

CHAPTER 7.

SHIFTING ROLES AND NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES: TA LEARNING IN LANDSCAPES OF PRACTICE

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Early in our TAships in a large writing program, we accepted positions as co-editors of an annually revised custom textbook for first-year writing. While working in this capacity, our web of roles and responsibilities was complex: we were instructors of record and curriculum decision makers, graduate students and teacher educators, newcomers to rhetoric and composition, and representatives of the field.¹ In some ways, the multiple roles and responsibilities we took on enhanced our perspectives and work. For example, we drew upon our own teaching experiences as we imagined improvements to the textbook, and our work on the textbook helped us develop insights into the goals of the writing program and disciplinary philosophies about writing that made us more confident instructors and scholars.

However, our competing responsibilities and in-between-ness also made the work challenging at times. We often felt the weight of our editorial decisions was made heavier and more complicated because of our TA status, as our own precarious reputations and relationships were seemingly at stake. On one

1 During our graduate experiences, we also individually took on roles such as faculty development workshop leader, mentor to incoming cohorts, graduate student organizer, program committee member, student placement advisor, in addition to our graduate coursework and research requirements. This juggling of roles will sound familiar to graduate students in rhetoric and composition programs who are encouraged to perform a wide array of activities and professional development positions due to shifts in job market demands and TAship models emphasizing professionalization beyond teacher training (Thomas; Long et al.; T. Miller; Sandy). In this chapter we extend our discussion of TA learning beyond the practicum to acknowledge this range of potential experiences and opportunities for development.

memorable occasion, a fellow TA stopped Madelyn in the hallway to enthuse about a textbook section that we had just decided to cut from the forthcoming edition. Madelyn was unsure how to break this news and feared that the editing team had made an error of judgment or would be faced with backlash and disappointment from colleagues. As our writing program shifted toward a curriculum guided more explicitly by the *CWPA Outcomes Statement*, we frequently struggled to engage productively with instructors who were resistant to the curricular changes, including our co-editor, a Ph.D. student studying literature. Our co-editor felt that the field of composition and rhetoric, the CWPA, and we—by proxy—were ruining writing instruction by failing to incorporate literary analysis in the writing classroom. Reflecting on these and other experiences throughout our editorship, we recognize that while our immediate goal was to produce a new edition of a textbook, we were also learning—and struggling—to represent composition and rhetoric’s values, histories, practices, and goals in conversation with others.

As this edited collection makes clear, these kinds of challenges in the TAship are not uncommon. While navigating multiple roles and responsibilities is a reality of academic life—and professional life, in general—such negotiation presents unique challenges for TAs who occupy liminal positionalities: not-quite faculty, not-quite administrators, not-quite representatives of a field. Previously published work has found that new TAs may struggle to negotiate their positions as novices in their graduate courses while simultaneously serving as experts in their writing classrooms (Dryer; Restaino) or as graduate administrators (Edgington and Taylor). Furthermore, TAs may see their disciplinary affiliation as separate from the writing courses they teach (Grouling). To address such identity-related challenges, Dryer calls on composition and rhetoric scholars to “move past skittishness on the question of teacher identity” (424), acknowledge the influence of TAs’ prior experiences and affiliations on their practices, and plan for “what sorts of learners and teachers [TAs] will *become*” (444, emphasis in original).

In this chapter, we respond to Dryer’s call as we draw from the works of the learning theorist Etienne Wenger-Trayner (nee Wenger) and his collaborators to re-theorize the TAship with particular attention to identity development. This framing aligns with others in this volume who seek to reconsider the TAship from a learning perspective that takes “a more capacious understanding of newcomers as lifelong learners across contexts, in and over time” (Gramer, this volume; see also Warwick; Yancey et al, this volume). In the sections that follow, we illustrate how a social learning lens has helped us to better understand some of the challenges we faced in our TAship, and we offer concrete strategies based on this framework for supporting TAs (and faculty) in their learning trajectories.

TAS AS LEARNING TRAVELERS

Wenger's *Communities of Practice* theorizes the social process of learning in ways that have helped researchers and professionals in education, government, and other organizations better understand the identity-related challenges newcomers may face as they learn to contribute to shared enterprises. According to Wenger, engagement with the members and practices of a community changes who we are by affecting our ability to participate, to belong, and make our way in the world (226). In other words, learning to participate is a process of identity development. People do not arrive in learning situations as blank slates, a point made clearly by Yancey et al. (this volume), and they do not leave their old identity behind and take on a new identity in practice. Instead, Wenger suggests that identity is neither unified nor fragmented but is instead a "nexus of multimembership" (159). A person's membership in multiple communities of practice is inevitable, as are the tensions experienced at the boundaries between communities. According to Wenger, the practices we engage in and the perspectives we adopt may differ across communities, and coordinating these forms of participation requires the "work of reconciliation" that "entails finding ways to make our various forms of membership coexist" (160). Indeed, in our TAship we found it difficult to reconcile our various commitments and locate ourselves constructively across different communities.

