INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF TEACHING CIRCLES IN COMPOSITION GTA DEVELOPMENT: NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND IDENTITY FORMATION

A DISSERTATION IN
English
and
Curriculum and Instruction

Presented to the faculty of the University
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by
KRISTIN NICOLE SCHMIDTLEIN

B.S.E., Emporia State University, 2017

M.A., Emporia State University, 2019

Kansas City, Missouri

2025

INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF TEACHING CIRCLES

IN COMPOSITION GTA DEVELOPMENT:

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND IDENTITY FORMATION

Kristin Nicole Schmidtlein, Candidate for Doctor of Philosophy Degree

University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2025

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the application of Teaching Circles (TCs) as a peer support system for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in composition courses, with a particular focus on the development of their professional identities and pedagogical practices. Despite the increasing reliance on GTAs in higher education, many existing professional development programs neglect the informal, ad hoc peer mentorship that GTAs engage in naturally. Drawing on narrative inquiry, this study examines how narrative-based TCs, led by the GTAs themselves, can provide a consistent and structured space for peer interaction that supports both professional growth and identity formation. By exploring the narratives of GTAs at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), this study highlights the ways in which these informal mentorship opportunities contribute to the development of teaching practices, the sharing of pedagogical experiences, and the formation of a professional identity grounded in peer collaboration. This research fills a gap in GTA professional development literature by offering an alternative to traditional, hierarchical training models and advocating for the integration of peer-driven mentorship structures into GTA education. Ultimately, this study presents a scalable

model for fostering a supportive, collaborative environment where GTAs can thrive both as educators and as individuals within the discipline of rhetoric and composition.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, have examined a dissertation titled “Investigating the Role of Teaching Circles in Composition GTA Development: Narratives of Professional Growth and Identity Formation,” presented by Kristin N. Schmidtlein, candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Supervisory Committee

Antonio Byrd, Ph.D., Committee Chair
Department of English

Candace Schlein, Ph.D., Co-Discipline Advisor
School of Education, Social Work and Psychological Sciences

Jane Greer, Ph.D.
Department of English

Jennifer Frangos, Ph.D.
Department of English

Jeff Rydberg-Cox, Ph.D.
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

CONTENTS

TABLES

Table Page

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this dissertation marks the culmination of a long and challenging journey, and I owe this achievement to the unwavering support and encouragement of many individuals and institutions. I am deeply grateful to all those who have played a part in my academic, professional, and personal growth throughout this process. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who have supported me throughout the course of my dissertation journey, without which this work would not have been possible. First and foremost, I would like to thank my family and friends who have been unwavering in their love, support, and encouragement during this process. It was a constant source of strength throughout this journey, and I am eternally grateful for you all. To my parents, Tom and Debbie Schmidtlein, your love, encouragement, and belief in me have been a constant source of strength. Your sacrifices and unwavering support have given me the courage to pursue this goal, and I cannot thank you enough for always being there for me. To Joe Miller, thank you for your endless love, patience, and sacrifices. Your support throughout this process has been a constant source of motivation, and your understanding during the many long hours I spent writing, revising, and researching means more to me than words can express. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the friends who have been with me through thick and thin. You have been a source of joy and respite during difficult times, and your encouragement has kept me grounded. Whether through words of encouragement, distraction, or practical help, your presence has been a vital part of this journey.

Five such individuals that I would be greatly remiss to not mention are the members of my dissertation committee: Antonio Byrd, Candace Schlein, Jane Greer, Jennifer Frangos,

and Jeff Rydberg-Cox. Each of you has been invaluable sources of expertise and constructive feedback and have provided unique perspectives that helped refine my ideas and broaden my understanding. The thoughtful suggestions you offered during our meetings and the rigorous questions you posed during the defense process helped me see my work in new and challenging ways. I am particularly grateful for your encouragement and belief in the importance of my research. Your contributions have not only enhanced this dissertation but have also shaped my growth as a scholar. I am particularly indebted to Dr. Byrd, my committee chair, for his constant guidance, patience, and insight. His input and advice have been essential in shaping the direction of my research and improving the quality of this work. I am truly grateful for the time you invested in helping me refine my ideas and research. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Schlein, my co-advisor, for her invaluable contributions throughout this process. Your expertise, support, and feedback were instrumental in guiding me through the complexities of this research. Your insights and advice were valuable in shaping the direction of my work and my academic development.

I would like to acknowledge my colleagues, both past and present, who have supported me through discussions, shared ideas, and provided a collaborative environment that has enriched my research. I am especially grateful to the faculty and staff of the English and Curriculum & Instruction departments at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. I appreciate the intellectual environment you have fostered, which has allowed me to grow both as a student and a teacher. I would also like to offer a special thanks to my fellow graduate students and colleagues who have been an invaluable part of my academic experience. The collaborative and supportive environment we shared helped me maintain my sense of community, even during the most isolated and challenging moments of this process.

To those who shared their insights, provided feedback on drafts, and were always willing to listen, I am deeply grateful for your friendship and support. Our discussions and shared experiences have enriched my academic journey immeasurably. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to the participants in my research study. Without your willingness to contribute your time, perspectives, and experiences, this dissertation would not have been possible. Your generosity and openness were fundamental to the success of this project, and I hope this work can, in some small way, honor your contributions.

Above all, I give thanks to God, whose guidance, grace, and strength sustained me throughout this entire journey. His presence in my life has been my source of hope and perseverance, and without Him, none of this would have been possible. As I reflect on the journey that led to this dissertation, I am acutely aware that it was not a solitary endeavor. It is the result of a collective effort, and I am eternally grateful to everyone who has supported me, challenged me, and believed in my potential along the way. To all of you, I offer my deepest thanks.

PREFACE

The journey toward completing this dissertation has been one of reflection, discovery, and growth. As someone who held the position of a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) for many years, I have spent years teaching First-Year Composition (FYC) courses, navigating the complexities of both pedagogy and professional identity development. Throughout this time, I have encountered the challenges of transitioning into the role of a teacher while still developing as a scholar, often feeling the weight of responsibility in the absence of structured support and mentorship. These experiences motivated my exploration of how ad hoc peer mentorship (specifically, narrative-based Teaching Circles) can serve as a meaningful and sustainable approach to professional identity development for GTAs.

The need for effective and consistent mentorship within GTA communities has long been recognized, yet many professional development programs still overlook the invaluable insights and guidance that GTAs can offer one another. In my own experiences working with and alongside GTAs, I have observed the profound impact that informal, peer-driven conversations can have on shaping pedagogical practices and reinforcing professional identities. This dissertation seeks to explore and formalize these peer interactions by investigating the application of Teaching Circles as a tool for creating supportive, reflective environments where GTAs can share their stories, challenges, and triumphs.

