CHAPTER 4.

COMING TO TEACHING: MOVING BEYOND A BLANK-SLATE MODEL OF DEVELOPING PEDAGOGICAL EXPERTISE

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THE CONTEXT OF TEACHING, KATHLEEN BLAKE YANCEY

In 1972, I began my career as a teacher as a teaching assistant, a TA responsible for teaching first-year composition (FYC) to two classes of 25 students each. Or that's the way the TA training program saw me, as someone just beginning her teaching career. In fact, even at 22, I had already learned a fair amount about teaching: as a student, I'd observed teachers for over 16 years; as an English major and an education minor, I was certified to teach language arts in grades 6-12; and as a student teacher just that summer, I'd taught two classes, one in 11th grade literature fairly successfully, one a 9th grade English class for students who had failed it earlier that year, pretty miserably. Put another way, I didn't begin my career in teaching on that first day of my TA training program: I began it years earlier.[1]

Since the time of my TA training many years ago, many in rhetoric and composition have moved from a TA training model to a TA preparation model, with some giving it a new name: writing teacher education (e.g., Reid et al.). Still, programs preparing graduate students to be teachers of FYC often continue to assume that new TAs are something akin to blank slates,[2] often because programs subscribe to a model of professional and pedagogical development located in the key concept of liminality, of a time of in-between-ness dividing novice

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1   And I'm not alone in bringing other teaching experience with me: the Reid et al. [2012] study, for example, showed that in the Mason program, over 40% of the TAs they surveyed brought such experience with them, and in the Boise State program just over a quarter did.

2   As the authors point out, those TAs there were not blank slates, either. This article thus also provides an exigence for our chapter.

from expert as TAs grow in professionalization. As Ruth Mirtz describes this situation, our programs enact "traditional 'plots' of initiate-to-novice-to-apprentice-to-expert" (26), almost as though developing pedagogical expertise could be mapped in a neatly linear trajectory. Many TAs, however—and in some ways, all TAs if we include their undergraduate experiences—"come to us from other . . . degrees and previous careers" (Phelps 128). Put simply, graduate students beginning in TA preparation programs, be they students of literature, creative writing, or writing studies, are not blank slates. As Zack De Piero and Jennifer K. Johnson, in "Doorways to Disciplinarity: Using Threshold Concepts to Bridge Disciplinary Divides and Develop Theory-Practice Praxis" (this volume) observe, "When FYC [first-year composition] TAs arrive at the doorway of their composition practicum on the first day of TA training, they bring life-long histories of literacy with them; they've already walked through countless other doorways both within and outside of the university," a point also made by Meaghan Brewer's *Conceptions of Literacy*. Brewer takes TAs' prior conceptions of literacy as a focus, arguing that graduate students' prior conceptions of literacy set the stage for their teaching of FYC. Here, we take up a somewhat similar task, attending to TAs' conceptions of literacy, but considering more fully their developing identities as teachers, especially as informed by their prior experiences.

In fact, as we demonstrate here, new TAs are not really new: they bring with them a wealth of experience that can inform and often enhance their own practices as teachers and those of colleagues. To illustrate this point, and to consider what we in writing teacher education can learn from graduate students about how we might design programs informed by TAs' earlier experiences, we go to a critical source, TAs themselves.[3] Like the editors of this collection, then, we believe that "exploring carefully the lived experiences of RCTAs can begin a deeper understanding of the liminalities and thresholds in these TAships, the programs that host them, and the contexts that engage them."

We begin this consideration and re-definition of liminality and the re-design of TA preparation programs by defining the key terms informing the chapter: (1) liminality; (2) prior knowledge, practice, and experiences; and (3) teaching assistants (TAs). Given this context, we then provide very different narrative accounts of coming to teaching composed by three doctoral students—each of whom began their graduate work in other fields, but who are now in writing studies, and each of whom took very different paths to the composition classroom, one by way of his own experience as an undergraduate; another by way of writing center activity and teaching overseas; and a third by way of a professional

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3   We are not the first to do so: see, for example, Obermark et al. . But rather than surveying or interviewing TAs, this chapter, co-authored by TAs, presents sustained narratives leading to a set of recommendations with potential for use across programs.

editing career. The chapter then concludes by drawing from these narratives to make four recommendations for TA preparation programs incorporating what TAs bring to them—from the very start. As the narratives suggest, TAs bring considerable experience to the classroom: if such experience is tapped, TAs are more likely to reflect upon and theorize it, find own teaching better theorized, and provide their students with a better experience; if such experience is not tapped, it still informs teaching, and not always to good effect.

