

CHAPTER 3.

ADAPTING, NOT RESISTING: A
PRELIMINARY UNDERSTANDING
OF TAs' RELATIONSHIPS WITH
WRITING PEDAGOGY EDUCATION

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In composition scholarship about writing pedagogy education (WPE), the term “resistant” has been applied to TAs when they are not conforming to the standards or teachings of a given teacher, department, or institution.¹ This term implies active agency in deciding to rebuke the task or diverge from the curriculum, and it actively hinders mentorship and professionalization. For example, I assume I was once labeled as “resistant” when I began my doctoral program at a public R1 university. Prior to a required pre-service orientation, I was asked to submit a syllabus and assignment sheets to the composition office, and even though they provided standardized instructional materials, I thought it’d be best to design something I was more confident in delivering. I wanted the familiar. While the award-winning first-year composition (FYC) program was grounded in rhetoric and transfer theories, I didn’t understand what “*stasis*” or “transfer” meant or how to teach these concepts—even after a grueling three-day pre-service orientation program.² I arrived to this program without any formal WPE from my MLA program. In my MLA program, I was not required to take any pedagogy courses or participate in a practicum, as is more typical of MA programs that provide TAs. Before starting to teach a 2-2 load, I attended a one-day workshop that focused on curriculum values (WAC), teacher *ethos*, syllabi development, and grading practices. And yet—as I was asked to come into the

1 See Bishop 1990, 1997; Welch 1993; Rankin 1994; Powell et al. 2002; Farris 2002; Ebest 2005; Reid 2009; Reid, Estrem & Belcheir 2012.

2 At my R1 institution, first-year Ph.D. and MA students were required to attend a 3-day pre-service orientation. The orientation was comprised of workshops, lectures, and guest speakers. In workshops, attendees practiced effective grading strategies, mapping issues in a debate (*stasis*), and identifying Aristotelian appeals, to name a few. Orientation was designed to be a quick-and-dirty introduction to the writing program’s values and focused on what to expect when teaching the first composition course of a two-course sequence.

office to discuss necessary revisions to my materials—I was confused and angry because what I had submitted was a design encouraged by my previous institutions, which were based in WAC curricula. I was resistant; I was like “Barbara” in Sally Barr Ebest’s *Changing the Way We Teach Writing and Resistance in the Training of Teaching Assistants*.

At the 2017 CWPA conference, the term “resistant” was used to describe TAs such as myself and theorize approaches to WPE. As I listened, I began to wonder how that particular term limits not only our engagement with TAs, but also our understanding of their learning processes. To what extent does the term affect the relationship between a TA and a writing program administrator (WPA)? To what extent does this term obfuscate a TA’s learning process of a new concept or curriculum? And while there’s scholarship about new TAs who are MAs or MFAs, research into the development of experienced TAs is limited. E. Shelly Reid et al. examined new TAs’ learning from the first year to the third year, and their findings yielded that “regular, formal, directed pedagogy education *must* continue beyond the first year if we hope to have any substantial, lasting effect on how TAs teach and think about teaching writing” (61). Yet, due to labor constraints, it is difficult for WPAs to provide ongoing WPE. As a response, compositionists have encouraged WPAs to consider *who* TAs are, such as their prior experiences, and to recalibrate WPE by considering TAs’ prior experiences (Weiser; Bishop, *Something Old*; Bishop, *Teaching Lives*; Welch; Neeley; Farris; Yancey; Stenberg). In addition to learning who TAs are, scholars and WPAs alike also need to consider TAs’ learning processes, particularly how their prior knowledge and experiences inform their pedagogical identities, practices, and values. With such considerations, WPE can be recalibrated to encourage generative discussions about writing program goals, teaching values, and appropriate practices.

Investigations into TAs’ learning and implementation of pedagogy are burgeoning, but there is more to understand. One scholar, Dana Driscoll, examined the extent to which TAs understood curricula values (transfer theory) and implemented such values in their pedagogical practices. TAs’ comprehension of transfer, whether it required explicit instruction or occurred naturally or passively, informed how they taught for transfer, which she termed as either connected or non-connected pedagogies. Driscoll concluded that WPE should consider these two types of pedagogies as well as who TAs are. While Driscoll examined how TAs’ beliefs impacted their pedagogies, Donna Qualley examined MA-level TAs’ learning as they critically transitioned into FYC instructors. She constructed a conceptual map of these transitions from *The Elon Statement*. This map begins the exploration of TAs’ learning, particularly how they negotiate their prior knowledge and experiences, how they maintain or cross boundaries, and how they use pedagogical affordances—e.g., standardized syllabus—and curricular

interventions—e.g., textbooks and sample assignments. Both Driscoll and Qualey have opened pathways to exploring TAs' learning processes, particularly how they transfer their learning into their pedagogies, but further examination is needed. How do TAs transfer WPE into their pedagogical practices? How do they negotiate their prior experiences and knowledge for a new teaching context?

To answer these questions, I propose that we inquire into the *who* and the *how* of TA learning, specifically focusing on experienced, Ph.D.-level TAs who have prior pedagogical knowledge, values, and practices. Who are these TAs? How might their prior WPE and academic writing experiences affect their learning of a new institution's FYC curriculum? And how might that learning manifest in their instructional materials and pedagogical practices? In this chapter, I present preliminary findings from a qualitative study about first-year Ph.D. graduate teaching associates (TAs) in the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's (UTK) English department. The purpose of this study is to examine how experienced, first-year Ph.D. TAs negotiate prior and current WPE and to investigate how that learning transfers into, or manifests in, their instructional materials and pedagogical practices. With this examination, WPAs could have a better understanding of TAs' learning processes to better inform a recalibration of WPE and pedagogical affordances. With such insight, TAs and WPAs could engage in active, generative dialogues about learning and teaching that would ensure the implementation of FYC curricula, thus decreasing the assumption and ascription of TA resistance.

