatever that is.” Although this could be seen as a missed opportunity because Unesha chooses to redirect the conversation, we do not see this as a missed opportunity but as evidence that Unesha is following a pattern typical of conversational turns. In her turn, she chooses which topic to introduce. Nancy steps in to support her by offering the term *comma* which Unesha continues to use as she talks about the closing.

Here again we see Unesha demonstrate knowledge that goes beyond just the application of a learned skill. In Lines 85–89 Unesha demonstrates three types of understanding. First, she demonstrates that she knows a comma needs to follow a closing. This in and of itself is rather unremarkable. Second, Unesha goes beyond this to demonstrate her awareness of the function of punctuation and an awareness of illocutionary force, that is, the notion that punctuation helps us capture, to some extent, what we do with our voice when we speak. On her own, she extends this to demonstrate an additional piece of knowledge, the importance of sense making. She observes that without a comma, the closing would read as one word run together “fromUnesha” and it wouldn’t make sense. In Unesha’s own words, “It has to make quite good sense.” Third, Unesha is also able to explain why to use a p.s. at the end of the letter and directly asks Nancy to explain to her what the p.s. stands for. Unesha is assisted in both explanations by Nancy who acts as a guide to extend and assist Unesha in exploring her conceptual knowledge. As Cazden (1988) suggests, the shift is not a dramatic correction of Unesha’s ideas, but rather a gentle prodding that encourages Unesha’s uptake on referents such as “comma” and “closing.” More importantly, the support helps Unesha voice her understanding of relationships between written and spoken language, for example, the notion that commas help us to slow our reading, pause, and make sense.

DISCUSSION

Although the segment of transcript presented here is fairly short—only about 4.5 minutes in real time—the transcript demonstrates the potential for student reflections in interactions scaffolded by artifacts and teacher discourse. In the segments described, Unesha talks about the editing and writing process (e.g., changing spelling, using carets, revising); the need for written language to make sense; greetings and closings for a letter; and the use of the function of p.s. While these matters of technical editing regarding the conventions of print may

seem unimportant in comparison to matters of content and substance, they are emblematic of other critical issues.

First, because Unesha has produced a letter and taken it through several drafts, we have clear documentation that she has constructed a letter and demonstrated her ability to edit her writing to make sense in addition to using conventions such as commas, greetings, paragraphs, and the like. The letters and other artifacts in her portfolio document how she has met or is working on several standards listed in the state's English language arts framework. Even the limited items in Unesha's portfolio help Nancy and Meredith to address their concerns about providing documentation of English language learning to the OCR and others more concerned about students gaining access to and mastering an official curriculum. Unesha's discussion with Nancy also reveals some of her misconceptions and provides useful information that Nancy and Meredith can use in instruction. We hope, however, that what readers take away from Unesha's interaction is more profound than just an awareness of what Unesha can produce, what conventions she has control over, or what she does not yet understand.

The second and more profound point to be taken from Unesha's example is that the written artifacts alone represent only one aspect of what Unesha can do; how she understands that work is the more critical matter. Unesha's articulation of the function of various conventions such as a closing, comma, or caret does not take place in isolation, nor is her knowledge limited to the correct use of these tools. In Unesha's development as a reader and writer in English, her ability to articulate the functions of these tools is a critical step because it demonstrates an understanding of writing that goes well beyond its surface features. In most instances Unesha is able to articulate and demonstrate that she understands why these tools should be used. She relates that the purpose of these conventions is to help with sense making and that some tools, such as commas, also help to represent patterns of speech in writing.

Ultimately, we find that Unesha's reflection does not arise on its own but is socially constructed with important scaffolding from Nancy. In Nancy's interactions with Unesha, we see how complex the process of reflection and interaction around artifacts can be. As Rodgers (2000) has observed, "What seems to be a casual conversation between child and adult in the context of reading and writing is actually an excellent example of a highly skilled adult moving a child through his zone of proximal development" (p. 79). This also holds true in Nancy's case; she must make on-the-spot decisions about how to support and encourage Unesha while avoiding a traditional teacher script of known-answer questions. At the same time Nancy must think about what to ask and how, without overwhelming Unesha with open-ended questions. In this intricate and cognitively demanding task, Nancy must presuppose information that Unesha has not yet shared while also monitoring Unesha's replies. It is likely that these

processes are similar for teachers working with native English speakers, but we suspect that the process is made more complex because Nancy must determine whether Unesha's talk about her work is unclear because she truly does not understand, as when she talked about paragraphs, or if Unesha's talk is unclear due to unorthodox syntax or semantics. Obviously, all teachers must make such decisions occasionally when assisting children with reflection, but we posit that the intensive, on-the-spot decision making and scaffolding that goes on during a discussion with an English language learner is likely to be much more complex for both teachers and children than in those discussions with children who are highly proficient in English.

