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Video-Recorded Collective Reviews. A Powerful Tool to Teach and Investigate the Process of Teaching and Learning to Write in a New Genre.

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Conference on College Composition & Communication

Video-Recorded Collective Reviews.

A Powerful Tool to Teach and Investigate the Process of Teaching and Learning to Write in a New Genre

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My focus

- My experience with collective reviews (CR).
- CR: feedback workshop sessions in which several students and the instructor take part.
- In the pandemic, when CR were video-recorded:
  - their potential as instructional tools was enhanced
  - their transcripts became research data to investigate the teaching and learning of new genres.

Argentina context

- Writing centers or writing tutors do not exist.
- Writing seminars usually teach grammar, types of texts, forms of citation… outside a writing project or a relevant topic to write about.
- Peer review sessions are extremely rare.
- When I first proposed peer reviews in graduate writing seminars, students felt insecure in making relevant comments on a classmate's drafts as well as distrustful of the comments received from peers.
- If students don’t know something, we must find the way to teach it
  - by devoting in-class time to help them perform the activity in context.

Collective reviews (CR)

- Inspired by writing groups (Gere, 1987), thesis writing circles (Aitchison, 2003), and Latin American instructional innovations (Lerner, 2001), I began to conduct CR to teach how
  - to comment on someone else's draft
  - to revise one's own draft
- The instructor gives some initial hints on how to proceed and offers her oral feedback on the draft after the students have given theirs.
- This activity takes place in every session.
- Through CR students gradually learn to revise and respond to peers' drafts while learning to write in new contexts and genres.

Collective reviews

- The instructor subtly regulates the oral review process
  - does not share her point of view about the draft at the beginning to allow students' knowledge to unfold
  - intervenes with questions
  - provides feedback at the end, so that students can learn her review criteria.
- Students progressively learn to revise their classmates’ and their own drafts as they participate in CR.
- Learning takes place both by doing and by watching how a more experienced participant (the instructor) does.

Teaching in the pandemic

- During the covid-19 pandemic
- I taught a 3-semester (60 hours) thesis proposal writing seminar
- in the Master's in Teacher Education
- at the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (Argentina)
  - The master’s program entails two-years of coursework plus a thesis.
  - The thesis implies carrying out a research project on an educator’s activity.
- In each of the 15 4-hour monthly lessons on the Zoom platform,
- online CR were automatically recorded on video.
- This fortuitous circumstance opened new teaching and research opportunities.

Collective reviews as the starting point to teach the new genre

- I will call "**action**" the activity of commenting the drafts that the graduate students and the instructor performed during the CR, in particular the criteria they used to comment, i.e., the intellectual work they were performing.
- Following Delia Lerner (2001)'s pedagogical approach, during the sessions of the seminar, the "action" involved in CR was addressed also as an "object of **reflection**", being explicitly discussed.
- The "action" was also considered as an "object of **systematization**" when generalizable features of the genre were abstracted from a particular draft—becoming relevant to all those who write a thesis proposal and not just the author of the text under review in class.
- The instructor taught "in situ, during the revision, . . . at the point of practical need" (Bazerman, 2009: 291), providing "explicit teaching to the task at hand" (Bazerman, 1997a: 1).

Collective reviews to externalize thinking

- Commenting the drafts, watching their instructor's comments and reflecting upon the criteria used to comment helped students gradually become aware of the thinking practices that the genre entails, in line with Gordon Wells' claim:
  - to understand "the mental activities involved," students "need to participate jointly in . . . writing events with their teachers or more competent peers, in which these internal activities are externalized and thus made available for appropriation in talk about the text" (Wells, 1990a, p. 16).
- Collectively reviewing the drafts throughout the seminar became an opportunity to **externalize and reflect on** the research writer's intellectual work in crafting the thesis proposal.

From a research point of view

- The analysis of the CR made it possible to examine the interactions between graduate students and the instructor
- It also gave access to traces of the participants' mental activities at play, as Anne Gere and Andrew Abbott suggest:

> "Researchers interested in writing processes need to give more attention to writing groups as a source of information about what writers do when they write" (1985, p. 378).

- The analysis of video-recorded CR helped me glimpsed the socialization process in this domain.

Analysis of video-recorded CR to access the process of genre learning

- Within the framework of Rhetorical Genre Studies and Bazerman (2009)'s notion of **social shaping of cognition by genre learning**, I examined the transcripts of the sessions to find out what specialized cognitive practices these master's students start developing over the process of writing their thesis proposals.
- The transcripts of the video-recorded CR allowed me access to
  "the reasoning the writer used to produce" and comment their drafts (Bazerman, 2017: 25).
- The transcripts showed how the instructor intervened systematically to help raise awareness of the core features of the thesis proposal as a genre, and the activity system it represents (Russell, 1997).
- Since the workshop spanned 3 semesters, I have begun to analyzed the development of graduate students' genre knowledge.