Through narrative inquiry, I have been able to examine how GTAs at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) make sense of their roles as educators through collective reflection and (re)storytelling. This research highlights not only the significance of peer mentorship but also the transformative potential of a framework that listens to the voices and

experiences of those who are most impacted by the challenges of teaching and learning in higher education. I hope this study contributes to a broader understanding of how peer-driven professional development can foster more meaningful growth and identity formation for GTAs. It is my belief that by integrating narrative-based Teaching Circles into the fabric of GTA training, we can create a more inclusive, supportive, and sustainable model for the development of future educators.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

First Year Writing (FYC) classes are taught by a mix of non-tenure track lecturers, adjuncts, and graduate students. In addition to other faculty members, the majority of these students hold degrees in creative writing, literature, or other related disciplines outside of composition and rhetoric. For Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) responsible for the college writing education of thousands of students across hundreds of sections of first year writing, it is hard to support so many Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) of varying backgrounds in developing their professional identities, pedagogical practices and disciplinary knowledge in teaching first-year writing courses. WPAs can use a variety of strategies to get instructors "up to speed" on contemporary theories and practices of teaching writing, such as required practicum meetings or mandatory graduate seminars in composition pedagogy. However, there is another location for expanding teaching practice and content knowledge outside these official professional learning opportunities: ad hoc peer mentorship- the conversations and interactions that occur in GTA offices, at coffeeshops, under the soft light of a bar, in classrooms minutes before a seminar begins, or even in hallways.

In my professional experience working as and with GTAs at three different universities, I have heard from GTAs and WPAs alike that GTAs rely on one another to develop not only their pedagogical practices, but "come into their own" as educators through the interaction with their peers. They develop ideas on best practices, ask for advice on classroom management, and use each other for support regarding stress, flopped lesson plans, in addition to other pressures GTAs face. In the words of the WPA participating in this study, who is the Director of Composition at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (the site for

my study), “GTAs are each other’s best resources.” Recognizing that there remains a professional barrier between GTAs and WPA where GTAs feel they cannot be completely transparent, the WPA sometimes leaves the room during bi-monthly GTA professional development meetings so GTAs have time and space to share “real talk”. However, despite the largely positive response towards this practice of peer reliance and its gradual increase in application, it is not used on a consistent enough basis to be considered commonplace nor is the focus typically on pedagogical practices and professional development (Marshall). There is an opportunity to empirically understand how these ad hoc peer mentorships, or “real talk,” may promote GTA professional identity development and help them make sense of the discipline and composition pedagogy. Additionally, this study offers the opportunity to assist WPAs who are being overburdened with many responsibilities and who have a distinct lack of resources and support system.

Statement of the Issue

The issue is that the majority of GTA professional development programs do not make use of composition GTA's ad hoc peer mentorship to assist in the formation of their professional identities. Several scholars have examined how GTAs develop pedagogically and professionally, often highlighting the limitations of formal training structures. David Fleming, Christine Denecker, and Casie Moreland discuss how GTAs often learn through experiential, peer-driven support rather than through structured training, yet professional development programs rarely formalize these peer interactions. Virginia Anderson and Susan Romano emphasize that GTAs rely heavily on one another for guidance in navigating their teaching roles, but institutional training programs tend to focus on top-down instruction rather than fostering peer collaboration. Similarly, Greg Barnhisel, Evan Stoddard, and

Jennifer Gorman argue that professional development frequently prioritizes theoretical training over the practical, experience-based knowledge that GTAs share informally.

Peter Elbow and Donald Murray, both advocates of reflective practice, suggest that composition instructors benefit from conversations about teaching experiences (something that ad hoc peer mentorship naturally facilitates). However, traditional GTA training programs often lack mechanisms to encourage such ongoing discourse. James Britton and Mina Shaughnessy further highlight the importance of mentorship and scaffolding in teacher development, yet many professional development programs overlook the organic, mentor-like relationships that form among GTAs in favor of more hierarchical training models. Kathleen Blake Yancey, Anis Bawarshi, Mary Jo Reiff, and Elizabeth Wardle have examined the role of transfer in writing pedagogy and how GTAs build their professional identities. Their work suggests that meaningful professional growth occurs when GTAs can reflect on and apply their experiences in dialogue with peers. However, current training programs frequently fail to integrate these peer-learning opportunities into their frameworks, missing a key component of effective teacher development.

While composition GTAs naturally engage in peer mentorship to navigate their roles and build their professional identities, most existing professional development programs do not intentionally incorporate or support these interactions. Instead, they rely on formalized training structures that often neglect the experiential, peer-driven learning that is essential for GTA growth. However, narrative-based Teaching Circles and ad hoc peer mentorship have proven to be valuable in promoting professional identity development (see Marshall; Moore et al.; Ashton; Fassinger and Gililand). To empirically study the informal nature of GTA peer mentor interaction without breaking the ad hoc-nature of these encounters, narrative-based

Teaching Circles built by the seven participating GTAs serve as a valuable tool for research and as a method of training.

Examining numerous studies on college and university teaching, particularly Teaching Circles, reveals the vital significance of professional identity formation. In a research study done by Margaret Marshall for the University of Miami's English Composition Program, she examines how informal structures like TCs are created and developed as well as the opportunities and challenges they present (414). TCs foster camaraderie, foster a feeling of shared purpose, and assist both novice and seasoned educators in their pedagogical growth. The majority of incoming students must complete several sections of first-year composition courses as part of their general education requirements at the University of Miami (UM), which is similar to many large research universities (Marshall). According to Moore et al., one group participated in a TC at a large, metropolitan research institution in the south for a whole year, and some members came up with ways to help students in our classrooms learn more inclusively and fairly (14). The case study within this article exemplifies potential uses of circles to solve other types of instructional problems.

Teaching Circles are more frequently used to debate common scholarly concerns regarding teaching interests and pedagogical techniques, even if their use in higher education has grown over the past twenty years (Marshall 413). Rather than for classroom procedures, TCs are more frequently utilized by post-secondary instructors to hold one another accountable for the depth of intellectual argumentation. Despite the lack of focus on pedagogy, TCs are credited with being safe places for learning, exploration, change, and accomplishment (see Marshall; Moore et al.; Ashton; Fassinger and Gililand). Of course,

there are exceptions to every common practice and TCs have been used for adjunct and GTA support. However, they are not utilized in this way often enough to be considered a normalized exercise. Through my own professional experiences as an educator (both GTA and non) and working with GTAs, it has become apparent that peer educators are some of the greatest resources for GTAs of all experience levels. The TCs I will be engineering will build on the documented success by exploring the potential of consistently applied TCs, which offer space for composition GTAs at UMKC to learn, grow, and support one another regarding their professional and pedagogical development. Part of this support comes from recognizing the narratives each GTA brings into the conversation.