LIMINALITY

The website Cyborg Anthropology, drawing on Victor Turner's work and pointing to several commonplace examples, speaks to the in-between-ness liminality references:

> Betwixt and between here or there. Not fully transitioned from one thing to another. A doorway is a liminal space, because it marks the boundary between inside and outside, between one room and the next. A caterpillar undergoes a liminal transition period when wrapping itself in a cocoon. A highway is a liminal space between starting point and destination. An airport is a transition point between here and there.

Turner's concept of liminality, developed "from observing rituals of the Ndembu tribe of central Africa," articulated a ritually oriented or marked rite of passage representing "some change to the participants, especially their social status" (Cyborg). The process of change positioned Turner's liminal participants as "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony" (Turner, "Liminality and Communitas"; quoted in Cyborg.).

Several observations about this model of development are relevant here. For one, the TA position isn't nearly as rigid as this description of liminality—with "positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony"— would suggest. The TA development process is defined by conventions, to be sure, although as the Pytlik and Liggett collection on TA preparation demonstrates, such conventions—from kinds of support to kinds of responsibilities— vary considerably from one program to the next. For another, while the TA preparation program is intended to assist with the passage from student to teacher, as Dylan Dryer has pointed out, the passage isn't neatly demarcated. Even in the classroom as teachers, TAs continue to inhabit dual positions, feeling like students precisely because they are students, although how they are students can be quite diverse, from that of the first-term MA student in literature taking a full

load of graduate classes to that of the dissertation-writing RC doctoral candidate assisting a WPA, presenting at conferences, and publishing research. For yet another, how much TAs feel like students depends on a host of factors, among them the responses of their own students to their teaching; the attitudes of the faculty teaching them and directing their dissertations; and the ways that institutions do or do not value their pedagogical contributions. In sum, liminality is both a very complex and a very differentiated construct.

In this context, what's of interest to this chapter is how the beginning of any TA liminality isn't crisply defined, either. TAs bring with them many, and many kinds of, experiences that set the stage for their formal TA development.

THE PRIOR

As research like that reported in *How People Learn* (HPL) suggests, prior knowledge contextualizes learning of all kinds. Moreover, the expression prior knowledge often refers to more than knowledge; it includes prior processes, dispositions, beliefs, values, experiences, and affect as well (Yancey). Sometimes, this prior knowledge writ large is a very good fit for the new learning; in such situations, there is a foundation on which the learner can build. Some other times, according to HPL and as documented in *Conceptions of Literacy*, prior knowledge is a misfit: the learner's understanding is at odds with the new learning, and/or the learner's beliefs, located in one community, are in conflict with principles or theories grounding the new learning. We see this in writing classes routinely, of course; the FYC student who understands purpose, audience, and genre as critical concepts defining all writing tasks and who thus has much to build on; the student who understands correcting grammatical and usage errors as the most important goal of a writing class and who thus must develop a larger and different conception of writing; and the student who brings faith-based beliefs to a class where quotations from the bible have limited, very specific value as evidence and who thus needs to learn about what we might call the rhetoricity of writing, in this case about what counts as evidence in a rhetorical text circulating in a secular context (see Yancey et al. for a fuller analysis).

Prior knowledge, of course, also shapes the ways that teachers develop. As Rachel Gramer points out in "Putting Learning First: Challenges and Possibilities for New Writing Teacher Research" (Ch. 1, this volume), TA preparation needs to begin with what she calls New Writing Teacher "identities, learning, and motivated behaviors." Such prior knowledge for TAs as for students, also includes, as indicated above, prior processes, knowledge, dispositions, beliefs, values, experiences and affect. Some of this prior knowledge is school-based. A TA's 10th-grade teacher who seemed to model the best in teaching—seeing the

positive in each student and designing writing assignments engaging students—can influence that beginning TA as she begins designing her first writing class. A different TA's experience as a FYC student, with a teacher whose response to writing was located in critique and executed with a red pen, can motivate him to do the same, or to develop a new means of response located in helpful dialogue. And as Dylan Dryer demonstrates, TAs' own anxieties and uncertainty about writing itself can inform their teaching. In addition, beginning TAs can also be influenced by prior out-of-school experiences having no direct relationship to teaching: Jeff Naftzinger's research shows that in one program, at least, beginning TAs were more inclined to use digital technologies in their teaching if they also used them in their out-of-school lives.

In sum, the prior, both in and out of school, influences how TAs begin their careers; tracing the prior is thus a useful strategy for inquiring into how it influences liminality.

TEACHING ASSISTANTS

In US higher education, teaching assistants, or TAs, sometimes called Graduate Teaching Assistants or GTAs, typically are the instructors of record, at least in FYC classes, and in those classrooms, they are in fact the teacher. In some cases, beginning TAs are required to use a standardized syllabus (e.g., Dively); in other cases, they devise their own in accord with programmatic outcomes. In some cases, they grade writing according to program standards; in other cases, they create scoring guides with their students. In other words, the conditions governing these TAs vary considerably. This chapter refers to beginning TAs as the instructors of their classrooms who make pedagogical choices, at the least, about multiple classroom activities, including in-class writing activities, peer review, group work, and response to student writing.