DEFINING TRANSFER

In composition studies, transfer theory has been the lens through which compositionists understand the cognitive processing of writing knowledge. Scholarship has focused on undergraduate writers' experiences with writing in composition courses to that of writing in workplace or another discipline (McCarthy; Bergmann and Zepernick; Beaufort; Nelms and Dively; Wardle). Other scholarship has examined undergraduate writers' perceptions of learning writing and repurposing that knowledge for different activity systems or genres (Beach; Rounsaville et al.; Reiff and Bawarshi). With each new examination, transfer theory has evolved from Perkins and Salomon's initial theory about "high road" and "low road" transfer.³ While these concepts are still employed in current research, Perkins and Salomon's theory of transfer has evolved and has been recontextualized.

3 Low-road transfer "reflects the automatic triggering of well-practiced routines in circumstances where there is considerable perceptual similarity to the original learning context" (Perkins and Salomon 25). High-road transfer "depends on deliberate mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application in another" (Perkins and Salomon 25).

Transfer theory has been reconceptualized to capture the dynamic learning and transferring processes that extend Perkins and Salomon's initial understanding of high road transfer as being either "forward-reaching" or "backward-reaching."⁴ For contemporary transfer theory scholars, transfer is a process of reshaping or repurposing writing knowledge. For example, Nowacek examines how writers recontextualize or integrate writing knowledge, thus citing the importance of metacognition for writing transfer. DePalma and Ringer suggest that writers—consciously or not—reuse or adapt prior knowledge as they "traverse rhetorical situations" (466). This reuse or adaptation can be a means for writers to make sense of a new, unfamiliar context. Yancey et al. found that student writers have three approaches to using prior knowledge in new writing contexts: "assemblage," "remix," and "critical incident" (5). For "assemblage," writers patchwork their prior knowledge with limited connections to their current learning, which leads to unsuccessful transfer of writing, whereas writers who "remix" adapt their prior knowledge with current learning to transfer writing successfully. Lastly, "critical incident" refers to when writers critically assess and learn from the failed or negative transfer (Yancey et al. 5). These three extensions to Perkins and Salomon's conception of transfer theory have informed how compositionists teach writing and understand student writers' cognitive processing for high road transfer.

While much of transfer theory scholarship has been about undergraduate writers' experiences and perceptions, the direct application of transfer theory to writing pedagogy education is just beginning. However, one could argue that transfer theory has existed in WPE scholarship without direct mentioning of the theory. For example, Robert Parker argues that there should be "compatible connections" (412-413) to bridge prior experiences and knowledges to new contexts. These connections are made possible in a reflective, recursive process, which he diagrams as:

Experience ↔ theory ↔ THEORY (Parker 413)⁵

In a pedagogy course, a student would connect prior teaching experiences (theory) with the formal THEORY presented in, say, a textbook or peer-reviewed journal, and these connections would then "transform" the student's pedagogical practices (Parker 416-417). For transformation to occur, THEORY

4 Perkins and Salomon extend their definition of high road by describing the modes of abstraction. "Forward reaching" transfer occurs when one uses current learned skills for future application, while "backward reaching" transfer is recalling prior learned knowledge for the current context (26).

5 Parker defines "theory" as "personal, concrete, context-bound, psychological," whereas "THEORY" is defined as "impersonal, abstract, context-free, logical" (413).

needs to take root within the student, and if development is external, then, such changes, if any, would be “merely adjustments” (Parker 417).

Driscoll directly employs transfer theory as a theoretical lens in her study about how experienced, Ph.D.-level TAs teach for transfer. Similar to Parker’s argument, Driscoll concluded that TAs benefited from connected pedagogies, i.e., direct, explicit connections between experiences and pedagogical theory to inform teaching practices. Qualley, too, found that TAs needed both explicit connections and the ability to articulate their learning and experiences. Additionally, TAs would need to experience either a conceptual break or a reframing of prior experiences to transform their pedagogical practices. While transfer theory is being applied to WPE scholarship, more research is needed to understand TAs’ learning processes, particularly how experienced TAs navigate different teaching contexts and transfer their learning into their pedagogical practices.

In this chapter, I employ DePalma and Ringer’s adaptive transfer. Their conceptual model provides the flexibility and opportunity for teacher research that other terms have yet to allow for. It is with this framework that I will analyze the complex relationship between TAs’ WPE experiences and pedagogies. Specifically, I will analyze the degrees to which pedagogical affordances (e.g., instructional materials, standard syllabi, etc.) are adapted into TAs’ pedagogical practices. To measure this adaptation (or lack thereof), I apply Pamela Grossman, Peter Smagorinsky, and Sheila Valencia’s “five degrees of appropriation” continuum. This measurement assesses the extent to which teachers reuse or adapt “pedagogical tools available for use in particular social environments” (15). By using this continuum, I will be able to identify the extent to which TAs are adapting, reusing, or resisting WPE and prior experiences into their pedagogical practices. The degree to which TAs appropriate WPE and prior experiences could inform WPAs’ understandings of TAs’ attitudes towards WPE, such as resistance, as well as how they develop their pedagogies. With this information, WPAs could recalibrate WPE to meet TAs’ learning needs by addressing their particular knowledges, experiences, and values in context of the writing program’s expectations and values.

A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF WRITING PEDAGOGY EDUCATION: RESISTANT TO THEORY OR STRUGGLING TO TRANSFER?

While compositionists have come to agree that WPE should be balanced in theoretical coverage and practical application, the debates leading to this conclusion were foundational for understanding TAs’ pedagogical practices and theorizing WPE initiatives. Such debates led to empirical studies about the effectiveness of formal WPE (see Dobrin). Studies have examined TAs’ struggle to “reinvent the

university” (Bartholomae) for themselves as students and teachers as well. Findings revealed that TAs’ experience dissonances when negotiating learning from formal WPE, teaching FYC courses, and taking graduate coursework.⁶ When TAs struggle to negotiate these dissonances, they are deemed resistant, a term that obscures learning as a process. In what follows, I’ll examine how literature about WPE frames TAs’ experiences as resistance to ideology, theory, and unfamiliarity.