According to narrative inquiry, teachers' knowledge is based on their personal experiences and stories, which they contribute to the learning-to-teach process (Pinnegar, Pinnegar, and Lay 55). As a result, in teacher education, focusing on experience as it is portrayed in a narrative may result in the creation of more creative, grounded, and dynamic educators. These qualities allow stories to both reinforce and challenge instructor expertise. Murphy et al. indicate how teacher candidates' learning is influenced and shaped by their early experiences and education. The stories guide teachers into new views with teacher education as they are recounted and retold. Narrative-based Teaching Circles offer the opportunity for GTAs narratives to be heard, expanded upon, and rebuilt. GTAs are notorious for a lack of autonomy, so having the space to rely on and validate one another's experiences helps promote productive teaching growth. Some of these experiences are represented in the form of reconstruction.

Resulting feelings as a result of constructive educator identity development consist of "[…] a sense of appreciation, a sense of connectedness, a sense of competence, a sense of

commitment, and imaging a future career trajectory." (Van Lankveld et. al 333) Results like this are often found in GTA peer mentorship programs, in the case of this study GTA-led Teaching Circles, as they rely on each other to develop their professional identities. However, outside of department-structured professional development, GTAs might have little to no opportunity to cultivate their professional identities. GTAs and administrators may prioritize survival. In other words, how to support GTAs in juggling their coursework (finishing assignments and projects, attending class, etc.) with the pressures they face as educators (lesson planning, grading, office hours, etc.) rather than emphasizing their experiences and the development of their professional identities.

Distinct programs, practices, and studies-that is, the curriculum that is delivered-are the subject of a large portion of New Writing Teacher (NWT) research (Yancey, *Teaching Literature as Reflective Practice* 17). Numerous studies concentrate on professional growth (Yancey; Hea; Turnley), instruction (Dobrin; Skorczewski; Welch; Powell, O'Neill, Phillips, and Huot), and formal mentorship (Rickly and Harrington; Blackmon and Rose; Christoph et al.). Institutional materials (such as curricula), classroom artifacts (such as writing assignments, teacher portfolios, etc.), administrator surveys, or WPA experiences are common forms of evidence in this work (Bolin, Burmester, Faber, and Vandenberg; Reid; Juzwik et al.; Latterell; Huntley; Trubek). "The Politics of Teaching Assistant Education in Rhetoric and Composition Studies" was the title of a nationwide research study on educator training programs carried out by Catherine Latterell. Four elements of GTA teaching preparation were found by this study: theory seminars, teaching methods courses, practica, and apprenticeships. Latterell's study looks at the various forms of preparation and comes to the conclusion that both theoretical and practical knowledge are necessary for effective GTA

preparation. Using course descriptions, syllabi, and GTA handbooks as preparation materials, the study polled thirty-six institutions. According to the results of her poll, three-fourths of the institutions examined prepare GTAs through a one-time practicum and "[the] short-term goal [consisting] of helping new GTAs survive their initial teaching experiences" ("The Politics of Teaching Assistant Education…" 46-47). According to Latterell, in order for GTAs to create a framework for interpreting their instructional actions, the coursework for training GTAs must strike a balance between their theory and praxis knowledge.

Experienced educators have been able to share their stories about how they (think) teach NWTs thanks to the important and relevant program data that has come from and contributed to WPA and WPE research. But this study has "[…] often made visible what/how faculty-administrators teach rather than what/how NWTs learn, studying only the delivered curriculum that is visible" (Yancey, *Teaching Literature as Reflective Practice* 41). Examining such a recognizable and particular facet of the NWT experience is problematic, as Yancey's criticism of the curriculum highlights: "The delivered curriculum, all too often, is the curriculum. At the same time, the delivered curriculum (over)relies on students playing a singular role: […] the delivered curriculum, asks students to tell us what they know, not what they don't know. It rewards students for strongly asserting their claims to knowledge […]" (41).

Interview studies that concentrate on the experienced curriculum were used in recent NWT research. NWT viewpoints and experiences are cited as observable, valuable evidence in these studies (see Barr Ebest; Dryer; Restaino; Rodrigue), which center on the long-demanded inclusion of graduate student voices. But even though NWT researchers have made an effort to move away from studying the delivered curriculum and toward the

experienced curriculum, experienced scholars and educators as a whole continue to struggle with problematic tendencies regarding where and when they study NWTs as well as the subject-area obligations that influence how they start our research. Each prevents them from delving deeper into NWTs' complicated learning and life experiences (Gramer 44). Part of the experienced curriculum is how NWTs view and develop mastery of content and pedagogy.

Leaning into the experienced curriculum creates an opportunity that this dissertation's study explores, specifically in the form of ad hoc peer mentorship within GTA lead narrative-based Teaching Circles. Ad hoc interactions (e.g., spontaneous conversations with colleagues, impromptu problem-solving moments, and informal mentorship, etc.) play a crucial role in shaping NWTs' pedagogical development. Yet, these interactions have not been systematically designed or studied in writing teacher preparation. The dominant focus on structured, documented components of the curriculum (syllabi, teacher portfolios, administrator surveys) means that much of the valuable, organic learning that happens outside formal training is overlooked. This lack of attention to ad hoc interactions is particularly problematic because it neglects one of the primary ways that NWTs develop mastery of both content and pedagogy. The experienced curriculum includes not just what NWTs report learning but also how they make sense of teaching through trial-and-error, peer discussions, and informal reflection. These informal learning moments are often where the deepest understanding of pedagogy emerges, yet they are rarely acknowledged as critical components of teacher preparation. This study explores the participating GTAs experienced curriculum as told by them via narrative inquiry.