THREE NARRATIVES

What do liminality, prior knowledge, and TAship look like in practice? What experiences do TAs draw on even before a TA preparation experience begins, and how helpful are they? And if acknowledged, how much more helpful could such experiences be? The narratives below provide some thinking about these questions; they also provide background for our recommendations concluding the chapter. The first narrative, written by Rob Cole, provides an account of a TA whose invisible prior knowledge locates some of his first teaching practices; the second, written by Amanda May, is an account of a TA with considerable writing center experience, both different from and similar to teaching; and the third,

written by Katelyn Stark, shows how the similarities and differences between professional editing and teaching can both enhance and complicate TAing the first time. Put another way, while this chapter emphasizes the role of prior experiences in shaping pedagogical practice, those prior experiences themselves are wrapped up in the professional/academic identities the TAs had developed before beginning to teach at FSU: Rob identified as a poet, Amanda as a tutor and aspiring writing center administrator, Katelyn as a professional editor. In each case, they brought much to the classroom, although none of it was acknowledged by their writing teacher preparation programs, which Florida State offers in two forms. Those like Rob and Katelyn who brought teaching experience with them take a three-day orientation, followed by a one-credit pass/fail pedagogy course; those like Amanda who had no teaching experience completed two graded courses during six weeks the summer before they teach as well as the one-credit pedagogy course in the fall.

Falling Backwards into Pedagogy: On the Job Learning, Rob Cole

I was enrolled in a poetry MFA program directly after finishing my undergrad degree, and teaching one section of composition a semester was part of the scholarship package. I had no idea what I was getting myself involved in and had no expectations about what preparations would be available or even necessary. In fact, my only experiences with composition were the two FYC courses I'd completed during my first two semesters as an undergraduate, and those were taught by creative writing MFA students. Moreover, as a history major, my interest in poetry had occurred almost accidentally, through a single upper-level creative writing course, so I wasn't familiar with the culture of English departments either.

The two-week pedagogy preparation before my first semester teaching focused on best practices and theory. It introduced us to Berlin, White, Bizzell, and Bartholomae; and defined the program's parameters. Although it was absolutely invaluable, it was also not nearly enough to prepare me to instruct a class in a field where I had been only a passing observer. Most of those initial theory-heavy readings went over my head and didn't stick, as I was still trying to comprehend how to provide students anything useful in the course: how valuable is an understanding of establishing a classroom ideology when I didn't know how to describe the difference between an essay meriting a B and another earning a C?

I began teaching with two strategies: first, I used the course materials we were given during the pedagogy preparation; and second, I emulated my FYC instructors and brought in literary readings and creative writing assignments. Although I didn't quite know how to connect these two approaches effectively,

they at least provided a starting point. I remembered what was successful in my own FYC experiences—at least for me as a student—and I brought those exercises into my classroom. For example, one of my instructors asked us to write notes to different people requesting funds and then explain our rhetorical choices as a way to demonstrate how we already understood audience. Copying this assignment led to one of my earliest classroom successes as a teacher and gave me confidence in responding to student writing from a shared understanding of audience, in part because I could explain how some moves weren't effective for the audience the student was addressing.

Since my own FYC instructors were also MFA students, they incorporated creative writing approaches into my FYC class, and I did likewise. Not all of these resonated well, but a few of them did—especially workshop feedback and revision. I responded to my students' work just as my FYC instructors had responded to mine. I spent little time on grammar or edit-level feedback since, as a student, I hadn't paid much attention to either; and instead focused on giving feedback geared towards revision—even before I knew to provide multiple opportunities for revision. My FYC instructors had treated my final drafts as works in progress and suggested changes even as they assigned a final grade. I appreciated this as a student, and I hoped my own students would feel the same. Connecting this to the process-based pedagogy of Elbow allowed me to understand why this approach was successful for me as a learner and how I could make it a focal point for my own students' learning. Other practices from my poetry workshops didn't carry over as well. During one class, for instance, I assigned a variation of the cut-up technique where composers scramble the order of their paragraphs and attempt to transition them together as a new draft. I tried this in class only once.

The pedagogy workshop continued to meet weekly through that first semester, and the theory we worked with began to connect to the actual practice of teaching composition as I was experiencing it, albeit slowly. Richard Larson, for instance, exposed why I struggled so much with typical research assignments as a student and why that was also carrying over to my own classes. Over time, I could identify what was failing with my approaches and improve upon them, but I still needed to develop my pedagogy more fully to make projects truly effective. Something else clicked as I began to establish an interest in composition studies. Reading the current issues of *College Composition and Communication* was still difficult, but I could at least make connections to my classroom as I learned more theory. Kermit Campbell, for example, allowed me to expand my definition of composition through hip-hop and other non-academic texts, which, in turn, opened up more connections to my MFA background. Theory, in other words, became an avenue into practice.