As we reflect on our "work of reconciliation" in the editorship role, it is helpful to consider what Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner would call our "landscape of practice." According to the authors, even a single profession's body of knowledge can be best understood as a complex landscape composed of multiple communities of practice (15). For example, the body of knowledge that constitutes first-year writing (FYW) is distributed across various communities, including the fields of composition and rhetoric, education, second language writing, and communication, as well as adjacent communities such as a university's general education or writing across the curriculum program, or closely related programs of study such as literature, linguistics, or creative writing. Communities of practice beyond the academy also participate in knowledge-making about writing. Policymakers, nonprofit organizations, and corporations, for example, play a significant role in constructing the public narrative about writing education (Adler-Kassner).

Participants in the landscape of FYW (TAs and faculty, for example) can be thought of as travelers navigating a complex terrain of multiple, overlapping, shifting, and sometimes contradicting communities. As Fenton-O'Creevy et al. explain:

These learning travelers have to find their way into and around specific practices, build an image of where these practices are located in the landscape, engage with multiple places

in the landscape at once, cross boundaries, and develop an identity that is resilient and productive. (151)

When we view our editorship through this metaphorical lens, we can see how often our struggles were related to understanding our positionality in the landscape and knowing what to do when faced with boundaries both local (institutional) and more wide-ranging (disciplinary). Our purpose for sharing our TAship narrative is not to complain or to critique our supervisors, program, or colleagues, nor are we suggesting that after a two-year professional development position we could or should have necessarily developed “resilient and productive” identities enabling us to identify and cross boundaries without fail. In fact, we recognize that we are always travelers finding our way through landscapes or into new ones, not travelers in search of a particular destination. To see TAs as learning travelers means recognizing the unique practices, places, boundaries, and identities they encounter as newcomers in what is most likely an unfamiliar landscape. We hope to use our experiences to remind those working in writing teacher education that “moving across a landscape and learning at its boundaries requires identity work” (Fenton-O’Creivy et al. 151-152). With identity work in mind, we suggest that a landscapes of practice lens that foregrounds the process of professional identity development through learning and reconciliation can benefit all who engage with the TAship, including TAs from across disciplines and the faculty members who support them.

DESIGNING FOR LEARNING IN A LANDSCAPE OF PRACTICE

Wenger has acknowledged the need for learning communities to actively support identity formation through mindful educational design. More specifically, learners should have access to three modes of identification—engagement, imagination, and alignment—that can help a learner make sense of the landscape and their own position in it (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner). Designing opportunities for learners to access these modes requires attention to:

1. Places of engagement;
2. Materials and experiences with which to build an image of the world and themselves;
3. Ways of having an effect on the world and making their actions matter (Wenger 270-271).

In this section, we describe these three modes of identification and suggest ways to design the TAship with them in mind. We hope to show how TAships

designed through a landscapes of practice lens can better support TAs in finding their place, seeing the value of their work, and communicating with others across the diverse landscape of writing education.²

ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is the *doing* of things in a community—using and producing artifacts and talking about things that matter—often in collaboration with more experienced members (Lave and Wenger; Wenger). Composition and rhetoric TAs are engaged in the practices of a community when they are designing lesson plans, grading papers, serving on committees, developing curricular materials, and having conversations in the hallway, among other activities. As Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner write, “there is no substitute for direct engagement in practice as a vehicle for learning the competence of a community” (20). Throughout our TAship, we were certainly involved in the *doing* of a community of practice. In our two years as editors, we created two editions of the textbook, artifacts which remain an important part of institutional history and our own learning trajectories. We were also FYW teachers responsible for developing syllabi and lesson plans, assessing student writing, and discussing our practices with friends and colleagues. These were all opportunities to participate in a community of practice.