In the early 1990s, scholars began identifying approaches to WPE that aimed to convert TAs to the best practices and ideology of the program in which they were being prepared to teach; these conversion experiences led to what scholars deemed as TAs’ resistance to ideology. For example, Wendy Bishop’s 1990 study found that TAs’ identities were altered based on preconceptions about teaching, prior teaching experiences, and the pedagogy course. Three TAs, in particular, were more resistant to the pedagogy recommended in the pedagogy course, whereas the other two TAs converted their pedagogies to fit the model. The three TAs who resisted shared similar experiences to what Nancy Welch describes. She recalls her experiences at University A and University B. At University B, her prior knowledge had become taboo, and she was struggling to convert to the language of the new program, whereas University A embodied Bishop’s 1990 “convergent” model, i.e., it brought conflicting ideologies together to inform pedagogical practices (Welch). Through conversion, Welch experiences a loss of identity or “personal history,” which led to feelings of resistance (395). This conversion approach to WPE is problematic because it presumes that TAs are “blank slates,” (Neeley; Reid, “Uncoverage”; Stenberg) who can be indoctrinated into the “theorizing professor” (Neeley). However, as case studies about conversion models point out, such models neither uproot nor connect compatibly to TAs’ lore or experiences (Parker; North; Bishop, *Something Old*; Welch; Neeley). With the emphasis on conversion, TAs’ experiences may appear resistant, but there is a disconnect between what TAs hold for their own pedagogical values and those values of the writing program.

TAs not only feel disconnected from writing program’s ideologies, but their relationships with those ideologies also affect their own identities. In teaching, TAs encounter uncertainty in their relationships with students, particularly in managing authority as a teacher (Rankin; Bly). TAs construct their concept of “teacher” based on their prior experiences with studenthood and family. When those tacit theories conflict with either a writing program’s ideology or scholarship encountered in graduate coursework, TAs develop their teaching personae based on *strategies for survival*, which stem from what they know and/

6 See Weiser; Bishop, *Something Old*; Bishop, *Teaching Lives*; Welch; Rankin; Neeley; Ebest; Reid, “Teaching;”; Dryer; and Restaino.

or previously experienced. By turning to survival tools, TAs are perceived as rejecting theory (Rankin; Bishop; Neeley) because they are likely to criticize the textbook or express dissatisfaction with the writing program due to the confusion from the dissonance (Rankin). Neeley describes the conflict as stepping into “someone else’s theory and pedagogy” (20) instead of developing an individualized teacher identity. This criticism and dissatisfaction are TAs’ projections because, in general, they were not resistant to theory itself, as they were “theorizing constantly” (Rankin 45). Rankin suggests developing TAs’ academic discourse and reflective practices, which will facilitate their ability to identify dissonances and make meaning of the conflict.

Restaino, on the other hand, problematizes the structure of WPE for promoting TAs’ survival strategies. She contends that TAs are forced into teaching prematurely, and with the quick transition from WPE to teaching, she found that TAs uncritically rely upon standardized teaching materials. This reliance leads to a thoughtless, endless cycle of TAs laboring to survive teaching. Restaino recommends a delayed introduction of TAs to teaching and support for them to develop a “fuller picture” (112) of the field as well as a space to experiment and augment theory and practice. However, Grouling believes that TAs’ reliance on studenthood inhibits their ability to transcend their identities from student to teacher. These recommendations, however, are not exploring how TAs are learning theory and how that learning process is intimately connected to their personal constructs of identity. If WPE were to connect to the constructs in which TAs hold familiar, then would TAs be able to transfer pedagogical theories into practice? Would they be able to be seen as students who are learning instead of teachers who are resisting? And then, could these approaches foster mentorship between WPAs and TAs?

For transfer of learning to occur, TAs need to be able to connect the familiar with the unfamiliar. When it comes to pedagogical theory, Ebest argues that TAs “find themselves on unfamiliar ground” because some TAs “are generally unaware of how they were taught” (43). Additionally, they may lack experience in taking a FYC course, as they tested out of it during their undergraduate education (Ebest; Reid “Teaching”). However, Dryer’s study found that those who had taken FYC courses felt neither more familiar with nor more confident in the course than those who had not taken it. In both situations, conflict arises from this dissonance of learning pedagogical theory and failing to connect that theory with prior experiences. Because TAs rely on personal experiences and lore to inform their pedagogical practices, they are more likely to encounter dissonance when the new information or practices contradict their prior experiences (Reid et al). These moments of dissonance significantly impact TAs’ reception of composition theory and their attitudes toward teaching FYC (Ebest;

Reid, “Teaching”; Dryer). Scholars recommend writing assignments that are challenging and reflective (Farris; Ebest; Reid; Dryer). This tactic to use writing, which is a presumed strength of graduate students, serves as a space to develop TAs’ self-efficacy, explore connections between pedagogical practices and composition theory, and develop empathy towards undergraduate student writers. These approaches to WPE aim to develop TAs as learners of the field who are conscientious and reflective (Ebest; Reid, “Teaching”; Dryer; Estrem and Reid).

TAs are students, first and foremost, and their responses to dissonance fall on a messy continuum of learning. Perceived resistance “may be more inertial than consciously directed” (Reid et al.). Formal WPE should connect directly to TAs’ prior experiences in order to take root and thus, in Parker’s terms, internally transform their pedagogical practices. While knowledge from formal WPE holds a “limited and sometimes peripheral position in [TAs’] daily thoughts and practices” (Reid et al. 48-49), WPAs should consider TAs’ prior experiences and knowledges. Their tacit experiences can neither be removed nor replaced (Estrem et al.), but they can be adapted if they are connected explicitly to prior experiences and knowledge (Driscoll). As Christine Farris points out, these moments of deviation or resistance “can be the impetus” for critical discussions and reflection about pedagogical practices between WPAs and TAs. For WPE to be connected to TAs’ pedagogies, compositionists need to continue exploring *who* TAs are, what their teaching experiences and theoretical ideologies are, and assessing the effectiveness of WPE (Yancey; Powell et al.; Stenberg). At the moment, WPE mostly occurs in either the first year of graduate school—typically at the MA-level—or pre-service orientations. While scholars have called for ongoing WPE (Stenberg; Restaino), research into what TAs retain from WPE and thus transfer into pedagogical practices is an area in need of further examination.