As much as I loved poetry, during my three years in an MFA program, I became a composition teacher. My pedagogy was an assemblage of my own FYC experiences, my program's instruction, the scholarship I was seeking out, and whatever I could take from past and current teachers. I modeled much of my classroom persona on my favorite undergrad history instructor, so much so that I began to emulate how he dressed and organized his class. Most of this wasn't a conscious recognition of growth, but rather an understanding of what worked. I used every tool that I knew to be effective and pieced together successful approaches from trial and error, and the more familiar with composition scholarship I became, the more likely I was to recognize why some approaches worked and some didn't. For example, another practice I imported from my poetry workshops was asking students to write introductions of projects in class so we could examine some of the moves they'd made. In response, the students used their twenty minutes of composing to create general, sweeping texts loosely connected to the assignment. In reading Flower and Hayes later, I understood why the practice hadn't worked; but I thought I could transform it into a post-workshop exercise where it reinforced the recursive nature of composing. And so it did.

I began my career as a composition instructor with a hodge-podge pedagogy cobbled together with practices borrowed from my own experiences as a student framed with the materials I was given during my initial pedagogy workshop. This messy combination slowly evolved into a more substantive, informed, and intentional approach as I gained expertise and was able to make connections to the theory I was learning. I brought all of this experience to my Ph.D. program where, for a third time, I went through a TA pedagogy orientation, this one shortened for those with teaching experience. In this orientation, I was once again assumed to be a blank slate; I wasn't asked about my prior experience. Ironically, from my perspective, my prior experience has been critical: my practice-focused experiences have consistently worked best when I could build them around prior knowledge; and they faltered the most when I was unable to ground them in previous practice.

(Re)Centering Experience and Identities: TA Preparation from Writing Centers and Abroad, Amanda M. May

Because I came to Florida State University without teaching experience, I was required to participate in the TA teaching preparation program, a six-week period when I took two graduate courses—one on composition pedagogy and one on writing center theory—and completed two hours of internship work. I found these courses and experiences helpful because, much like Rob's preparation in his MFA program, the summer courses focused on classroom pedagogies and introduced

me to unfamiliar theorists who would inform my teaching—Bitzer, Shipka, and Faigley among them. Through FSU's TA preparation program, I learned much that has helped me develop as a teacher of writing, including lessons on reflection, techniques for classroom management, and appreciation for a variety of expertise in language and discipline, and I appreciated having access to a professional community. At the same time, I also brought considerable related experiences with me to the preparation program and to teaching. Of these experiences, the most influential were two: tutoring writing center students and teaching in Japan. Together, they have informed three significant areas of my current pedagogy.

A first lesson from tutoring has to do with the exchange between participants in any learning situation. The many ELL writers I tutored helped me develop as a tutor, and then teacher, in part because of the challenges they presented. Sometimes, for example, students would ask me if a word, a phrase, a sentence structure, or an idiom sounded natural, a question I encounter now as a teacher who has ELL students in class. Perhaps one of the most memorable of these experiences occurred with a faculty member from China working on an annotated bibliography who wanted help with surface issues and clarity. I was nervous about the difference in our educational levels—she, after all, was faculty, and I was not—but I became comfortable once the session started. As I read aloud, I paused every now and then to offer suggestions, and at one point, she picked up on a grammatical pattern and started self-correcting. When she did, I said to her, "Nice catch!" She asked me about the meaning of the phrase, I explained it to her, and by the end of the session, she was trying that phrase out on me, saying "Nice catch!" when I pointed out a phrase that I thought sounded a little off. This tutoring session helped me understand, first, how students will seek opportunities to improve spoken English as well as written English, and second, that precisely because a tutor or teacher and student bring different expertise to our work together, this means that we also have knowledge to offer one another. In this case, the faculty member learned more about both spoken and written English, and I also learned about her Chinese language and her discipline.