Teachers' knowledge is ongoing and based on their experiences and tales that they have lived and told (and recounted), according to recent study on their instructional development (Elbaz-Luwisch and Pritzker; Graven; Pinnegar, et al.). Teachers determine their professional identities and how they want their practice to evolve by "testing their own theories of teaching against experience" through the telling, pondering, and processing of tales (Savvidou 63). By (re)telling their stories as they live them, educators' identity development is understood to be directly linked to their pedagogical development. Relatedly, the long-standing relationship and balancing act between personal and professional identities pertains to educators' professional identity development (Klein; Alsup; Korthagen). The narratives that educators share and hear have an effect on their personal and professional identities (Pinnegar et al.). It is crucial to think about how teacher growth is impacted by the rhetorical position of teachers' professional knowledge, which includes their communities and professional contexts (Clandinin and Connelly, "Teachers' Professional Knowledge Landscapes").

Important questions about GTA professional development have been developed by a number of WPE-related studies. These include the development of each GTA's unique teaching and writing theories, the benefits and risks of GTA mentoring one another, the emotional adjustment of GTAs to their new roles as teachers and scholars, and the design of GTA preparation programs at different universities. In her book *Subject to Change: New Composition Instructors' Theory and Practice*, Christine Farris describes four GTA experiences in an attempt to comprehend how the attitudes, practices, and personal theories of composition of GTAs evolve over their first year of teaching. In her book *Changing the Way We Teach: Writing and Resistance in the Training of Teaching Assistants*, Sally Barr

Ebest examines the growth of eighteen GTAs to show how their encounters with composition theory and their experiences as new teachers lead to resistance and change in their developing professional identities as composition instructors. Lastly, the edited collection *Preparing College Teachers of Writing* by Betty Pytlik and Sarah Liggett examines the theoretical, programmatic, and historical frameworks of GTA preparation programs. It includes GTA education as dialogic response, graduate student planning for the job market, and GTA preparation design based on introspective templates.

Additionally, narrative teacher education creates space for recognizing the diversity of experiences individuals within a community present (Tanaka). Teachers must acknowledge the variety of students' experiences in order to provide them with effective support. To satisfy the requirements of different pupils, teachers must take into account each student's individual learning style and background (Chan and Ross). Increased connection and a more cohesive heterogeneous community can result from encouraging academic community members to share with each other their unique tales while recognizing that there is no one story that is universal (Adichie; Tanaka). It is critical to recognize that, despite the advantages of incorporating tales into professional development, there are drawbacks as well. Stories can be subjective and have a narrow focus, and we may have preconceived notions about schooling that are difficult to overcome (Connelly and Clandinin, *Teachers as Curriculum Makers* 151; Craig).

New and experienced GTAs "will more than likely be reading scholarship that does not include them, does not sound like them, or represent their work" (Macauley, "Conclusion: Mapping the Space Between" 21). One of the main arguments offered by many academics is that GTAs ought to be free to advocate for themselves based on their own experiences.

Anglesey, Edwards, Lambrecht, and Lovas assert that GTAs' own voices should be much more present in these conversations and that GTAs have knowledge that would benefit a number of audiences in this area (4). We need to learn more about the actual experiences of these GTAs because there is currently insufficient research and scholarship of this type. (Warwick 356-57). For people that engage with and participate in GTAships, we need to learn more about who they are.

It is not meant to be suggested that GTAs have been misrepresented or deliberately excluded. There is plenty of documented research and scholarship, such as from Heidi Estrem and E. Shelly Reid, Rebecca Nowacek, Jessica Restaino, Tanya Rodrigue and Andrea Williams, and Mary Soliday, where GTAs are very present and well represented. The issue is not necessarily in how they are being represented, but in the fact that they are not speaking for themselves and participating as a researcher. However well GTAs have been represented though, they have not often been the researchers, scholars, or voices speaking with authority on GTA issues (Macauley, "Introduction: The Space Between" 6). We need to hear straight from rhetoric and composition GTAs because they are the only ones who can show us what these experiences are as they experience them.

Summary

The issue at the core of this study is that current professional development programs for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in composition fail to incorporate and support the organic, peer-driven mentorship that naturally occurs among GTAs. Despite extensive research demonstrating that GTAs primarily develop their professional identities and teaching competencies through informal, experiential peer interactions rather than structured, top-down training programs, most professional development initiatives continue to rely on

hierarchical, theory-heavy models that neglect these valuable mentoring relationships. Scholars such as Fleming, Denecker, and Moreland have emphasized the limitations of traditional training approaches, while Anderson and Romano highlight the significant role that peer guidance plays in GTA teaching development. However, institutional training programs rarely formalize these ad hoc peer mentorship opportunities, missing a critical component of effective teacher education.

Teaching Circles (TCs) have emerged as a promising model for fostering professional identity development by providing structured yet flexible spaces for GTAs to engage in reflective discussions and mentorship. Although TCs have been widely utilized in higher education to support scholarly discourse, they are not frequently used to facilitate pedagogical growth or GTA support. Studies by Marshall, Moore et al., and Fassinger and Gilliland suggest that TCs can create collaborative learning environments that enhance teaching practices and professional identity formation. However, they have not been systematically integrated into composition GTA training programs.

Furthermore, research on new writing teachers (NWTs) has predominantly focused on structured professional development frameworks, emphasizing official mentoring programs, practicum experiences, and theoretical training rather than the lived experiences and informal learning processes of GTAs. Scholars like Yancey and Latterell argue that effective teacher preparation must balance theoretical foundations with practical, experience-based learning, yet most training programs prioritize survival-based skills over professional identity development. Additionally, narrative inquiry suggests that teacher knowledge is deeply rooted in personal experiences and the stories they share, further underscoring the importance of peer-driven learning in shaping GTA development. This study seeks to address this gap by

investigating how GTA-led Teaching Circles can serve as both a research method and a professional development tool that captures the ad hoc mentorship experiences of GTAs. By centering GTA voices and lived experiences through narrative inquiry, this dissertation aims to emphasize the critical role of peer mentorship in professional identity formation and advocate for more intentional integration of these interactions into composition GTA training programs.

Research Questions

Research questions serve two primary purposes: focus the study and serve as a guide on how to conduct it. Qualitative research is "pre-eminently appropriate if one is interested in the respondents' own interpretation and wording with respect to their behaviour, their motives, emotions and experiences in the past and the present." (Heyink and Tymstra 300). This study applies the following research questions, which include one fundamental question and three secondary questions:

- "What are the experiences of GTAs with participation in Teaching Circles in relation to their teacher/teaching development?" More specifically:
    - What stories do GTAs share about their own professional growth?
    - Do GTAs recognize their identities and experiences as having shaped their professional growth as teachers? If so, how?
    - Do GTAs recognize the narrative process affecting how they develop as individuals? If so, how?