METHOD OF THE STUDY

At UTK, I conducted a qualitative study throughout the Fall 2017 term. My data collection consisted of three semi-structured interviews, two classroom observations, and collection of instructional materials, such as syllabi, assignment sheets, lesson plans, etc. The first interview was conducted within 2-3 weeks of the department’s three-day orientation program. The second interview occurred within 1-2 weeks after the first classroom observation, which took place during the third unit (a position paper for an academic audience). The second observation occurred within the fourth unit (a position paper for a public audience), which was approximately 1-2 weeks after the second interview, and then the final interview took place within 1-2 weeks after final exams. At the end of

the study, I requested participants' instructional materials, and they emailed archives of their syllabi, assignment sheets, and course calendars. From these data sources, I present data of TAs' experiences, specifically what they retained from their prior experiences and how they reused or adapted UTK's WPE into their pedagogical practices.

The UTK English department typically accepts approximately ten Ph.D. students in concentrations of English literature, creative writing, and rhetoric, writing and linguistics. For the 2016-2017 academic year, there were nine incoming Ph.D. students, and eight of which consented to participating in the study. Each participant received a gift card after each interview and had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants also either selected or were designated a pseudonym to protect their identities. Throughout the study, I served as the assistant director of composition, and the year prior to this position, I was one participant's mentor.⁷ To ensure trustworthiness and credibility, I neither evaluated nor mentored participants throughout this study. Moreover, I participated in bracketing interviews⁸ to check bias and kept detailed accounts of procedures, interactions, and reflections in a research journal. I also asked participants to verify narratives and reports from data analysis to ensure I accurately captured their experiences.

For this study, there were eight participants, four males and four females. The male participants go by the following pseudonyms: Cornelius, Joseph, Mike, and Spencer. All male participants were Caucasian, and ages ranged from 24-40. Cornelius, Joseph, and Mike were Ph.D. students in the English literature concentration, whereas Spencer was a Ph.D. student in the creative writing concentration. For the four females, they went by the following pseudonyms: Ava, Clara, Liz, and Mandy. All four female students were Caucasian, and ages ranged from 25-45. Clara and Mandy were Ph.D. students in the English literature concentration, whereas Ava was a Ph.D. student in the creative writing concentration. Liz was the only Ph.D. student in the first-year cohort who was in the rhetoric, writing and linguistics concentration.

As for data analysis, I used an existing coding scheme from Grossman et al. They developed "five degrees of appropriation" to measure how the participants reused or adapted "pedagogical tools available for use in particular social environments" (Grossman et al.). In what follows, Grossman et al. define their five-degree continuum:

7 I mentored Spencer in teaching the second course in the FYC sequence.

8 Bracketing interviews are common practices in phenomenological research. This process allows the researcher to "usually explore their own experiences, in part to examine dimensions of the experience and in part to become aware of their own prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions" (Merriam 94).

- *Lack of Appropriation*: Learners may or may not appropriate pedagogical practices or theories due to the complexity, conflict, or foreignness of a concept, or they may altogether dismiss a concept (16).
- *Appropriating a Label*: Learners know the name of pedagogical practices or theories “but knows none of its features” (17).
- *Appropriating Surface Features*: Learners know parts of pedagogical practices or theories but not “how those features contribute to the conceptual whole” (17).
- *Appropriating Conceptual Underpinnings*: Learners understand the conceptual underpinnings of pedagogical practices and theories, and they are able to adapt this knowledge to new contexts (17).
- *Achieving Mastery*: Learners have appropriated and applied conceptual underpinnings and pedagogical tools to classroom procedures (18).⁹

This schematic allows for researchers to identify appropriation or adaption processes on a learning spectrum. With it, I identified the extent to which TAs were adapting prior and current WPE experiences into their pedagogical practices. For the purposes of this chapter, I analyzed the first interview protocol to identify participants’ prior experiences in writing, teaching, and WPE as well as to examine the extent of their recollection and immediate implementation of UTK’s WPE.

WHO ARE TAs, AND WHAT ARE THEIR PRIOR EXPERIENCES?

TAs have mostly been framed as graduate students who teach FYC classes and more than likely have never taken the course as undergraduates (Weiser; Fischer; Ebest; Reid 2009). As for my participants, that scenario was true for one, Ava, who tested out of the FYC courses and enrolled into 200-level English course. As for the other seven participants, they took at least one FYC course in their undergraduate education. Mandy and Mike tested out of the first FYC course and were enrolled into the second course, and Spencer was enrolled into honors composition. Joseph’s community college only offered one course, which emphasized writing as a process, and Cornelius, too, took a “one-shot” FYC course that was informed by expressivist pedagogy. Liz took both FYC courses and recalled that they emphasized literature. Like Joseph, Clara attended a community college, but her FYC experiences were different. She reported taking basic writing and FYC courses; she also reported struggling in these classes due

⁹ This definition slightly deviates from the original authors’ definitions because their participants had not begun teaching whereas my participants were teaching. For this classification, I looked for the flexibility and multivariate appropriation of theory and praxis.

to unclear expectations and conflicting feedback. In fact, Clara had to retake her FYC course, and from these experiences, she reported feeling “confused” about what constituted good writing. Based on these reports, most participants were familiar with FYC courses from their undergraduate studies.

While most participants had prior experience in taking first-year composition, seven out of eight participants had at least two years of teaching experience before entering UTK’s Ph.D. program. Ava, Clara, Cornelius, Joseph, Mandy, and Mike taught either two-sequenced FYC courses, 200-level courses, or remedial writing courses for two years. In addition to teaching their own classes, Ava and Mandy had co-taught sections with a peer, and Mike taught reading and study skills. Liz, on the other hand, was the most experienced teacher, as she had taught college-level courses for thirteen-and-a-half years. She taught basic writing courses as well as FYC courses. In addition to college-level writing, she taught secondary education for approximately three years. The one TA who had less than two years of teaching experience was Spencer, who taught one semester of fiction writing and a semester of the second FYC course. Based on these teaching experiences in conjunction with undergraduate writing classes, participants had an idea of what a FYC course entailed. These prior experiences informed participants’ vision of how writing classrooms functioned—such as encouraging writing processes—and this familiarity constructed a foundation of teaching practices that they found successful.