A second lesson that I brought to my TA preparation and subsequent teaching resulted from my experiences tutoring and teaching abroad: they taught me that, like tutorial sessions, teaching conferences are conversations. In Japan, we often had individual counseling with students to help them create or enhance their study plans and set goals. The advice we received in training was to be specific and to set realistic goals with the students, but also to listen and to respond. In some ways, I view tutoring sessions as akin to such conferences. While the power dynamic between a tutor and writer differs vastly from that between teacher and student, writing tutors serve as conversational partners for writers and, by extension, as a sample audience for a piece of writing, a mindset that I

apply in individual teaching conferences now. This view is informed in part by sessions like my tutoring session with the ELL faculty member, described above, but my work as a tutor also showed me what happens on the other side of classroom peer review. In one tutoring session, for instance, a student with recurring appointments came in, clearly disgruntled. From the conversations we'd had, I knew she enjoyed writing, but when I asked her how she was, she expressed some frustration. After a little probing, she explained to me that she hadn't gotten "good" feedback from her peer reviewer, who had been hypercritical of her writing and had focused mostly on her grammar. In response, I explained that I understood her frustration, that as a first-year composition student, I had encountered a similar experience, and I ultimately reminded her that because she was the writer, she would choose what to change. After encouraging her, I offered her the option to talk through the comments with me, and after that, the session went smoothly. From sessions like this one, I learned that conferences are a conversation, an understanding I have enacted as a classroom teacher.

The third lesson I brought to teaching resulted from my work giving written feedback through asynchronous online tutoring, which can be especially difficult given the absence of physical cues. The direction for this tutoring emphasized phrasing: I was told that in online comments, I should avoid phrasing (e.g., the pronoun "you") that could be interpreted as casting blame on the writer. Admittedly, it was challenging to work without having the student in front of me, but the following year, I became one of two co-coordinators responsible for preparing new consultants to tutor online; preparation involved reviewing a consultant's comments on a sample paper and responding to him or her. One day, a new tutor came up and thanked me for my feedback. She explained that it was clear, understandable, and easy to follow; rather than undermining her motivation because her mistakes were highlighted, she said my response made her feel both that she was improving and that there was further improvement to be made. I have applied this lesson to my teaching as well: I typically approach grading with an asynchronous online commenting mindset, limiting my use of direct address (a.k.a. "you") unless something is drastically wrong, balancing my suggestions with praise, and trying to be clear and concise. Of course, as a teacher, I can follow up such feedback with a verbal reminder that anyone with questions can meet with me or email me, so rather than simply adopt online tutoring approaches, I have adapted them to serve the classroom rhetorical situation.

Through tutoring in various sites and teaching abroad, I was inadvertently preparing to teach in the university classroom. My writing center experience has proven invaluable in preparing me for individual student conferences, which I understand as conversations about writing. Tutoring and individual counseling in Japan helped me value the practice of listening to students and writers and

made me attentive to frustrations they may feel from other feedback. And last but not least, my experience as an online tutor helped me learn how to provide students with clear, helpful written feedback. In sum, while not all-inclusive, my previous tutorial experiences have shaped my teaching in the college classroom.

The Editor: Tacit Knowledge Becoming Explicit, Katelyn Stark

I am a professional developmental editor as well as a TA, and a large number of my practices in the classroom stem from my career in the commercial publishing industry. Helping people become better writers has always been a part of my editorial practice: my prior knowledge of teaching writing, in my professional, pre-academic context, developed from my experiences building relationships with authors, providing them with heuristic prompts to deepen ideas, and offering constructive feedback for revision. And when I returned to the academy, I also worked as a writing center tutor and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) research assistant. In other words, my development as a writing teacher did not begin in a summer course, pre-semester orientation, or semester-long pedagogy workshop, but rather began tacitly through these other experiences; my teaching ethos, efficacy, and weaknesses thus differ from those represented in much of the TA education scholarship. The prior knowledge gained from my professional experiences shaped me as an instructor, but it was not until I was simultaneously teaching and learning composition theory that my tacit knowledge about writing instruction became explicit and thus available for my classroom use.

My first professional role in the publishing industry was as an intern at a literary agency in New York City. I was fresh out of my English bachelor's program and responsible for wading through the submission slush pile and forwarding the manuscripts I deemed worthy. After a few weeks, I was hired full-time and promoted to executive assistant. All of a sudden, I found myself becoming the liaison between authors and editors of major publishing houses, with very new responsibilities: I trained the new interns on what was quality writing; I corresponded with authors on ways they could improve their manuscript to meet the industry's competitive standards; and I reviewed editors' comments on manuscripts. I became a writing professional. I was an assessor, a critic, and an editor; and the more I communicated with aspiring authors and new interns, the more I became a teacher. After I left the literary agency, I launched my own editing company and have worked as a professional freelance developmental editor since January 2014, nine months before returning to graduate school and becoming a writing center tutor, and over a year and a half before I taught college composition.

I remember rationalizing my decision to leave the publishing industry and return to academia: I would rather have a full-time teaching job where I could

teach writing to a larger number of students on a semester-basis than continue working with only a limited number of authors each year. My perspective was narrow, however; I did not have any comprehension of the intricacies of higher education, nor did I know anything about composition scholarship. The only thing I wanted was to teach people how to write.