Purpose of the Study

To answer these questions, I study the narratives GTAs co-construct about teaching First Year Writing (FYW) in Teach Circles, which re-create ad hoc peer mentorships. The

stories of participants' experiences, told through my observations of the narrative-based Teaching Circles, with additional information provided from the individual interviews, are analyzed in relation to their professional identity development. In this study, I aspired to identify how participants develop their professional identities, in addition to how their experiences (past, present, and future) contribute to GTA knowledge of writing studies, composition pedagogy and practice, and how these factors contribute to their identity development.

These narratives, while observed in a relatively isolated timeline of three months and representing their "present" selves, their current selves were still built upon their "past" experiences and influence how their "future" identities will develop. So, while their "present" experiences within the narrative-based Teaching Circles are the primary focus, the participants' other "selves" are still addressed as a framework for their current selves. However, it is essential that all participants have voice within the dynamic and that their narratives are "believed" rather than retold by others who did not experience them. This plays into a difficulty with narrative inquiry: proper representation of these ongoing stories. When the stories are told and retold, they force teachers into new relationships with teacher education and professional development (Pinnegar et al. 56). For example, the participants in this study came to their positions as GTAs with a lifetime of experiences that influence the ongoing development of their professional identity as writing teachers. One specific aspect of narrative inquiry is storying.

As part of identity formation, storying entails "the use of personal stories and narratives." In this study, this includes the development of GTAs' professional identities (Goodson). Storytelling is a continuous activity that involves narrative comprehension of

experience and introspection. Because our stories are implicit, it can be challenging to make sense of them, but there are ways to make it more explicit and concrete, such as through writing, storytelling, guided reflection, etc. We can learn more about ourselves and others through storytelling, which entails narrating, recounting, and reliving our experiences. This gives us the chance to develop fresh perspectives on who we are, who we are turning in to, and who others are (Connelly and Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry"). The process of creating meaning can be reduced to experience, which includes how we "interpret situations, events, objects, or discourses" in light of our experiences as well as how our experiences change and evolve over time (Ignelzi 12; Zittoun and Brinkmann). Within the framework of qualitative research, this meaning-making process has been characterized as a narrative process (Bernhard; Gravett 1; Manning and Kunkel; McLean,; Singer). The goal of this study is to examine how narrative-based Teaching Circles serve as a type of peer support that produces consistent opportunities for GTAs within UMKC's English department to utilize each other as resources to develop their professional identities and pedagogical practices.

Theoretical Framework

From a broad perspective, qualitative research approaches data analysis as an "interpretative, meaning-making process." A key objective is to identify significant patterns and themes. Narrative inquiry and analysis center around "the art of storytelling," where researchers strive to capture participants' experiences, share their narratives, recognize patterns within the data, and consider their implications (Patton 8). Through the tales that participants shared about their professional development as composition GTAs teaching

First-Year Composition (FYC), I hoped to gain an understanding of their perspectives and experiences.

Storying has been studied as a common, impactful experience as well as an individual process of meaning-making (Craig, "Parallel Stories: A Way of Contextualizing Teacher Knowledge"; Lindholm; Stapleton, and Wilson). Since shared narratives influence how members of a community create meaning, this collective meaning-making is intimately related to identity. According to Stapletons and Wilson, the larger meaning systems we participate in "give us both an orientation to the world and directions for living in that world." Identity formation and learning frequently take place within a community, where newcomers gradually assume their roles and make sense of their place in the collective narrative (Lave and Wenger).

Narrative inquiry serves as the primary research strategy for this study. Since this research integrates narrative theory into the professional identity development of GTAs, it was logical to employ narrative as the means of capturing the stories and experiences of GTAs and the WPA as they reflect on their teaching and learning experiences. My research methodology includes one-on-one interviews with composition GTAs and the WPA at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, the site of the study. Additionally, I conducted ethnographic research through observation by implementing three narrative-based Teaching Circles (TCs). These TCs were designed to assess whether a structured setting could preserve the informal, low-stakes nature of existing interactions while also serving as dedicated spaces for GTAs to engage in discussions. With minimal prompts, GTAs had the autonomy to guide the conversations, ensuring that while the TCs were structured, they retained an authentic and organic quality.

A significant driving force behind these TCs is the personal and professional experiences of the participating GTAs. Teaching Circles are deeply rooted in personal experience, often manifesting through narrative inquiry. By analyzing how people perceive the world, narrative studies help us understand that education and educational research entail the creation and reconstruction of social and personal narratives. In this way, researchers, educators, and students are both characters and storytellers in their own and other people's stories (Clandinin and Connelly, “Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research” 2).

Through reflective research, past experiences are continually reinterpreted in light of new ones, causing stories and their meanings to evolve over time. What is often overlooked is that teachers, shaped by prior experiences and interactions, enter the profession with strong perspectives on certain aspects of teaching-perspectives that can be understood as biases (Chan 170; Pinnegar, Pinnegar, and Lay 55). Connelly and Clandinin argue that curriculum is fundamentally experiential, with teaching being influenced by the personal and professional experiences educators bring into their work with students. Given the role of experience in shaping teaching practices, it follows that teachers' beliefs about incorporating culture into the curriculum are informed by their past interactions with students and colleagues.

A conceptual framework provides a theoretical foundation for a study, guiding researchers in analyzing data by identifying relevant concepts and their interconnections. In this study, the conceptual framework is built on the interplay of GTA professional identity development, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology. Each of these concepts significantly informed the study and is covered in more detail in Chapter 2’s literature review. For now, I will introduce fundamental ideas by outlining important terms and definitions that are pertinent to the research.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry involves presenting multiple, varied perspectives at once, with the intention to be read and analyzed together. Since stories convey human experiences, which are frequently distinct and complex, subjectivity is a normal and necessary component of narrative research (Clandinin and Connelly, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research"). "Narrative is somebody telling somebody else, on some occasion, and for some purposes, that something happened to someone or somebody," according to Phelan and Rabinowitz, who characterize narrative as a rhetorical act (3). It is crucial to use open-ended inquiries and conduct contextual research while telling someone else's narrative. Written or verbal, a narrative might be a brief, superficial account of a specific experience or incident, a lengthy account of an important part of one's life (such as graduate school), or a narrative of one's whole life. According to Susan Chase, "Analytic (retrospective meaning making), verbal action (narrator's voice), range of social resources and circumstances (self and reality construction within the community), socially interactive performances (a joint production of narrator and listener), and researcher's voice (researcher as narrator while interpreting the participants' narratives)" are the analytical lenses of narrative inquiry" (652-657).