However, designing for engagement should consist of more than simply encouraging or making room for TAs to participate in ongoing activities. As Wenger suggests, people begin to develop a sense of self in practice when they invest in their work and in relations with other people. In our editorship, opportunities for collaboration and negotiation with others were limited. Much of our work unfolded in our “editor’s cave,” a small, isolated corner of the TA office building. We received little feedback on our work from administrators or other experienced instructors, and we were even physically removed from these members of the community in our TA office, located in a building separate from the English department. Due in part to these institutional constraints, we lacked the intergenerational encounters Wenger identifies as important for incorporating historical knowledge into our practice.

Our lack of access to mutual engagement is one reason we struggled to make meaning in our work. As a result, we endured a period of stagnation in the

2 Following Wenger, we must make the important distinction that one can design *for* learning but learning itself cannot be designed (229). In other words, we can create situations to open learning opportunities, but predicting results is not possible. With this in mind, what we offer here is not a prescriptive plan, but rather a framework for rethinking the educational design of the TAship.

planning stages of the editing process. The textbook had 34 previous iterations before our input, and some of the content had remained static for decades. How could we respect this history and the instructors who had used the same material for years while also moving the book forward to support our program's impending curricular changes and reflecting advancements in the field? In the end, we erred on the side of caution, making changes to the text to improve usability while largely maintaining the status quo. We were certainly engaged in the act of producing the text, but we struggled to develop a sense of meaning, or a sense of ourselves, through our engagement. Wenger explains that newcomers are often more conservative in their actions, like we were, because they are invested in gaining a foothold in the community; paradoxically, more experienced members may actually want newcomers to shake things up. Designing opportunities for intergenerational encounters may help TAs develop a contextual understanding of their roles and actions, build relationships across boundaries, and chart their own paths in negotiation with other members of the landscape.

DESIGNING FOR ENGAGEMENT

Designing for engagement should emphasize the social aspects of practice, including negotiating meaning with more experienced members within and across communities. In our editorship, different kinds of mentorship may have opened such opportunities. For example, a more apprenticeship-oriented editorship structure would allow for collaboration with a more experienced member of the community, such as a faculty member or WPA involved in program-wide decision-making. Importantly, this faculty member could still defer to the graduate editors but would be there to talk through the rationale for certain choices and engage in conversations from what Wenger would call an "old timer" position, thus allowing the TA editors to participate in the practice with a more enlightened and reflective perspective. Such mentorship could have also helped us experience disciplinary and pedagogical boundaries with our co-editor and other writing instructors as a learning asset. Ideally, a faculty mentor could have helped facilitate a more constructive conversation during tense situations by providing a more informed and nuanced account of the institutional and disciplinary histories of the writing education landscape.

Creating space for intergenerational collaboration in the TA practicum can also provide TAs with access to fellow learning travelers facing similar challenges. As TAs complete the many tasks required of them as new writing teachers in a program or institution, they may engage in actions without considering their own developing identities as writing teachers. To address this issue Rupiper, Taggart, and Lowry suggest inviting experienced TAs to explain the ways their

course policies and calendars reflect their teaching ethos, situating seemingly static artifacts and routines in more dynamic ways. Inviting advanced TAs to reflect upon their teaching identities and share their expertise could help less experienced instructors identify more deeply with their practices while also learning the value of reflexive practice. Creating opportunities for novice TAs to co-construct classroom materials with advanced TAs or facilitating peer-to-peer teaching observations can also help support the formation of an intergenerational cohort of learning travelers.

Planned opportunities for mutual engagement will increase the visibility of boundaries, but Wenger reminds us that “boundaries are regions worth paying attention to” as sites of learning (254). TAs may face boundaries when their prior experiences feel disconnected from new areas of competence or when their roles as graduate students or affiliations with a discipline seem to misalign with their roles as teachers (Grouling). Such clashing of memberships and experiences can lead to resistance or, even worse, abandonment of a practice, affiliation, or trajectory. Therefore, making these boundary encounters visible and providing TAs with strategies for addressing them should be part of TAs hip design. The TAs in Dryer’s study of teacher feedback demonstrated such challenges when they encountered a boundary between practices. According to Dryer, TAs’ pre-existing expectations of teacher-student dynamics affected how they positioned themselves as teachers and imagined their own students as writers. In their struggle to reconcile their identities as novices in graduate school with their role as “experts” in the writing classroom, TAs were unable to see parallels between their own challenges and those of their students. Dryer suggests offering opportunities to “deroutinize” teaching practices, such as asking TAs to offer feedback first “as a teacher” and then “as a colleague.” Such an approach might “create new interplays of [prior] experience and competence” (Wenger 254), inviting a boundary encounter that can challenge pre-conceived notions of teaching (Dryer 442-443). One can imagine conducting similar role-playing activities with TAs and faculty from English studies or other disciplines in order to engage with and across other boundaries. For learning travelers moving through a landscape, these intergenerational and/or interdisciplinary boundary engagements can also help them better locate their practices—and themselves—within the landscape.