I spent the first year of my master's program working in the writing center, where I found that being a writing tutor was a natural extension of my previous work, though my teaching-writing practices lacked a metacognitive rationale for enacting them. I did not know the theory; I just had my intuition of how to best work with authors to improve writing. For example, I knew from editing that beginning with higher order concerns was more important than addressing lower order concerns such as sentence structure or usage: as a tutor, I simply used a different language than I had as editor. I knew the practice, but I did not know the terminology, nor could I cite theory to explain my approach to the students I tutored.

The TA preparation for MA students at my institution included a course in composition theory the spring semester before teaching in the fall and a two-day teaching orientation the week before fall classes started. In the class, we read about process from Donald Murray and revision strategies from Nancy Sommers; we learned about expressivism and social constructionism—and I very clearly remember the professor asking us which camp we fell into and my not being able to give her an answer. Neither quite made sense to me, and I didn't have the experiences with a classroom of students to be able to even imagine the differences. In a reverse of how as a writing tutor I'd had the practices without the theory, I now was given the theory without the practices to ground them. Consequently, the theory didn't make sense to me, and there were no exercises inviting me to connect my prior knowledge to this new theory.

The two-day TA preparation orientation was a crash course on how to conduct ice-breakers on the first day and how to grade papers. As someone who had never taught before, I found it beneficial: I needed a hands-on, logistical breakdown of how to interact with my students for the first time. The orientation also included guest speakers who talked about their experiences and gave us advice on how to conduct conferences, scaffold projects, and balance our graduate workload with our teaching responsibilities. In the midst of this preparation, however, I was still not able to make connections from my prior experiences to my new job responsibilities. I can see now that as an editor and as a tutor, I had already practiced assessment and helped authors scaffold knowledge, but during my orientation, I wasn't able to make this connection.

In addition to teaching as a second-year MA student, I served as the research assistant for the institution's WAC program. My responsibilities included

attending all of the staff meetings, conducting research and creating bibliographies, and assisting with the Writing Across Institutions Conference hosted by WAC each year. The majority of my time was spent reading articles on WAC theory and learning about how these theories were enacted through dialogues with the WAC consultants. During this term, I also took a Writing Program Administrator's (WPA) theory course focused on WAC, and it was the first time I was formally learning the theory of a new concept while simultaneously enacting its practices. In our class, we investigated competing WAC theories, examined different WAC programs across the country, and learned how WAC can be enacted within an institution and be taught as an undergraduate class. As I sat in on the WAC meetings and learned about WAC practices through experiencing them myself as a research assistant, the theory I was reading in the WAC course clicked—I finally got it. It was when my introduction to theory was balanced with practice that my knowledge became explicit.

My editing experience gave me a basic knowledge of how to teach writing, but cognitively, the related practices were disconnected. Even looking back, it seems as though I should have been able to make these apparently obvious connections, but the language of the concepts in rhetoric and composition was too foreign and felt too unrelated to my previous work experience. I know I would have benefited from direct exercises that helped me to recall and connect my prior knowledge to plans for teaching. But when I engaged in all three activities—reading composition theory, practicing the theory in the classroom, and reflecting on my learning—my tacit knowledge of writing instruction became explicit and thus applicable in my classroom.

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As these narratives suggest, becoming a teacher is a process of becoming. It begins before a first pedagogical preparation activity, before a practicum accompanying teaching, before a teacher welcomes her first class to campus. What's more: TA preparation programs at institutions are typically offered without reference to each other. Thus, despite their many teaching and teaching-related experiences, Rob, Amanda, and Katelyn as TAs new to Florida State participated in FSU's required versions of TA preparation. With no writing classroom experience per se, Amanda completed FSU's two TA preparation graduate courses before teaching, while Amanda, Katelyn, and Rob all completed a year-long pedagogy practicum. And for her part, while Kathleen hasn't participated in a practicum for some time, she does lead professional development workshops, both at FSU and other institutions. At TAs' request, for example, she conducted a 4-part practicum on classroom assessment in which she learned as much as the participating TAs; and with her colleague Michael Neal, she has twice offered a multi-day Writing Assessment

Institute. Put more generally, many teachers complete more than one TA preparation experience, which makes the concept of liminality even more permeable. In sum and as the narratives above indicate, teaching preparation includes other related professional experiences; undergraduate tutoring experiences; and not least, the experiences of teaching we've encountered as students—which even if only tacitly understood, provide us with our very first models of classroom teaching.

TA preparation is, in a word, multiply-situated.