Narratology

"The ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events-of cultural artifacts that tell a story" makes up the term "narratology," which is associated with narrative inquiry (Bal 3). Although both disciplines study stories, narrative inquiry uses people's personal stories to understand their lived experiences and meaning-making processes, frequently using a variety of sources such as interviews and personal journals.

Narratology, on the other hand, focuses primarily on the structural components and mechanics of a story, analyzing how narratives are constructed. Essentially, narratology looks at the "how" of storytelling, while narrative inquiry investigates the "what" that is being told through stories, with a focus on the "why" the investigation is taking place. For this study the "how" comes in the form of narrative-based Teaching Circles and interviews, whereas the "what" are the experiences and perspectives of participants regarding their professional identity development. The "why" of this study pertains gaining understanding of how participants, whose perspectives are largely not considered, view their own development. Furthermore, narrative serves as a tool for emphasizing the unique and local aspects of experience as they relate to social and cultural contexts.

Phenomenology and Purposeful Sampling

A phenomenological study is "one or more individuals' consciousness and experience of a phenomenon and a view into the participants' life-worlds and to understand their personal meanings" (Johnson and Christensen 364). A phenomenological strategy is required to comprehend the meaning and structures of the GTAs' lived educational experiences within higher education FYC since phenomenology also addresses the idea that "perceptions present us with evidence of the world-not as it is thought to be, but as it is lived" (Morse and Richards 45). Generally, phenomenologically gathered and analyzed data are divided into three sections: 1) segment the original data, 2) turn the segments into meaning clusters, and 3) provide a broad overview of the experience (Creswell 55). Heuristics in particular is a type of phenomenological inquiry that is "a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis." (Moustakas 17) According to heuristics, participants must

have a deep familiarity with the phenomenon being studied, and the researcher must be personally interested in and experienced with it (Patton 107).

According to Creswell, a "narrow criterion or criteria" sampling is effective for phenomenological research "when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (118). Purposeful sampling is a technique where researchers intentionally choose environments, subjects, or activities to offer special research opportunities (Maxwell 88). For this study, the focus is on composition GTAs within UMKC. While a wider collection of other individuals could be included (e.g., adjunct instructors, faculty, other administrators, etc.), it would take away from the focus, which is specifically on GTA professional development and their experiences in their positions.

Teaching Circles

Teaching Circles (TCs) are a specialized form of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that foster dialogue and scholarship on teaching, improve pedagogical practices, and provide a space for professional growth while also enabling educators to build connections (Ashton; Powell and Harrington). The primary objectives of a Teaching Circle are as follows:

1. Create opportunities for educators to engage in peer discussions on enhancing student learning experiences, such as providing high-quality feedback, refining instructional methods, and utilizing learning management systems effectively.
2. Establish a forum for educators to explore current events and their implications for the classroom.
3. Serve as a consistent resource for educators seeking support, guidance, or instructional materials (Ashton 12).

In addition to these fundamental purposes, these narrative-based Teaching Circles seek to build a feeling of community, create a common understanding of educational objectives, stimulate critical thinking among teachers, and advance intellectual participation in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Fassinger et al. highlight how participation in writing circles has led educators to adopt new teaching strategies, cultivate greater empathy for students as writers, and enhance their ability to support students at various stages of intellectual growth (53).

Significance of the Study

The study's significance is deeply connected to the historical challenges and evolution of composition instruction. By recognizing the struggles and shifts in writing pedagogy, the study offers a forward-thinking model that addresses persistent issues in GTA identity development, mentorship, and pedagogical training. This study helps provide a theoretical model for GTA professional identity development through the concepts of storying and ad hoc peer mentorship. These frameworks can be applied across institutional contexts to support GTAs as they navigate their roles as teachers and scholars. Higher education has a long history of using graduate students as teaching assistants. This practice dates back to the eighteenth century, when universities started using GTAs to teach lower-division courses. The evolution of composition and rhetoric has influenced the contemporary function of GTAs, necessitating that they strike a balance between their academic development and their teaching duties. By incorporating storytelling and peer mentorship, this study allows GTAs to better understand their teaching journeys and enhance their professional self-awareness, ultimately leading to more effective pedagogical approaches.

Although the stories of composing GTA professional identity development were the main focus of this study, these ideas might also be useful for GTA or perhaps other teacher education programs in different settings. This study could help faculty development coordinators or New Writing Teacher (NWT) educators understand the value of GTA identity development through narrative activities. The importance of this research is that there are now gaps in the body of knowledge about the development of legendary GTA professional identities through ad hoc peer mentorship. In the end, this study adds the following to the fields of educational practice and theory development, with each of the points being discussed in the following sections:

- This study helps provide a theoretical model (storying and ad hoc peer mentorship) for GTA professional identity development, which could be applied across institutional contexts.
- GTAs have confirmed that they rely on one another to develop their professional identities and pedagogical practices. Utilizing TCs within this study helps create dependable opportunities for this practice to take place.
- Rather than demand WPAs do more, this study helps take on some of that responsibility while simultaneously offering additional support.
- This study has the potential to maximize the GTAs resources that help them learn to teach composition as well as to lessen the load WPAs are carrying.
- This study helps provide support for a shift in focus in telling GTAs what they should know and think to listening to what GTAs understand from their own stories and perspectives.

- This study helps provide a space for GTAs to tell stories about themselves as learners and as sponsors of literacy in First Year Writing programs.

This study helps provide a theoretical model (storying and ad hoc peer mentorship) for GTA professional identity development, which could be applied across institutional contexts.

Shift from Telling GTAs What to Know to Listening to Their Stories

This study provides a theoretical model for GTA professional identity development through storying and ad hoc peer mentorship, offering an adaptable framework across institutional contexts. A crucial component of this model is the shift from a prescriptive, top-down approach (where GTAs are simply instructed on best practices) to one that prioritizes listening to their narratives and lived experiences. Historically, composition instruction followed a similar trajectory, moving from rigid, remedial frameworks toward process-oriented approaches that value individual agency. Likewise, GTAs have traditionally been placed in instructional roles with minimal training or mentorship, often expected to conform to predetermined pedagogical norms. By embracing a narrative-based approach to GTA development, institutions can foster more meaningful professional growth, wherein GTAs construct their identities through shared experiences, reflection, and peer mentorship. This shift not only aligns with composition theory's evolution but also ensures that GTA training is responsive to diverse institutional and disciplinary contexts.