IMAGINATION

While engagement provides a means for doing things in a community and making visible the boundaries in a landscape, designing for imagination can help a learner develop a reflective practice about these activities and boundaries. According to Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, imagination allows learners to

visualize the landscape of practice and to locate their role in it. As the authors explain, a nurse is aware that there are other nurses working in different hospitals, and imagining this network of people aids in the nurse's journey to better understand positionality and interpret experiences in relation to other communities in the landscape (21). Imagination helps learners develop a sense of identity and belonging and can also help learners locate themselves on a learning trajectory to make sense of where they are, where they have been, and where they are going (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner).

Challenges related to imagination were prominent in our editorship experience. On the one hand, as composition and rhetoric Ph.D. students we had opportunities to read about and debate different approaches to composition pedagogy in our coursework, helping us develop and examine our commitments to different theories and principles of our discipline. In Wenger's terms, we were able to construct a picture of the world and make sense of where we belonged. We could imagine other learning travelers reading the same texts and having similar conversations, and this construction of a social world was important to our developing professional identities. Course readings that included case studies and writing program profiles also heightened our awareness of how writing is taught in different contexts and even how other writing programs have approached custom textbook publishing, helping us to orient our work in relation to a more expansive network of teachers, administrators, and textbook editors.

However, we faced difficulties imagining our expertise in relation to those outside our disciplinary community, which resulted in frustration and impasses with our co-editor. Like many TAs, our co-editor did not have the same opportunities to engage deeply with composition scholarship outside of the one-year practicum course that focused more on practical know-how than theory-based training or acclimation to the field. To our co-editor, English literature as a subject and discipline was under attack by composition and rhetoric, with the *CWPA Outcomes Statement* and our program's curricular changes as the reified proof. In our often-tense conversations, we became our co-editor's proxy for the entire field of composition and rhetoric, as we suspect we were for other TAs whose perspectives of the study and teaching of writing may have been limited to a single textbook in a single writing program. Looking back, it seems we all could have benefited from more opportunities to use the facility of imagination to reflect upon our roles and other perspectives shaping the landscape.

DESIGNING FOR IMAGINATION

The TA practicum itself could create opportunities to envision the landscape of writing instruction beyond the local context. Supporting imagination in the

TAship means helping participants explore their learning trajectories by creating opportunities for them to try things out, test boundaries, and discover possible futures (Wenger). Designing for imagination could begin with taking the landscapes of practice metaphor literally and asking TAs to make maps illustrating their commitments and relationships to various communities of practice. In our TA position, a new editor might map their own affiliations and those of other textbook stakeholders in order to see their role from multiple perspectives. TAs in a practicum course could map their past and future scholarly and extracurricular affiliations in order to locate their interests and set meaningful goals. Repeatedly returning to this map throughout a graduate seminar or even over the course of an entire TAship would allow TAs to see their own trajectories evolving, as where they saw themselves on day one would likely change with experience. Yancey et al. (this volume) similarly explore the possibilities of mapping exercises. The authors suggest helping TAs name what they know about writing and teaching from their prior experiences to create a glossary of terms, and then using mapping to find connections and tensions between their prior experiences as students and/or professionals and current experiences as writing instructors.

Like these mapping exercises, other opportunities to reflect on teaching and professional development experiences can help TAs look at their roles, practices, and relationships with new eyes (Wenger). In our case, we turned to journaling as we struggled to locate ourselves in our editing work. With the initial intention of simply documenting and processing our experiences, we wrote about our successes and the obstacles we were facing, including our challenging interactions with colleagues. In this exploratory, personal writing we began to work through our conflicted feelings about the work and better understand our TAship in relation to our other commitments and our fellow learning travelers. This informal writing led to the kinds of self-assessment and reflection recognized as a central aspect of scholarly work (S. Miller et al.). We found support in our reflective efforts and encouragement to share our findings with others in a graduate seminar on writing program administration. Through this course, we were able to develop our TAship reflections into a research project and earn course credits for doing so. Designing such opportunities for informal and/or formal reflective writing in the practicum, graduate coursework, or professional development settings can help TAs develop these reflective scholarly habits.