At the same time, TA preparation is an important component of TA professional development, again as these narratives suggest. Based on our collective experiences, as different as they are, we conclude with four recommendations growing out of these experiences in the hope that they will enhance TA preparation and teaching, specifically by acknowledging and then building on what TAs already bring to that preparation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION ONE: MAKE THE TACIT EXPLICIT THROUGH MAPPING, REFLECTION, AND SIMULTANEOUS THEORY AND PRACTICE

TAs bring a wealth of knowledge from academic, personal, and professional experiences into TA preparation programs, but prior writing knowledge for TAs is often tacit: knowledge that is understood but not articulated. Tacit knowledge can manifest across several teaching practices, including assignment design and assessment. TAs might know what counts as "good writing" (and they might not: see Dryer), for example, but having explicit knowledge of assessment theory when assessing student work is something else entirely. If TAs are not invited to articulate their prior knowledge, it can go unused or, worse, it can even interfere with the uptake of new knowledge, as Rob's narrative suggests. Likewise, as outlined above, Katelyn as a professional editor had developed a language she used in her editing practices, one that was instrumental for her work as an editor, but which did not match her new language as a composition teacher. Such a disconnection can prompt liminality itself, as Ray Land, in *Threshold Concepts: Naming What We Know*, observes: "an encounter with unfamiliar discourse, or different use or forms of language, often was the trigger that provoked a state of liminality" (xi).

Much like the students described by Land, Katelyn had a specific understanding of concepts attached to particular terms. When she entered her graduate program, however, those terms operated within and across two different discourse communities, and they did not always align. On the plus side, much like Amanda and Rob, TAs may tacitly bring experiences that contribute to their pedagogical practice, but even then, such practices only become intentional if

and as they are identified and articulated. Since we can expect that new TAs will bring prior concepts, practices, and language with them, inviting them to connect those prior understandings and practices to new writing concepts, practices, and languages as they engage in TA preparation programs can contribute to their success as classroom teachers—as well as to the success of their students. In addition to asking TAs directly about what they know about teaching writing and how they know it, such an invitation, much like the process used in the Teaching for Transfer (TFT) curriculum, might also focus specifically on naming terms and mapping them.[4] After creating a glossary of terms by naming what they know, for example, TAs can map these terms, drawing from their experiences as students and employees; making connections across those terms, finding similarities and differences across the contexts the terms represent; and then deciding what all this languaging, as it were, means for their teaching of writing.

Equally as important, it can be helpful to ask TAs to engage in practice, theory, and reflection concurrently, precisely because such an ensemble helps enable TAs make tacit knowledge explicit. Developing explicit knowledge requires language, context, and experience. Moreover, when TAs are asked to engage concurrently in reflecting on their prior experiences, in reading composition theory and in teaching—or possibly co-teaching—in the classroom, their tacit knowledge of writing can be articulated and put into dialogue with new experiences, concepts, and language. Reflection, Kara Taczak argues, "allows writers to recognize what they are doing in that particular moment (cognition), as well as to consider why they made the rhetorical choices they did (metacognition)" (78). Working analogously, asking TAs to engage concurrently in theory and practice and to reflect on writing theory and classroom teaching can facilitate the development of their own theory of teaching writing, a theory bringing together and integrating their own prior experiences and new learning.

Moreover, a study from math shows why such concurrent engagement is helpful. Lee Abdullah and Lena Vimalanandan found that it is the combination of subject matter and pedagogy, interwoven with reflection, that helps pre-service math teachers develop as teachers. Working only tacitly, the pre-service teachers were not able to translate what they knew into successful teaching practices; combining explicit knowledge, practice, and reflection, however, facilitated their development as teachers and helped them to teach students more effectively. In other words, this study demonstrates that providing only theory or content knowledge does not assist new teachers to develop; rather, a combination of theory, practice, and reflection in which the tacit is made explicit does. Thus,

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4   Erin Workman's dissertation, situated in TFT, details the efficacy of such naming and mapping for composition students.

thinking in terms of writing teacher preparation (WPE) and as Kali A. Mobley Finn (this volume) observes, "By knowing who TAs are, WPE can be tailored to their needs and experiences": the suggestions here regarding prior knowledge are intended to foster TA's sharing of who they are.

RECOMMENDATION 2: EMPLOY A MIXED LONG-TERM SET OF STRATEGIES FOR TA DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF A SAFE SPACE

As these narratives illustrate, the backgrounds of TAs, which are diverse, can present each writing program with a wide range of TA experiences and interests. Accordingly, helping TAs develop explicit knowledge from tacit knowledge requires a set of processes, including those described above as well as others like mentorship, community building, professional development, and research. Such practices, highlighted in the narratives, are much like those identified by Obermark et al., who propose a model of TA preparation extending beyond what they call the "one and done" approach. In part, such a diverse set of TA preparation practices is needed because while many of the best practices in writing teacher education have been identified, the ways they should be implemented isn't always clear, especially given the diversity in TA prior experiences. As with students in writing classrooms, the makeup of the TAs in any cohort shapes the best direction for learning. Nonetheless, a mix of approaches can better aid TAs in their navigation of the becoming-a-teacher liminal space.