Five types of cognitive work that the learning of a thesis proposal as a genre drives

- I will share my analysis of the interactions during the sessions in the first third of the seminar to show how learning to write in this novel genre transforms the writer.
- The process of writing the initial section of the thesis proposal implied beginning to perform novel "roles" for these graduate students:
  - I. Writer, II. Epistemic contributor, III. Thinker of the disciplinary relevance of a research topic, IV. Producer of systematic knowledge, and V. Researcher focusing on the teaching practice.
- These roles represent five categories of thinking practices driven by the writing of the thesis proposal in this master's program.

I. Seeing themselves as writers and not only as readers

- Many graduate students began to think of themselves as writers for the first time. In their roles as teachers, they would consider themselves mainly as readers.

  - Autobiography as a writer? First of all, I must say that the assignment surprised me. I have never thought of myself as a writer! (**Graciela**)
  - My history as a writer (although I feel that the word is too big for me). (**Mariana**)
  - I don't consider myself a "writer." (**Dora**)
  - It would be easier for me to write an autobiography as a reader. (**Selene**)

II. Constructing knowledge problems and not only solving practical problems

- In their attempts to draft the first section of their research proposal, graduate students began to think about epistemic problems, i.e., issues that needed to be understood, explained, etc. In contrast, as teachers, they were used to facing practical problems and solving them in practical terms.

  - **Instructor**: What does the reader expect from my thesis? (1.00:42:56)
  - **Sonia**: I believe that they expect that it can give an answer to some problematic issues, . . . that it can improve a situation in a specific field. . . . [It] has to solve some problems in education, . . . I have to find a solution to something or improve something. (1. 00:46:12)
  - **Mirta**: . . . that it could be an input, . . . a possible solution, in a territory, in a proposal even to the Ministry of Education. (1. 1:04:30)
  - **Fabiana**: . . . a contribution to improve specific practices. (1.1:05:25)
  - **Morena**: Two small words would come to my mind: applicability, or practicality, . . . and I would also think it could be socially useful. (1. 1:06:16)

III. Considering the potential disciplinary significance of a research topic (its relevance for a field of study) and not only the personal interest that it represents

- In the first session, the instructor prompted students' discussion about the rhetorical context of a research proposal and the significance of a study. A student shared her emerging awareness of addressivity and the need to consider the disciplinary interest of any research:

> **Katia**: [Y]ou are introducing an element now with this socio-rhetorical approach, . . . I had not thought before, I had not included this in what interests me when I thought about the thesis project, in the assignment you gave us. I had not thought about who would be interested in reading it. I had only thought about what I was interested in producing. . . . I say, of course! How I did not take it into account! How I could not see it! . . . Now I would have to review my thesis topic because I was thinking about what interested me, but the truth is that I don't know who this might be of interest to. (1. 00:30:45)

IV. Generating research questions aligned with the methods that could address them

- Graduate students began to think that research questions —related to the knowledge they aspire to contribute— need to be considered in connection to a method that is able to provide empirical evidence to answer them. Before, as teachers, i.e., "communicators" of knowledge, they did not need to reflect upon the relationship between knowledge and method.
  - **Instructor**: What data do I need to answer [this question]? . .. I am trying to align, ensure coherence . . . between questions and . . . methodology. . . . What data do I need to answer [this question]? (1. 2:45:38).
  - **Noelia**: I would like you to repeat it . . . you've lost me. (1.2:47:40) . . .
  - **Instructor**: What data do I need, . . . to answer the question? (silence for 4 seconds) Can anybody risk an answer? (1.2:49:00)
  - **Sonia**: I need to have a film, a video recording of the lesson, to observe the interventions because . . . (1. 2: 49.07)
  - **Instructor**: Sonia is saying that we need to observe a lesson. Because if I want to see the interventions, I need to observe the class. . . . Every time I wonder what the teacher does and how they intervene, I need to observe lessons and record them. Yes? I start relating questions with methodology.

IV. Generating research questions aligned with the methods that could address them

- Students mismatched research questions and methodological approaches several times. Several times, the instructor promoted similar reflections:

  - **Instructor**: How can I answer the following question? [She reads:] “How does a teacher reflect on the gap between . . . what they planned and what they were able to do?” (1.2:51:50)
  - **Lola**: An interview, could it be?
  - **Instructor**: What kind of interview?
  - **Lola**: Self-confrontation?
  - **Instructor**: There is it! . . . That question requires a self-confrontation interview to be answered.

- Thinking of a method to address a knowledge gap is part of a social and cognitive practice triggered by writing a research proposal. As a member of a research community, the instructor noticed that the students were far from performing this practice and recurrently guided them to consider it.