The teaching philosophy presents another writing opportunity for teacher learners to locate themselves in the landscape of FYW. While often considered a job application genre, the teaching statement can also hold value for learning travelers long before they enter the job market. During our first year as TAs, we were tasked with writing a semester-long “intertextual teaching philosophy” in

a graduate pedagogy course. On three occasions we exchanged working drafts with a different group of colleagues, and each time we revised we had to include ideas gained from reading others' statements. This intertextual collaboration not only allowed for engagement with learning travelers across experience levels and intellectual commitments, but also helped us (re)position ourselves with respect to our practice at different points in the semester. With each new iteration of our statements, we had to project ourselves as a teacher in connection to our past and future affiliations, imagining ourselves anew and in connection with other members of the community. In a TA practicum, a project like this could help build a cross-disciplinary imagination, through which new teachers might decide whether and how to re-appropriate the values projected by others. This activity might also help TA learners imagine and prepare for potential boundary encounters such as conversations with administrators, university-wide committees, or faculty from other departments who wonder what it is we do in our corner of the academy.

As this discussion has emphasized, the landscape of writing instruction extends beyond one's immediate classroom or writing program. Thus, it is important to help TAs extend their imagination beyond their local institution in order to see the purpose and significance of their work within the broader enterprise of writing education. Wenger suggests developing this sort of imagination through sharing stories and "exploring other ways of doing what we are doing, other possible worlds, and other identities" (185). One way to expose TAs to the stories and practices of more geographically-distant members of the landscape is through reading program profiles, such as those published in *Composition Forum* and in this collection, or scholarship with case studies involving TAs, teachers, or administrators. Arranging visits or video conferences with scholars or facilitating cross-institutional TA partnerships could also help TAs better contextualize their work and locate themselves in relation to other members and communities of the landscape.

Involving advanced TAs in writing program administration (Rupiper, Taggart, and Lowery), distributing professional development across institutional sites (Obermark, Brewer, and Halasek; Yancey), and including more direct faculty mentorship from across programs and departments could also help to expand the TA imagination, allowing them to better understand roles they might wish or need to inhabit across time and space in a landscape of practice. Imagining how the TAship fits within a professional landscape may especially help TAs who do not already see themselves as writing teachers or scholars aligned with composition research. Through imagination, learning travelers are engaging in the work of reconciliation required to develop a flexible, productive identity as a graduate student, teacher, and scholar.

ALIGNMENT

According to Wenger, engagement and imagination can help a person understand their position and the practices of a community, but alignment is needed to bring ideas into action or contribute to broader goals that extend beyond a single community in a landscape. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner further explain that alignment involves “making sure that activities are coordinated, that laws are followed, or that intentions are implemented” (21). Alignment is evident when individuals share commitment to a goal or engage in similar practices to meet a directive. It can be “a way of taking part in something big” (Wenger 196)—like a faculty-wide walkout to protest working conditions—but alignment practices can also take more mundane forms like following a syllabus template or enlisting a colleague’s collaboration designing an assignment. In a landscape of practice, alignment might simply mean developing a shared discourse so that a conversation can take place across boundaries. Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir describe this type of alignment work when they remind us of the field’s “commitment to pedagogical outreach” that requires “confident, mature, reflective composition teachers representing us—and extending our scholarly reach—at all levels” (61-62). Here we suggest that focus on alignment in the TAs hip can support this goal.

As our prior discussions have indicated, the boundary work required for a successful editorship was evident as we struggled to align our work across communities in our landscape and communicate with other instructors in our writing program. Though we had no problem imagining each other as fellow writing instructors, beliefs about the purposes and practices of writing instruction were often in conflict. One semester, we made efforts to meet with first-year TAs to hear about their experiences using the textbook with hopes their insights would help us make editing decisions more reflective of community needs. What we heard were mostly requests for more workbook-style grammar activities. At our editing meetings, our co-editor similarly insisted on incorporating decontextualized rules about academic grammar and mechanics. We knew these suggestions from our peers did not reflect research on student learning and writing development, but we also knew that these ideas about writing and writing instruction were not uncommon in our program and in broader public and academic discourses. Caught in alignment dilemmas, we often simply moved on, not wanting to (or not feeling ready to) engage in dialogue about our pedagogical and disciplinary differences. We now recognize these moments as potentially generative opportunities. Perhaps we could have brought the suggestions of our peers into a broader discussion with WPAs about the goals and values of our program and worked together to create textbook additions aimed at helping teachers address the language-related needs of their students in more effective ways than decontextualized grammar drills. While we recognize it was not our

job alone to convince anyone of the efficacy of broader goals and practices of FYW, with the help of more experienced members of the landscape we could have used these boundary encounters as opportunities for learning, extending our reach, and working toward more meaningful collaborations.