HPL notes that successful engagement in new practices requires "making oneself vulnerable and taking risks," a factor WPAs and faculty preparing TAs can easily forget (3). In the midst of all of the outside factors often involved with transitioning into a new institution, location, and career, it is often difficult for new TAs to position themselves as new learners, too. As all three narratives in this chapter note, first-time instructors struggle in trying to combine old knowledge with new and with appropriately applying the new to classroom practice: for each, it took time, reflection, and failures for the connection of theory and practice to be made. Acknowledging this liminal space as a different environment for each incoming TA helps create a climate where individual learning needs can be met and where TAs can connect their own prior knowledge with the theory they are encountering. This development takes time.

RECOMMENDATION 3: IDENTIFY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT TA PARTICIPATION IN THEM

As Obermark et al. observe, too often TA preparation is a one-shot experience: in their study of moving from TA preparation-as-single-opportunity to a

"Culture of Collaboration," Obermark and her colleagues found that TAs often wanted continued professional development, a point that these narratives highlight. Professional development can, of course, take several forms: for Amanda, it has included presenting at conferences; for Rob, it has included attending institutional workshops where he could talk to faculty across the curriculum; and for Katelyn, it has involved becoming a research assistant. In short, providing a diverse array of professional development opportunities can support TAs in a multitude of ways. Moreover, such opportunities—occurring in varied sites: within a department, across campus, and at conferences—can be offered in several ways, which collectively has the effect of encouraging pedagogical development and expertise. Some sessions might be required; some might be initiated and run by an instructor group; some might be offered as a collaboration with a WAC program, a writing center, or a teaching and learning center. Such a professional development program can also help TAs appreciate that the climate of any program is not a universal. If the environment surrounding them, their thesis director, other instructors, and other programs push against the importance of writing instruction, professional development opportunities, especially those from outside the department like teaching centers, can provide another perspective. Even in an ideal and nurturing department environment, professional development opportunities allow for a wider perspective of the profession—one that even the most active departments cannot provide alone. When the framing of writing teacher education is as a temporary activity enabling a degree, the importance of advancing beyond the liminal space of novice instructor dissipates, but by inviting TAs to diverse continuing professional development opportunities, WPAs can help new TAs see their labor in the context of a professional career trajectory, especially when these opportunities involve networking with participating professors and TAs from other departments.

Finally, these sessions can also serve as an introduction to academic presentations outside of the institution. TAs can be encouraged to emulate these presentations and think of them in the wider context of the academic conference. Even when funding or location make participation in conferences difficult, connecting professional development opportunities to discipline-specific conferences serves to dissuade the "temporary staff" framing of TAs.

RECOMMENDATION 4: INTRODUCE THE WRITING CENTER AS AN IMPORTANT SITE FOR TAs AS TEACHERS AND WRITERS

Writing centers, as both Amanda and Katelyn's narratives attest, often provide a specific kind of TA preparation, one focused on the tutorial setting where TAs can learn about how writing works for individual students. In addition,

TAs often adapt what they have learned in a tutorial setting to the classroom, as Amanda did in learning how to individualize responses to writing. At Florida State University, TAs without 18 credits of graduate work begin working with students not in the classroom, but rather in the Reading Writing Center (RWC). Writing centers, of course, are typically identified with students, as Lil Brannon observes. She frames the writing center as a place where students go for assistance with their writing, but she also describes it as "the place where faculty discuss their teaching and the role that language plays in it." Carol Haviland, focusing on all writers, defines the writing center more capaciously: as providing "the spaces in which peer and professional writing consultants offer their services to writers" (672). In other words, while a writing center can be helpful to a teacher of writing in providing support to the teacher's students, the writing center can also be a site of assistance for TAs and their writing. Emphasizing the role of a writing tutor as an audience for all kinds of writing, for example, could open the possibility for teachers to attend writing center sessions focused on their course documents; tutors could help them understand how students will interpret their syllabi and unpack their writing assignments. Likewise, TAs might find that tutorial response to their own work—seminar papers, for instance, conference presentations, and drafts of publications and dissertation chapters—very helpful as well. Moreover, such assistance might be particularly valuable for TAs at campuses without a center for teaching excellence and/or an explicit WAC program.

CONCLUSION

Becoming a teacher is a process of becoming; those who are expert at teaching often say that it, much like learning to write, takes a lifetime. A liminal process, becoming a teacher also begins, as our narratives suggest, long before a formal TA preparation program, sometimes in another professional opportunity; other times in a writing center; always, at least implicitly, in the classrooms where TAs were students. In all these situations, TAs develop knowledges and practices that could be useful were they made explicit; were they were put into a reflective dialogue with new teaching practices; and were they seen as the start of a TA preparation program that includes a variety of professional development opportunities. Our hope is that our recommendations, illustrated by the narratives here, will contribute to such newly strengthened TA preparation programs.

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