This foundation was informed further by their WPE from their respective master’s programs. Participants’ WPE backgrounds varied—ranging from no formal training to multiple pedagogy training courses—and while participants’ experiences overlapped in kinds of WPE they received, the overall structure of WPE was idiosyncratic and localized to the institutions that prepared them to teach FYC, which is common in TA preparation (Yancey ; Hardin; Guerra and Bawarshi). While Reid et al. posit that formal WPE holds a limited, peripheral space in TAs’ daily actions, participants were able to describe the kinds of preparation they received from previous institutions, particularly recalling practical experiences more than composition theory. For example, Spencer received his WPE from UTK, which spanned over two years. Prior to the start of term, he attended a three-day orientation, and, for the first year, he worked in the writing center and participated in a writing center training course. He also was a mentee for a year and had two experienced TAs as mentors (one mentor per semester). In the spring term of his first year, he took a pedagogy course, which incorporated theory and practical application to the curriculum. As part of the course, he developed and taught a miniature lesson, conducted action research, and composed FYC assignments. These practical experiences shaped his pedagogical practices, and he was able to reuse these lessons and assignments in his teaching.

Similar to Spencer's experience, Cornelius took a pedagogy course and claimed that the course was "a condensed version of the 1005/1006 course. [We turned] in all of the assignments ourselves, plus learn[ed] how to teach them." In addition to this course, he worked in the writing center for one term and "shadow[ed] professors, or basically mentors" throughout his first year. Joseph, too, worked in the writing center and took a writing center pedagogy course. He also took a pedagogy course as an undergraduate, titled "Teaching Writing for Credential Candidates." This course introduced him to writing theories but was meant for "improving [his] own writing than it was teaching [him] how to teach writing." As for formal WPE, Joseph claims, "I never had very formal, I would say none of them were incredibly formal, pedagogy-focused courses with the exception of maybe that class as an undergrad for the credential program." He did, however, participate in a weekly practicum throughout his first year of his MA program. In the practicum, he and peers discussed teaching, which is where he first saw how others taught the curriculum. Both Cornelius and Joseph recalled reusing practical activities that were provided via mentorship or the practicum in their pedagogical practices; and they found that these affordances helped them teach the course when they were new to teaching.

Ava's and Mandy's respective WPE consisted of a five-day orientation. After this training, they both participated in a weekly practicum, but the duration of their respective courses varied. Mandy's practicum extended into her second year, whereas Ava's was only a year long. Both participants reported that the subject matter of the training was practical and localized to their respective programs. For example, Mandy recalled composing FYC assignments prior to them being assigned in her classroom. While Mandy appreciated slow, methodical approach to her preparation, she criticized the course for being "a little bit repetitive." Ava's year-long practicum included microteaching lessons and peer observations. She noted that she reused lessons from the microteaching, and the observations helped her to develop a "teacher" persona. At first, she had an authoritarian approach to teaching, but after witnessing a peer's more relaxed approach, she realized that the authoritarian stance inhibited her ability to connect with students. She then adapted a more relaxed demeanor in her teaching. Unlike Mandy's practicum, Ava's included composition theory, but she noted that the theories were "all over the place" and often contradicted one another, which left her feeling confused about what to do with the theories. As for what informed Ava's and Mandy's pedagogies, they, too, relied on the practical tools provided from their practica.

Similar to Mandy's two-year course, Mike took a two-year practicum. This practicum was designed around the second-year MAs delivering presentations to the first-year MAs about teaching; Mike recalled, "Each week someone would

do a presentation on this subject, and then somebody would hand out a lesson plan that worked for them or an assignment sheet. Then, we just talked about those kind of things.” In addition to this weekly meeting, Mike took a modern theories course—which was his pedagogy course—the semester prior to teaching his first course. It consisted of “a lot of comp readings,” which he found to be “very helpful” for teaching. While he elected to take the pedagogy course, he did not state the extent to which the composition readings informed their pedagogies. For pedagogical development, he valued the sharing of instructional materials and observing peers’ microteaching.

Liz, with approximately seventeen years of teaching experience, had a diverse WPE background. She began learning about teaching via the National Writing Project, which carried over from secondary teaching to college instruction. In addition to her MFA, she had a master’s in education (M.Ed.). The coursework for that degree provided extensive, recursive training. Liz exclaimed, “I’ve got a lot of pedagogy just from training. Every year of teaching, there’s always training either in the summer before you start or you go to conference.” She recalled training in reading courses and learning disabilities as well as applying her MFA education to her teaching practices. She was the only participant who did not report experiencing WPE that consisted of pre-service orientation, pedagogy course, practicum, tutor training, or mentorship.

As for Clara, she remembered taking three writing pedagogy courses: digital pedagogies, teaching college composition, and I study of writing. The first course was based in digital pedagogy, whereas the second course introduced her to compositionists like Donald Murray. These courses were taken in her last semester of her MA program, which may have affected her perceived value in recalling and applying course content. She noted that she “just wanted to finish.” What she did recall were particular assignments, such as mapping digital literacies, or compositionists like Murray. As for I study of writing course, she stated, “I don’t remember a whole lot from that class. I will not lie. I don’t remember much at all.” Overall, Clara received a variety of formal WPE, but she did not perceive a need to recall the subject matter of these courses as they were taken toward the end of her MA program.

Contrary to Ebest’s findings, TAs remembered the kinds of preparation they received prior to attending UTK, but those recollections were—as Estrem et al. found—limited and peripheral. TAs mostly recalled practice-based experiences, such as microteaching and peer observations, as most valuable in their pedagogical development. Moreover, they reported reusing shared instructional materials—such as lesson plans or assignments—in their pedagogical practices prior to UTK. Participants’ experiences with composition theory, however, held limited, peripheral influence on their pedagogical development (Reid et al).