DESIGNING FOR ALIGNMENT

As we reflect on our TAs hip, we recognize that it is one thing to become a knowledgeable and reflective teacher or scholar, but another to be able to communicate this knowledge with others or to engage with participants in a landscape who have different scholarly commitments and teaching philosophies. Wenger has argued that in our interconnected world, the goal for all education should be to support learner identities that are able to move across boundaries (274). Designing for alignment in the TAs hip requires the facilitation and support of boundary encounters and coordinated efforts that extend across a landscape.

One way to design for alignment in the TAs hip is to make visible the histories and philosophies underlying certain practices. Such a process allows the learning traveler to see the ways a community encompasses multiple perspectives while also understanding the role of local practices within the broader enterprise. Writing about a podcast she created to introduce an assigned text in an education seminar, Polin suggests that teachers of graduate students can make visible the histories and tensions within scholarly conversations. She explains:

Via podcast, I was able to offer a bit of a history about the author, his academic lineage, his current work, and the role the book plays in a landscape of writing on the subject. I explained why I had selected the text and what my intentions were for them as readers. In this way, I was able to not only help the students make meaning more easily, but also to connect them with a sense of the community of researchers pursuing this line of work. (174)

In creating this explanatory text, Polin is helping newcomers locate their reading within the history and practices of a community.

Making curricular decisions transparent, like Polin does by explaining the text selection process for a course, can improve alignment between learner needs and the expectations of educators and open opportunities for learners to negotiate the terms of their experiences. Miller et al. similarly suggest that graduate teacher educators should be more transparent with TAs about the curricular philosophy of the practicum. By modeling their process of curricular decision making, educators are offering TAs “the tools to develop their own methodologies in their writing

classrooms, to evaluate those methodologies, and to evaluate [the teacher educator's] methodologies in the practicum itself" (88). Making explicit the coordinated actions and productive tensions that help a practice like the TA practicum evolve can invite graduate students to engage in processes of alignment.

Acknowledging moments of tension as learning opportunities, rather than as problems or impediments to progress, can also help members of a community remain productive in the face of difference. For example, as practicum instructors introduce policies, standards, or outcomes, they can also discuss the ways these policies came to be and make visible the ways a policy—such as an outcomes statement—may not please everyone, even those who created it. Providing TAs not only with the CWPA outcomes statement but also with some of its critiques may help novice TAs “hear controversy and contention, to understand this tension as healthy and productive, and to learn to participate in it” (Polin 175). We wonder if more open discussion about the history of tension surrounding topics like grammar instruction, for example, may have led to more productive conversations with those who disagreed with our editing approaches.

We do recognize that emphasizing tensions may raise concerns among writing teacher educators, especially in writing programs where disciplinary boundaries are quite visible. Faculty may fear bolstering TA resistance or further delegitimizing composition and rhetoric in the eyes of those already skeptical of its value. Thus, it is important to reflect on one's local context and consider prevailing beliefs and topics that could lead to tense moments. Hosting interdisciplinary roundtable discussions in TA training focused on a controversial issue (like grammar instruction or assessment) might be one way to highlight multiple perspectives in an ongoing scholarly conversation while modeling work across boundaries.

Extending TA training across institutional sites also creates opportunities for alignment across boundaries. Showing what this might look like in practice, Obermark, Brewer, and Halasek describe a three-part workshop on diversity in writing classes. The program was designed to enable TAs to learn about campus resources, learn from experienced teachers in the English department, and collaborate with peers in designing instructional opportunities. The authors conclude that this workshop showed TAs the university's “broad commitment to teaching,” and ultimately led to TA satisfaction and program sustainability (46). Because the teaching of writing is a shared enterprise, representatives from writing centers, teaching and learning offices, and related academic units have much to offer in TA training. Directly incorporating their perspectives in TA training may help show TAs potential resources and expand their ability to align with communities across the landscape of practice.

While in this section we focused primarily on challenges related to disciplinary and programmatic boundaries, we must acknowledge that learners will inevitably

encounter additional boundaries arising from relations of power. The process of alignment is particularly troublesome because it involves coordinating practices with others. Alignment might include, for example, expectations to follow guidelines or policies, which can potentially feel forceful or coercive. Writing teacher educators must recognize that TAs bring knowledge, experiences, and subjectivities that influence if and to what extent they may align themselves with the ideas, values, goals, and practices of a landscape. Designing the TAs hip with power relations and identities in mind is thus critical to the process of alignment.