Shifting from Prescriptive Teaching to Reflective Practice

The shift from prescriptive teaching to reflective practice aligns with the idea that GTAs should develop their professional identity through storying and ad hoc peer mentorship. Moving away from simply telling GTAs what to do toward listening to their

experiences reflects the social turn in composition studies, which emphasized writing as a dialogic and communal process rather than a fixed skill set. Just as writing pedagogy evolved to value collaborative knowledge-making, GTA training can similarly benefit from fostering self-reflection and peer dialogue. Encouraging GTAs to articulate their teaching experiences and engage in discussions with peers allows them to develop pedagogical philosophies that are informed by their own perspectives, rather than solely dictated by institutional expectations.

The evolution of composition studies (from product-based writing to process-oriented approaches) mirrors the need for GTA development models that emphasize iterative growth, mentorship, and communal learning. The critique of process-based pedagogy highlights that effective professional identity development cannot rely solely on prescribed methods; rather, it must be socially constructed through engagement with peers and mentors. This is where storying becomes a vital tool-encouraging GTAs to explore their own evolving pedagogical philosophies through narrative reflection. Just as writing has been reconceptualized as an ongoing and recursive process, GTA identity formation should be seen as dynamic, shaped through continuous reflection, dialogue, and experiential learning. This study supports a shift from simply telling GTAs what they should know and think to listening to their personal stories and perspectives. This aligns with the broader evolution in composition studies, particularly the "social turn" in the 1980s, which emphasized the importance of writing as a process and a social activity rather than a static skill set. The integration of narrative research into composition pedagogy highlights how personal and communal experiences influence writing instruction. This shift underscores the importance of reflective practice, where GTAs are encouraged to develop their pedagogical philosophies through dialogue and self-

exploration. Encouraging self-reflection also allows GTAs to critically assess their strengths and areas for improvement, fostering a more engaged and adaptable teaching methodology.

With inquiries into the nature of knowledge (Bizzell, Bruffee), the connection between writing and social interaction (Bartholomae, Nystrand), and the broader societal purposes of writing instruction, such as its capacity to assimilate students into unacknowledged relations of unequal power (Berlin, Trimbur), this focus on the writer-in-context (also known as the social turn) transformed composition scholarship. A specific idea of the writing process was developed by the idea that writing is always the result of a dialogue with oneself and others (i.e., a process); the "social turn" appeared to emphasize the importance of prewriting, drafting, and revising by encouraging students to complete these tasks collaboratively. However, in reality, a collaborative pedagogy and a social conception of knowledge are not always related. In order to maintain their unity, Richard Fulkerson was urged to state in 1990 that a "full theory of composition" required a conscious understanding that a teacher's objectives (axiology), beliefs about the nature of knowledge (epistemology), classroom practices (pedagogy), and perceptions of what students should do to accomplish the teacher's ends (procedure) must all be understood as separate formulations.

Through a collaborative, seemingly process-driven approach, a teacher may inspire pupils to interact with one another. When a teacher like that says that "process works," almost everything that happens in his or her classroom still needs to be explained. More than fifteen years ago, the critique of writing as a process reached a degree of disciplinary progression in composition's published scholarship, as demonstrated by Fulkerson's "Composition Theory in the Eighties: Axiological Consensus and Paradigmatic Diversity." The postprocess is the topic of more recent study that keeps addressing the complexity and

multiplicity Fulkerson discusses. The term is very controversial, and as Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch points out, "the broader implications of postprocess theory have very little to do with process" (120). The issue I hold with this term is that it is contradictory to the recursive nature of "process." By its definition, the recursive process does not end. Therefore, how can there be a "post" to a continual activity?

The broader social relationships between authors, readers, and audiences are addressed by contemporary practices, which see all discourse as rhetorical. The focus shifted from "product" writing to "process writing," "invention," and "prewriting" as a result of research conducted in the 1960s through 1980s. Additionally, the writing process was seen as "recursive" rather than "linear" (WAW). In *A Theory of Discourse*, James Kinneavy suggests that there are many challenges of contending with such a wide-ranging field. Here is a list of a few of the examples he presented:

> […] reference works as a resource, situational context, communication theory, interpretation, meaning making, argumentation, informal logic, analysis, exploration, epistemology, technical writing, journalism, propaganda, political rhetoric, commercial advertising, rhetorical criticism, self-expression, mass media and small group media, semiology, computers and rhetoric, and rhetoric and the teaching of composition (Kinneavy).

On one side, we simply want to teach writing effectively. However, on the other, we have to contend with a vast array of knowledge and concepts. For example, Rhetorical Analysis: A Brief Guide for Writers functions as type of "how-to" guide for undergraduate students attempting to learn these skills. Classical terms (e.g., ethos, pathos, logos, kairos) can be found in each of the eight chapters, and in their opening chapter, Longaker and Walker define

rhetoric as the "study of persuasion" (limited as this definition may be). Longaker and Walker then go on to explain "rhetorical analysis" as "the study of persuasion in order to understand how people have been and can be persuasive." The remaining chapters of the book tell students how to write rhetorical analyses using classical concepts. There are other guides that show how students can consider and apply classical concepts to more contemporary "texts" such as television programs, films, video games, and advertisements. For example, Style in Rhetoric and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook, represents modern writers who are not only understanding history but also trying, in a sense, to reconnect with it. Within its introduction, Paul Butler questions why rhetoric and composition have largely ignored the study of style. While the canon of style has been an important part of rhetorical history, its affiliation with composition studies is far more recent, dating back roughly to the discipline's beginning in the 1960s.

Scholars, not surprisingly, are still grappling with very similar tensions to what they were dealing with forty to fifty years ago. In 1995, for example, Kathryn Flannery wrote "The National Prose Problem" and within it she explores the ways in which, throughout history, pedagogues have taught style. She questions past approaches to teaching style as part of rhetoric and urges scholars to reread terms "in their material context in order to see how other cultural values-such as democracy and difference-may be lost in the recentering of normative discourse." Flannery analyzes the ways in which ideologies of style, throughout history, have created what pedagogues have come to see as normal and, in doing so, demonstrates an awareness of history for purposes of rethinking future pedagogical practices.

Concerns about overspecialization and fragmentation in rhetoric and composition studies underscore the importance of a holistic professional development approach for GTAs.

If specialization leads to isolated learning experiences, storying and ad hoc peer mentorship can serve as unifying elements that help GTAs connect their personal teaching experiences with broader disciplinary conversations. Through narrative reflection and informal mentorship, GTAs can better integrate various pedagogical theories into their practice, making professional identity development a more cohesive and adaptable process. The ability to connect theory with personal experience enhances their ability to navigate diverse teaching contexts effectively.