While some participants recalled being exposed to theory, they either reported not knowing what to do with the theory or not perceiving a need to apply it to their pedagogical practices. These recollections point to the powerful influence of practical WPE that informs TAs' pedagogies. Even though compositionists have encouraged the balance of theory and practice in WPE, that balance—while present in some participants' prior WPE experiences—did not take root in their pedagogical development. To help them survive teaching, they relied on the lore of shared instructional materials and peer observations (North; Bishop, *Teaching Lives*; Reid and Estrem; Restaino; Qualley). These materials, however, are localized and idiosyncratic; so when TAs transition to a new teaching context, how might those pedagogical practices transfer into a new curriculum that may or may not align theoretically with their prior teaching experiences? By isolating what TAs' prior experiences in FYC and WPE are, WPAs can discover how a new teaching context may conflict or overlap with TAs' pedagogical foundations. Such insight would aid in recalibrating WPE initiatives and thus help TAs adapt to new teaching contexts.

PRIOR EXPERIENCES, NEW CONTEXTS, AND ADAPTATION

By understanding TAs' prior FYC and WPE experiences as well as their attitudes towards current WPE, WPAs can design effective WPE to ensure theoretically grounded, effective teaching practices (Yancey). In addition to TAs having these practices, WPAs also want TAs to teach the curriculum as designed to ensure course and program assessment outcomes. To further assist TAs in teaching a curriculum, writing programs often provide pedagogical affordances, such as a standardized syllabus and assignment sheets (Qualley). At UTK, TAs received WPE through the three-day pre-service orientation, which consisted of workshops that provided theoretical information and practical lessons for teaching a transfer and rhetoric-based FYC curriculum. TAs also received pedagogical affordances—such as syllabi and assignment sheets—to help them transition into the teaching context. As previously discussed, such WPE initiatives and affordances, while issued with good intentions, can be perceived by TAs as subversive attempts to hinder or oppress their perceived pedagogical strengths and values (Bishop, *Something Old*; Bishop, *Teaching Lives*; Welch; Neeley). Therefore, I wanted to explore first how experienced TAs negotiated their pedagogical identities and practices after receiving the proffered training and affordances. Did TAs feel like the program was aiming to convert them to a new ideology, like Welch and Neeley posit? Or did they experience a convergence of similar ideologies of which they could adapt into their existing pedagogies (Bishop, *Something Old*)?

Participants' initial reactions to the pre-service orientation were unanimous:

too long, overwhelming, and a blur. Most participants described their pre-service orientation experience as boring because they found the content repetitive. Some workshop discussions reviewed concepts or teaching practices in which they were already familiar. For example, some participants recalled that the workshops, in general, either reminded them of things “done in the past,” as was the case for Ava, or they “calmed anxieties” because the participants knew how to teach these concepts, as Clara and Mike respectively noted. Participants’ perceptions of being familiar with the subject matter led to them perceiving themselves as “Achieving Mastery” (Grossman et al.). TAs, for the most part, identified these familiar practices as pedagogical tools and knowledge that they already possessed and employed. And even though their prior WPE experiences were idiosyncratic and localized, these TAs believed that the workshops were not applicable to their pedagogical development due to their prior experiences and familiarity. There was not a perceived need to explore or alter practices. They felt confident in teaching the new curriculum.

The convergence and familiarity of past experiences were consistent themes throughout participants’ interviews. They contextualized their immediate impressions of the new context’s values and procedures by comparing the new information with their prior teaching experiences. For example, Joseph discussed how workshops helped “to pinpoint those areas that I need to adjust and be ready to change how I do things.” Similarly, Liz stated, “It helped me with understanding some of the things that we’re teaching in the course and how UT’s course is different.” By reflecting upon the similarities and differences between experiences, Joseph and Liz were able to identify dissonances. However, the other participants did not note differences between experiences; they perceived similarities only—making the pre-service orientation repetitive and boring. These participants did not elect to explore how those similarities functioned differently—that is theoretically—within the new context. For TAs to adaptively transfer their pedagogical experiences, the THEORY of UTK’s curriculum must be understood and explicitly connected to their previous experiences and pedagogical values (Parker; Driscoll; Qualley). Without such understanding, TAs’ adaptation to the new curriculum will be limited.

Based on these responses, TAs detected similar surface features without exploring the underlying theoretical structure of the writing program, particularly how the values and practices were designed for a specific purpose, such as transferring writing expertise. TAs either adopted the practices of the new context or assembled prior experiences that were perceived as similar to the new curriculum. At the end of the first interview, I asked each participant, “Did you use the standardized syllabus and assignment sheets? If so, why? If not, what changes did you make, and why?” There were two common responses:

1. I didn't make significant changes to the standardized documents because I wanted to experience the curriculum first, and
2. Because of teaching experience, I mixed the content of the syllabus.

Five participants claimed the former response and three participants asserted the latter. Using the "five degrees of appropriation," I have coded the first response as "appropriating surface features" and the second response as "lack of appropriation."

While it appeared that five participants (Cornelius, Joseph, Liz, Mandy, and Mike) were adapting the standardized materials (the first response), there wasn't any evidence that they understood the theoretical underpinnings of the course design, particularly in the scaffolding and purpose of each unit. In fact, most of these participants reported a degree of uncertainty with the curriculum. For example, Liz stated, "I did not change the assignments and all the other stuff just because I didn't know. I mean, it's the first semester. There's no way I'm changing anything." Similarly, Joseph stated, "Since I'm still learning the way it is here, I felt like if I'm going to use the standard syllabus, it makes sense to use the standard assignment sheets at least for this first semester until I get more comfortable with the textbooks and the curriculum and stuff." These participants recognized that, even with their prior teaching experiences, they still needed to learn the new curriculum by experiencing it. They all trusted that the FYC program was well-designed, or as Mandy asserted, was "already very successful and already doing lots of really good things." Based on this trust, they adopted the pedagogical affordances to help them survive teaching in a new context.

Restaino argues TAs uncritically appropriate (or adopt) the standardized teaching materials to survive teaching the first semester due to the quick transition from pre-service orientation to teaching. These participants, however, adopted to survive but were not uncritical. They detected similarities in subject matter, such as teaching Aristotelian appeals or writing as a process, which is why I labeled this group as "appropriating surface features." While they recognized familiar subject matter, they struggled to perceive the underlying differences and purposes between their prior and current teaching contexts. The new curriculum was still unfamiliar, which meant that they couldn't foresee what to expect or how to adapt their prior experiences. For this reason, they chose to adopt, thus putting their pedagogical values on hold to learn how the new context functioned. If WPAs want strong, reflective practitioners, then TAs need opportunities to discuss explicitly their detections of similarities and differences between their prior experiences and the writing program's objectives, values, and practices. These discussions could provide clarity into the curricula goals and department culture as well as what TAs value in regard to teaching writing.