TOWARD A LANDSCAPES OF PRACTICE APPROACH

While composition and rhetoric scholars have long agreed that the goals of the TAs hip should encompass more than preparing teachers of writing for the classroom (T. Miller; Yancey; S. Miller et al.), planning for identity development has been largely elided until recent years (Dryer; Grouling). We are pleased to see others directly engaging with issues of identity in this volume (Lugg; Yancey et al., this volume), and we are encouraged by calls to re-think the TAs hip from a learning rather than teaching perspective (Gramer, this volume). Together, insights from this collection make clear that TAs enter a landscape of practice consisting of a complex, overlapping web of communities of practice. As learning travelers, they need opportunities to engage with practices and across boundaries, to construct an image of the landscape and their evolving place in it, and to explore ways their work can have meaning. To this end, we have offered suggestions for designing the composition and rhetoric TAs hip from a social learning perspective by foregrounding attention to identity development. Actively designing the TAs hip to support learning travelers requires providing opportunities for different forms of identification (see Table 7.1).

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner remind us that while it can be helpful to consider engagement, imagination, and alignment as distinct, they are most effective when they are activated together. Engagement without imagination or alignment can lead to reification of practices without a reflective understanding of why they are carried out. Similarly, alignment without engagement or imagination can lead to “unthinking compliance” or resistance (22). On the other hand, the combination of imagination, engagement, and alignment makes for a reflective practice in which a learner is doing things with others, thinking about this work and their role in it, and extending themselves to achieve goals within and beyond the boundaries of the enterprise. Many of the examples we have provided show the interrelatedness of these modes. For example, co-constructing curricular materials is a form of engagement, but may also contribute to one’s ability to envision the landscape or align with a different perspective.

Table 7.1. Designing for Identification

	Engagement	Imagination	Alignment
Key Questions	<p>Who do TAs interact with during practicum? After their first year? What mentorship structures are in place?</p> <p>What opportunities do TAs have for collaboration across boundaries (disciplinary, intergenerational, etc.): How can we design for these?</p> <p>How often do TAs discuss their practices with more experienced TAs or faculty?</p> <p>What physical spaces offer opportunities for interaction?</p>	<p>What opportunities exist for TAs to access their prior experiences? To project their future experiences?</p> <p>How are TAs offered opportunities to reflect on their teaching? On their learning? On their engagement with others?</p> <p>What opportunities exist for TAs to learn more about the role of writing in the university? In their program or discipline?</p> <p>How can we help TAs extend their imagination beyond a single institution or program?</p>	<p>How are TAs introduced to policies and curricular materials?</p> <p>What kinds of interactions are possible with TAs and faculty from other programs and disciplines?</p> <p>How are TAs supported in communicating their expertise across boundaries?</p> <p>Do TAs have a broader understanding of the goals of the TAship?</p> <p>How are TAs prepared to address tensions and conflicts?</p>
Strategies to support identification	<p>Discuss lesson plans, activities, grading, etc. with more experienced TAs and/or faculty</p> <p>Construct course materials collaboratively</p> <p>Serve on committees in writing program, department, or at university level</p> <p>Discuss “threshold concepts” with TAs from other programs and/or disciplines</p> <p>Assess or co-develop practicum curricula</p>	<p>Support ongoing development of teaching philosophy, with opportunities to read others</p> <p>Create consistent opportunities for reflection on teaching, writing, and disciplinary</p> <p>Make power relationships visible</p> <p>Map university writing landscape</p> <p>Initiate cross-institutional partnerships</p> <p>Read program profiles and case studies</p> <p>Coordinate visits from scholars</p>	<p>Encourage teaching observations and feedback discussions</p> <p>Talk to faculty across the university about their writing goals for students</p> <p>Host interdisciplinary roundtable discussions</p> <p>Share histories of policies, standards, and program-level decisions with TAs</p> <p>Highlight the productive tension inherent in disciplinary scholarship and programmatic decision-making</p>

NOTE: The questions and programmatic activities listed are not prescriptive; they are meant to serve as a starting point, and are, of course, incomplete and decontextualized.