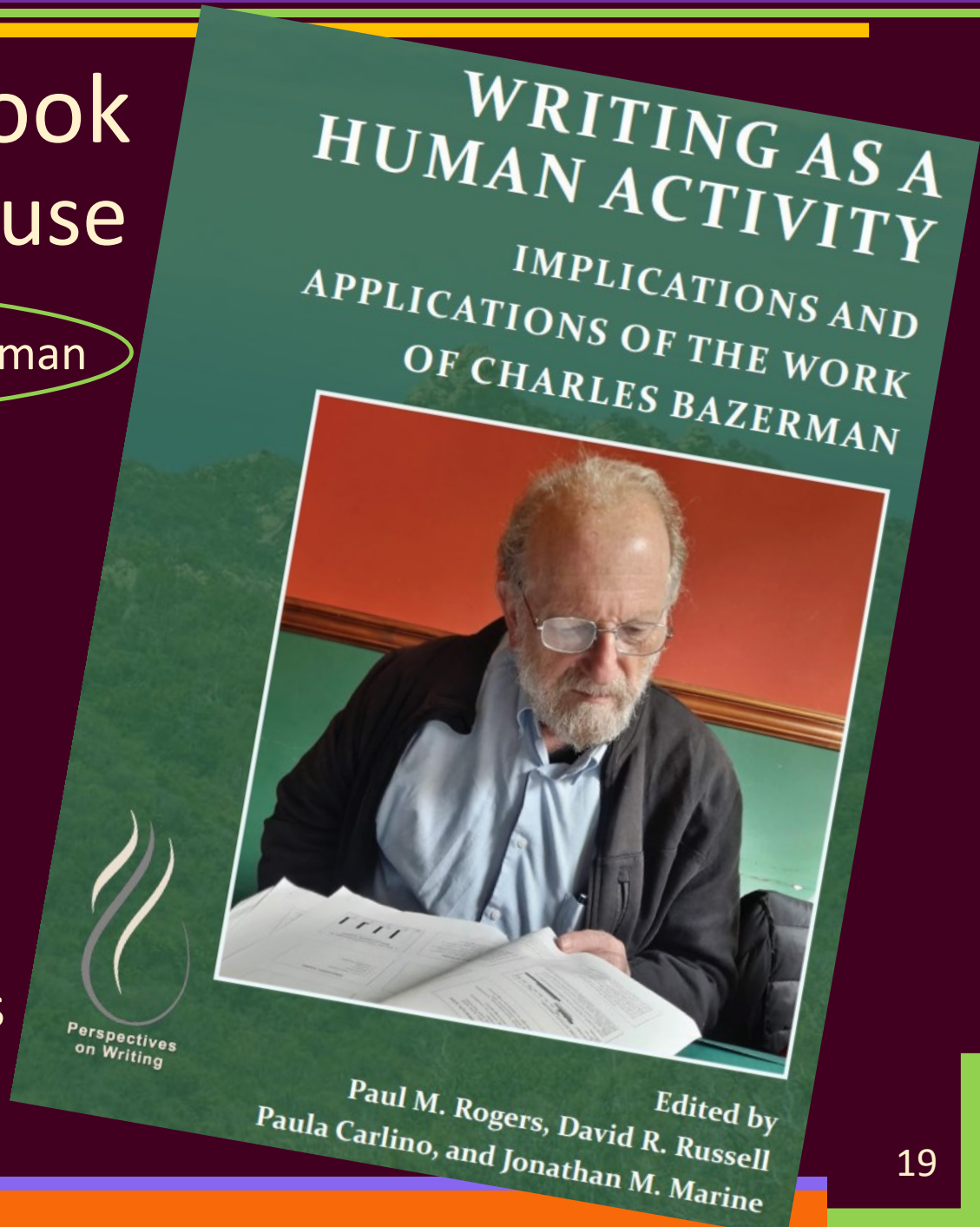
V. Focusing the professional tensions that educators face in a particular professional situation and not only the difficulties that the students show in their learning process

- The need to write a research proposal prompted that the graduate students shifted their attention from their students' learning to the teaching activity because the master's program requires them to observe an educator (principal, teacher, instructor) in a working situation and to reflect on it afterwards. Focusing on what an educator does and thinks was laborious for these participants since, in their teaching role, they were used to looking primarily at their own students.

Chapter 1 in brand new book online from WAC Clearinghouse

https://wac.colostate.edu/books/perspectives/human

- My chapter shows how
- the process of learning to write in a novel genre
- brought about the need to embark on
- new thinking practices and
- to play roles typical of members who belong to specialized communities in which the genre is used.



Pedagogical and research implications

- Since writing in a new genre requires students learning novel disciplinary cognitive practices and not just formal features of discourse, institutional programs and instructors should be aware of this complex process and provide for the necessary resources and time.
- The analysis of video-recorded CR can serve as a powerful research tool to investigate the process of teaching and learning, and in particular, the slow appropriation of new genres.

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Thank you!

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