Through guided reflection and discussion, TAs can transfer their learning and teach to their strengths to meet programmatic objectives.

As for the other three participants (Ava, Clara, and Spencer), those who gave the second response, their lack of appropriation could be identified as resistant. They altered the syllabus, and they deviated from the pedagogical affordances that were deemed best by the composition office. These TAs made such decisions based upon their prior experiences. Ava even claims that she was resistant because she didn't "like being told what to do." She added, "I've taught for two years already; I know things." While it is easy to label these TAs as resistant, their explanations for the changes that they have made present a more complex narrative beyond that of rejecting the course design. "Lack of Appropriation" doesn't necessarily equate to rejection and could mean that the learning was either too complex or foreign, or even that there's a conflict between prior experiences and new learning. We could also put these alterations in terms of adaptive transfer, as either reusing or reshaping experiences to make meaning of a new learning context.

For example, Ava and Clara reused prior teaching experiences and materials in their UTK syllabi to understand this new writing program's expectations and curriculum objectives. Ava, who came from a genre-based FYC program, assembled prior teaching lessons and materials into UTK's standard syllabus. Her reasons for reusing the materials were because she was "not familiar with the way that everything is scaffolded and everything, and [she's] never done it before." She goes on to describe the foreignness of the new curriculum:

It probably would have been in my best interest to just leave everything, but then, I was like reading the descriptions of each day, and I'm like I don't know what that means. I don't know what you're telling me to do. So, then I got all nervous that I wouldn't do it right, and then it would be terrible and would look like I didn't know what I was doing. So, that's why I was resistant to it.

This new course design did not connect compatibly to Ava's prior teaching experiences. She did not understand the theoretical underpinnings of the curriculum, even though she reported being familiar with transfer theory. She didn't understand why she should accept the standardized syllabus because, after all, she was an experienced FYC educator. To maintain her self-efficacy, she turned to reusing instructional materials like her "cultural eye" activity to replace a department-provided activity about exploring discourse communities. She was more familiar with this previously used activity and perceived its purpose as similar to the one provided in the standardized syllabus. This change reinstated Ava's agency and was a means for her to teach material in which she was confident teaching.

In addition to reusing this activity, Ava also reported reshaping the first assignment, which was a comparative rhetorical analysis, to allow students to freely choose their own texts as long as they connected to the course “in some way.” She did not detect the importance of selecting the texts for her students, as the writing program instructed her to do. She experienced this requisite as limiting to both her teaching and her students’ learning, and she wanted more flexibility in her classroom. When she first began teaching, she was more authoritarian, but through former WPE she adopted a more relaxed teaching persona. UTK’s pedagogical affordances and requirements aligned more with the ineffective authoritarian pedagogy that she shirked. Due to these conflicts, Ava deviated from the writing program’s standardization and described herself as resistant. However, when I analyzed her overall course design, she did not outright reject the curriculum and values. Instead, she reused materials for lessons that were perceived as similar to prior experiences or altered lessons to negotiate perceived conflict and unfamiliarity that she encountered in this new teaching context. If she understood how her prior experiences connected and deviated from the new context, she could have remixed her pedagogies more successfully instead of falling into the dichotomy of adoption or rejection.

Clara also reported reusing prior experiences to inform her pedagogy in this new context. She reported “mash[ing] up” her prior teaching syllabi with UTK’s standardized syllabus. She, too, was unable to directly connect her prior experiences with the expectations and design of this new context. According to her, the standardized syllabus did not provide the “bare bones” for what the writing program expected and she did not foresee how to teach with what she perceived as ambiguous affordances. She redesigned the syllabus and course schedule to “fit the way [her] mind works,” which provided her clarity for what she would teach and how she would go about implementing this new curriculum. Moreover, this deviation was tied to Clara’s identity and learning needs. In past learning contexts, she struggled in and failed undergraduate writing courses where transparency of expectations and procedures were not provided. To negotiate her teaching in this new context, she returned to using previous instructional materials that were familiar and thus transparent. This reuse allowed her to maintain her self-efficacy and provided a means for her teaching survival. Even though the pre-service orientation provided workshops about curriculum structure, procedures, and expectations, Clara needed help in transferring her prior experiences to teach in this new context.

Similar to Ava and Clara, Spencer reused instructional materials and deviated from the standardized syllabus and assignment sheets. Spencer, unlike the other participants, was the only participant who completed his MFA and prior WPE at UTK. Due to this familiarity, he had more confidence and understanding of the

writing program's expectations and curriculum objectives. Even with this understanding, he deviated from the pedagogical affordances to reflect his prior experiences. For example, Spencer didn't accept revisions to an assignment sheet that the composition office had implemented. He reported, "I think I changed the word length in the first paper to be a bit shorter. I think it was 1000 words on the template, I changed it to 750. That's just from experience in the writing center." Spencer's prior experiences in the writing center informed his decision to not accept the revised assignment sheet. Prior to the revision, the assignment was in fact 750 words, which was deemed to be too constricting for students to complete the comparative rhetorical analysis by the composition committee. Because the previous assignment sheet was familiar, he decided to reuse the outdated assignment sheet without considering the department's rationale. In addition to reusing this assignment sheet, he also reported altering due dates and reusing lesson plans that he obtained from his pedagogy course and mentorships. Spencer's lack of appropriation stemmed from a conflict between his prior knowledge and the current curriculum expectations. To teach the curriculum, he relied on what was familiar without exploring the theoretical implications of the practices and requirements that he amended.