Although there are missed opportunities along the way, our reading of the interaction suggests that Nancy succeeds in getting Unesha to talk and in helping Unesha extend her talk beyond what she could do on her own. As such, Nancy demonstrates that she is working, at least in the excerpts presented above, in Unesha's zone of proximal development. The dialogue between Unesha and Nancy provides a context in which Unesha can articulate or illustrate metalinguistic and metacognitive knowledge where Unesha's explorations are supported by Nancy's discourse strategies and by references to the written artifacts. Nancy, we think, allows Unesha to reach just beyond her grasp in developing these important reflection and self-evaluation tools.

We realize the limitations of presenting a short segment of transcript such as the one explained above. It is important to recall that Unesha's interview with Nancy also included talk that was less insightful than that presented here. Both Nancy and Unesha are novices when it comes to reflective talk across a portfolio, and due to the brief excerpt we have chosen, Unesha's talk contributes less to our understanding of reflection across a set of portfolio artifacts and more to our understanding of what one learner can say about several written artifacts related to one another.

CONCLUSION

We did not focus on Unesha because she was the student who was most unusual in ability or performance. Unesha struggles with school and must work hard to learn English. Yet she provides wonderful insights into her own learning, in part, due to her own metacognitive development, but also due to Nancy's scaffolding. Whereas the ability of some students to explain and explore their own work may not be surprising given their school success or agility in acquiring English, Unesha demonstrates that even those students who are struggling are capable of discussing and reflecting on their own growth and progress. Unesha reminds us how much we, at times, underestimate the ability of children both to perform curricular tasks and to reflect on their performance of these tasks; when we make such underestimations we do a disservice to stu-

dents who are becoming proficient in multiple languages. Even so, we celebrate what Unesha knows and can do; we also acknowledge that there are times when the discourse breaks down and language barriers prevent clear communication between Nancy and Unesha.

At the outset of this article, we explained how the research conducted with Unesha and other children evolved out of a need expressed by Unesha's ESL teachers, Meredith and Nancy, to identify more meaningful assessment tools to document students' growth and progress. Just as it is critical for students to revisit their portfolios and reflect on what they have learned, it is also critical for teachers and researchers to reflect on practices and learning. It seems fitting, then, that we close with a quote from Unesha's teachers, whose words mirror the learning of all of us involved in this project. They write,

"We have realized the importance of the documentation of growth that may not be reflected on more formal standardized instruments and tests and check-off report cards...[M]uch of the assessment is best addressed with the student...[who] is critically important in communicating to others, including teachers and parents and self, what s/he has learned. Instead of a judgment apart from the student, now students are much more involved in assessing their own growth. Before we told them how they were doing; now they can tell us."

They conclude by stating,

"We have been able to see how the portfolio is an assessment tool and an opportunity to review naturally what has been learned so that it is not forgotten, and a chance for the student to reinforce a positive perspective on her/his learning" (McVee & Pearson, 1997, p. 21).

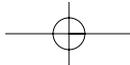
These comments represent the ways in which Meredith and Nancy put their students at center stage; they listen carefully to what students like Unesha have to say about their own learning. In uncovering what students say they know and can do, Meredith and Nancy gather vital information about their learners so that they may tailor instruction to meet the needs of individual students.

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APPENDIX

Transcription Key

Transcription Code	Represents
//	pause, each / represents one second
<u>underline</u>	overlapping speech
:::	elongated vowel
FromUnesha	no space, words spoken without a pause between them
<i>...inaudible</i>	words left out because they were inaudible on tape
bold	words stressed for emphasis in speech
<i>[points]</i>	gestures