Though we see great possibilities in reimagining the TAs^{hip} for social learning, we want to be realistic about the potential outcomes of enacting this approach. Of course, it would be nearly impossible for a TAs^{hip} design to incorporate all of the strategies listed in Table 7.1, and some may be impossible to enact depending on contextual factors. We also do not hold or promise utopian visions of TA identity transformations or boundary crossings. As our narrative has demonstrated, we came across fellow TAs (and faculty) who did not wish to learn more about some of the practices in their landscape. We also recognize that race, class, gender, sexuality, language, first-generation status, ability, and other identity markers factor into the degree of risk, access, difficulty, or desirability TAs may experience when learning in a landscape (Alexander; Craig and Perryman-Clark). While we have tried our best to be mindful and realistic in our discussion, as white, cis-presenting, native English speakers we acknowledge that our own boundary encounters were experienced from places of privilege and that our perspective on learning in a landscape is not the only narrative to consider. When designing the TAs^{hip} it is important for writing teacher educators to learn from and alongside TAs about potential boundaries that impact TA learning and prepare to address challenges and tensions that may surface. It is also important to recognize that not all boundaries are necessary or navigable. Eliminating unnecessary and inequitable barriers wherever possible is fundamental to supporting TAs in their learning trajectories. People in places of privilege and power should start by securing TA access to a livable wage and healthcare, for example, and creating clear pathways to success through fair, transparent, responsive, anti-racist, and anti-ableist policies and practices.

As with any discussion of graduate student labor, it is important to acknowledge the very real potential for exploitation in the TAs^{hip}. Designers of TAs^{hips} must be careful not to place unnecessary burdens on graduate students or mask exploitative labor under the guise of professional development or learning opportunities (Leverenz and Goodburn; Edgington and Taylor). This is why, for example, we have cautioned against providing engagement opportunities without careful design and consideration of TA identities and learning trajectories. While there are certainly risks of exploitation in any TAs^{hip}, we believe much of what we have suggested, such as designing opportunities for collaboration and negotiation across boundaries, can help protect the working rights of graduate students in precarious positions and may even create conditions for productive advocacy efforts.

Despite potential challenges, we maintain that the TAs^{hip} is a unique opportunity to develop professional identities that enable one to explore and work across boundaries. The ability to cross boundaries, particularly disciplinary boundaries, is a valuable asset for composition and rhetoric professionals whose

work must reconcile multiple memberships in a landscape and serve as “brokers,” bringing elements of one practice into another (Wenger 105). For example, when faculty members serve on university-wide committees they are “extending [their] scholarly reach” (Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir 62) to listeners who may have different understandings of writing or student writers. TAs will also face situations in which they must translate their expertise for others. When discussing writing or what writing teachers do with fellow TAs in a seminar, with colleagues at a cross-disciplinary organization meeting, or with a stranger on an airplane, composition and rhetoric TAs are negotiating their place within the field and learning how to communicate their expertise across boundaries.

We now realize this was the work we were trying to do in our roles as TA editors of a custom textbook. In our struggles to reconcile our multiple memberships, we learned about our commitments to composition scholarship, about the institutional and programmatic histories of FYW, and about the challenges of engaging across boundaries. While we do not discount these invaluable lessons and experiences, we suggest that an educational design more like the one proposed in this chapter might have provided us a way of understanding our challenges and goals in clearer terms. Rather than avoiding difficult conversations with others or feeling stagnant in our work, we may have been able to embrace boundary encounters as learning opportunities. As Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner explain, making boundaries visible “confronts explicitly the problematic nature of boundary crossing and the potential tensions or conflicts between practices as sources of accountability” (18). Designers of TA learning experiences can better support brokering and coordination across a landscape by helping TAs locate boundaries and approach them as learning assets.

Such changes are already occurring at our prior institution. A recent publication of the custom textbook was the result of a collaboration between TAs and an associate director of the writing program, a faculty member who could serve as a facilitator for boundary crossing. The program has also increased efforts for collaborative engagement, including an initiative in which TAs and long-time instructors from different disciplinary backgrounds worked in the same room to develop sample teaching materials. Prominent scholars have been invited to offer workshops on issues that frequently lead to tensions such as written feedback and writing assessment practices. Activities like these provide opportunities for engagement, imagination, and alignment within and across boundaries.

Given the contentious role of writing and writing instruction on our campuses and in public discourse, writing instructors, including TAs, can expect to encounter multiple and competing perspectives with which they are called upon to engage. As Adler-Kassner explains, representatives of writing education can benefit from “thinking strategically about how to shape stories about students and

writing” (“Activist WPA” 2). Actively designing the TAship for learning in landscapes of practice is one way to bring us closer to this goal by helping TAs develop flexible, boundary-crossing identities that will enable them to more effectively communicate with others about the values and practices of writing education.

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