Based on these data, TAs are not "blank slates" (Neeley; Reid, "Uncoverage;" Stenberg). They have prior writing, teaching, and WPE experiences that have created foundations for these participants' pedagogies. Whether TAs adopted or adapted their pedagogical affordances, they made that decision as a means to survive in a new teaching context; that decision helped them learn more about a curriculum that was unfamiliar or conflictual. It is important to note that while pedagogical affordances are helpful for both WPAs and TAs, these materials position TAs as "blank slates" as well as contribute to their reliance on practical methods for teaching FYC. As seen from their recollections and impressions of prior and current WPE, TAs prioritize learning or reusing best practices without considering sufficiently the underlying theories that inform and shape those practices. Because these best practices are, in essence, tried and true, experienced TAs didn't perceive a need for ongoing WPE, which is problematic for their pedagogical development. TAs drew from their tacit theories to make meaning of the pedagogical affordances, and their reliance on lore and their trust in the writing program created an endless laboring cycle, as Restaino contends, to survive teaching. I disagree with Restaino insofar that this laboring was thoughtless because TAs were, as Rankin found, thoughtfully engaged in comparing prior and current experiences to inform their pedagogies. However, the availability and use of pedagogical affordances inhibited open communication between WPAs and TAs about their learning and teaching experiences.

While I concede that some TAs may resist their writing programs' practices and values, TAs in this study did not outright resist the curriculum ideology

and values of the new teaching context. TAs who adopted the new program's practices conveyed a deep trust in the authority of the writing program, and they deferred their teaching experiences and values by adopting practices and instructional materials valued by the writing program. TAs who reused prior experiences and practices were also not resistant. Their deviations were "more inertial than consciously directed" (Reid et al. 55). These particular TAs had syllabi that embodied the spirit of the new teaching context's values, but they drew upon familiar prior experiences and lessons to help them learn and thus teach a new curriculum. In this study, moments of adoption and self-described resistance were symptomatic of a larger learning problem. These TAs struggled to transfer their learning from their prior institutions to this new teaching context and, for this reason, they struggled to comprehend the writing program's objectives and values. TAs need explicit guidance in understanding how programmatic practices and curricula are rhetorical and situated, not generalizable. To help TAs adaptively transfer their WPE and teaching experiences, WPAs need to explore not only who TAs are but also what TAs know, and, with this insight, WPAs can recalibrate WPE to foster transfer of learning and pedagogical development.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WRITING PEDAGOGY EDUCATION

These narratives from Ava, Clara, Cornelius, Joseph, Liz, Mandy, Mike, and Spencer demonstrate that learning to teach is a complex and dynamic process. By using adaptive transfer to examine WPE, WPAs can identify how TAs are reusing or reshaping their previous teaching and WPE experiences to inform their pedagogical practices for a new curriculum. Transitioning to a new curriculum can be challenging, as curricula might diverge or converge. As TAs encounter dissonances of ideology, identity, and familiarity, they either adopt a new ideology or reinvent the new context to fit their previous experiences. Those decisions to adopt or adapt are critical moments for assessing TAs' learning processes. TAs are neither "blank slates" (Neeley; Reid, "Uncoverage;" Stenberg) nor "wrongly inscribed" (Stenberg). They are students who are attempting to cultivate a professional space for themselves as theorists and educators. They are *learners*. At UTK, the ongoing WPE that experienced Ph.D. TAs received was too compact and inundating to adapt successfully, and the transition from WPE to teaching was too quick to encourage reflection. And as the data shows, TAs will encounter dissonances as they continue learning to teach and adapt to new pedagogical contexts. The question for WPAs becomes, how can we help these TAs make sense of these dissonances to encourage adaptive transfer at the appropriating conceptual underpinnings and achieving mastery levels?

Based on these data, I recommend that compositionists, particularly WPAs, continue examining *who* TAs are, which isn't a new call (Weiser; Yancey; Reid et al.; Driscoll). TAs are not homogenous populations, and a one-size fits all approach to pre-service orientation doesn't consider their prior experiences. By knowing *who* TAs are, WPE can be tailored to their needs and experiences. At UTK, we redesigned orientation to consider attendees' experiences. Attendees were split into tracks that were based on their position within the program (e.g., lecturers, first-year Ph.D. TAs, first-year MA/MFA TAs, etc.). This separation ensured that each group was comprised of attendees with similar interests and concerns, and workshops were tailored to these interests and concerns. WPAs didn't have to construct generic workshops that would engage all levels of FYC instructors. By considering each audience, the workshops became more purposeful. It was the hope of the composition office that this tactic would provide audiences with a perceived need to learn and adaptively transfer the theoretical and practical information into their pedagogical practices.

My second recommendation is to incorporate reflection into pre-service orientation workshops to learn what TAs know. As Farris notes, "From an administrative perspective, we want confident, *reflective* teachers whom we know will grow and change in interesting ways" (102, emphasis added). With the quick transition from pre-service orientation to teaching (approximately three days), experienced Ph.D. TAs didn't have enough time to reflect about how their identities and ideologies did or did not fit in the new curriculum. For internal transformation to occur, TAs need to be able to articulate dissonances and make sense of their experiences to adapt or transform their pedagogical theories and practices. At UTK, after each day of pre-service orientation workshops, TAs were prompted to reflect about their experiences. Reflection prompts were aimed to facilitate compatible connections and thus transfer by asking the audience to consider prior knowledge and experiences, articulate their understanding of the new context, and reflect upon the connections or dissonances between the experiences and expectations. These prompts were then discussed among the TAs and WPA. By opening this dialogue, WPAs can address misconceptions as well as guide high road transfer of prior experiences.

Transfer theory has informed the field of composition that writing skills cannot be picked up, and what's true for writing transfer is true for teaching transfer. While these recommendations are ideal for most writing programs, I understand the labor constraints that affect the implementation of such recommendations. It is my hope that these examples of how UTK redesigned its WPE to be more transfer-focused by including directive reflections and considering audiences' experiences and needs are helpful to other WPAs. These changes are small steps toward helping WPAs rethink their programs' WPE. TAs need

guided supervision in their pedagogical development, particularly when they transition into a new teaching context. If WPAs begin considering TAs' learning as well as their acceptance or reuse of affordances, then TAs can develop flexible, richer pedagogies to fit not only their values but also the writing program's expectations, objectives, and values.

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