

NARRATIVE 8.

ALWAYS BEGINNING: INHABITING THE TASHIP AFTER A CAREER

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When I first taught, I was paired with amazing mentors who taught me so much I didn't know. With an aborted attempt at an engineering major and a heavy industry career behind me, I knew how to work as a professional, but I knew little about the college classroom or process composition. This my mentor showed me, generously, but the other half of the new TA program was for those without my past. So, in many ways the program didn't resonate with me. Too often, I felt, they weren't speaking to me—and that loneliness followed me through and after my MA.

When I finally landed a full-time job, I found for the first time a wealth of professional development programs that alleviated that loneliness from my first MA term. I had already determined to forge ahead myself. I earned a TESL certificate, peer mentored, co-developed new courses, and volunteered to teach them. When my teaching was less effective, my students asked me to change—and I listened. Collaboration, particularly with my students, was what I realized my TAship didn't teach me. Maybe because I am a loner or didn't fit in with my cohort? I don't really know.

When I returned eight years later for my Ph.D., I was excited to grow in new ways, but I imagined it would be like my faculty experience, especially since the assignment sequence was so different for me. Again, the bulk of what I encountered, at least in the first year, seemed geared for those inhabiting the TAship for the first time.

The mentoring relationship was really a peer relationship—much like my first one—and mutually beneficial. But the other kinds of understanding I sought occurred more in the classes I took and came in pieces. I needed up-front discussions and workshops to understand and plan new-to-me assignments before I taught my first assigned composition class. We are a large program, and I thought there would be more opportunities for those of us in the first year to be, not begin as, teachers together.

My experience in WAC/WID workshops, the Flipping the Classroom course, and my collaborative experience in developing completely new courses

at the request of the company taking over my old faculty program led me to seek similar experiences. I wanted someone to show me through how they taught new-to-me assignments. Instead, it was more like my first experience—the basics, the groundwork, the how-tos that must happen before we can put a whole class together. I ended up figuring a lot of this out on my own before I felt like I had a place—again, mostly alone. Sure, we each need to find our own professional identity and inhabit our profession in ways that make the most sense to us. But reflecting on my TAs that bookended an ESL faculty and adjunct career, I still wish for more opportunities for each of us to have inhabited, instead of beginning, what it means to be a teacher.