"Growth, consolidation, diversification" is how Stuart Brown, Paul Meyer, and Theresa Enos introduced their 1994 assessment of PhD programs in rhetoric and composition (240). Programs keep getting stronger and get more complex as they develop. But "growth" has become more nuanced. The survey discovered a little rise in graduate enrollment even though it showed a decline in the overall number of programs. Strong programs, according to Brown, Meyer, and Enos, are not only surviving but flourishing during comparatively difficult times. According to the MLA Committee on Professional Employment, the field continues to draw large numbers of students and put new rhetoric PhDs in academic and nonacademic positions at rates that are consistently greater than those stated (233). The number of doctoral programs in rhetoric has decreased, from 72 programs in 1994 to 65 programs in 1999, according to a survey by Brown et al. Due to the departure of important teachers, a number of universities, including the University of Southern California, State University of New York at Stony Brook, and the University of Rochester, stated that they no longer possessed competitive rhetoric and composition programs (Brown, Meyer, and Enos 235). In other words, these programs no longer care to advertise that they provide degrees in composition and rhetoric, even though they haven't completely vanished. "Strong programs

have only gotten stronger, leaving weaker programs behind," the study's three authors conclude. (236).

Two intriguing aspects of subject growth and composition faculty were discovered during this survey. The first is the net loss of rhetoric and composition professors teaching in PhD programs, which nearly doubled in size between 1987 and 1994. According to Stuart Brown, Rebecca Jackson, and Theresa Enos, there are currently 505 faculty members teaching PhD students in the field, with an average of 7.7 per program. The decline in the number of programs helps to explain some of the loss. Senior faculty members retiring and not being replaced may be another factor contributing to the general decline in the number of faculty members. Key markers of the profession's current state continue to be its ongoing development and strengthening. This is demonstrated by the reliability and thoroughness of job search assistance and graduate assistant training programs (Brown, Jackson, and Enos 237). According to surveys, graduate assistant training programs are becoming more complex, providing graduate assistants with a variety of opportunities to read and discuss theory and practice, teach, reflect on teaching, and collaborate with seasoned mentors. Additionally, the great majority of programs mandate a course in composition theory, composition instruction, rhetorical history, and rhetorical theory. Many programs mandate courses in discourse analysis, professional and technical communication training, professional and technical communication theories, and English language history (Brown, Jackson, and Enos 238).

Pre-semester orientation, continuing orientation, workshops, GTA-GTA and faculty-GTA mentorship, mandatory technical communication theory and pedagogy and composition theory and pedagogy courses, writing center training, and other practices were among the

training categories. For graduate assistant instructors, ninety-seven percent of the programs reported providing some form of pre-semester orientation, and ninety percent of programs reported providing some form of continuing orientation. Seventy percent offer teaching workshops, sixty-one percent offer some kind of GTA peer mentoring program, sixty-one percent offer formal writing center training, eighty percent require students to take a graduate course in composition theory and pedagogy, and fifteen percent require a course in teaching technical communication (Brown, Jackson, and Enos 237-38).

Notably, three or more of the aforementioned types of teacher preparation are required in some form in ninety-five percent of all programs. This combination consists of a mandatory course in composition theory and pedagogy along with mandatory pre-semester and continuing orientation for seventy percent of the programs. While no program said that it offered and/or needed every kind of training listed, seventeen percent did require all forms of training except a mandatory technical communication course (Brown, Jackson, and Enos 237-38). These initiatives seem to be working. 236 PhDs were awarded by rhetoric doctoral schools in 1997, according to survey reports. Out of these 236 individuals, 66.5 percent were offered tenure-track jobs, eighteen percent were offered nontenure-track jobs, and 8.5 percent were offered nonacademic jobs. Just four percent of people who looked for jobs in 1997 had no job offers at all, and three percent did not look for work at all (Brown, Jackson, Enos 238-39).

However, the subjects that these dissertations tend to cluster around are more telling than the sheer volume of dissertations being written. Dissertations classified as theories of composition or rhetoric correspond to high-status theory. History follows in a further third, followed closely by pedagogy. The range of special-topics courses offered is closely tied to

the types of dissertations generated. From courses on visual design, feminism, and linguistics to courses on liberatory and critical pedagogy to literacy, identity, and publications management, specialized courses cover everything from rhetoric and religion to technology and cultural rhetorics to environmental rhetoric. Although diversity is a sign of maturity in the field of composition and rhetoric studies, Brown et al. stress that it also carries the risk of fragmentation and overspecialization (240).

Programs find notable advantages in offering PhD training and leadership in the composition and rhetoric fields. These include interdisciplinary inquiry, programmatic flexibility, a variety of teaching, professional training, and administrative opportunities for graduate students, a wide range of faculty interests, close relationships between students and faculty, strong mentoring relationships between students and faculty, and high rates of job placement (Brown, Jackson, and Enos 241). However, programs continue to be somewhat troubled. Problems with funding (staff, library holdings, stipends, etc.), literature control, and attracting high-caliber students from a variety of geographic and ethnic origins are common to many programs. It is difficult for new programs to gain recognition and create sufficient tools to evaluate their expanding programs. With significant administrative burdens, emerging programs find it difficult to draw in top-tier PhD candidates, improve and expand their curricula, and figure out better ways to combine teaching and research. Established programs have started the modification process, with many citing curriculum revision, the creation of undergraduate rhetoric programs, and the reevaluation and reassessment of goals and foci as the main obstacles (Brown, Jackson, and Enos 241).

The discussion of faculty-GTA mentorship and GTA-GTA mentorship in graduate training programs further supports the importance of peer learning networks. The study's

theoretical model aligns with these findings by advocating for ad hoc mentorship-a more fluid, less structured way of developing professional identity. Many training programs already incorporate mentorship formally, but informal peer mentoring can supplement this by allowing GTAs to exchange experiences, share teaching strategies, and reflect on their growth in real-time. These informal learning spaces foster deeper professional engagement, allowing GTAs to build confidence and adaptability in their teaching practices.

Additionally, the study's theoretical model is applicable across institutional contexts because it recognizes that GTAs often navigate diverse challenges-funding limitations, administrative expectations, and varying degrees of pedagogical support. By incorporating storying and informal mentorship, GTA training can become more adaptable, allowing individuals to learn from each other in context-specific ways rather than relying solely on top-down instructional models. The survey data on GTA training suggests that while formal training structures exist, there is still room for more organic, community-driven learning approaches-precisely what storying and ad hoc mentorship offer.

By framing GTA professional identity development through storying and peer mentorship, this study contributes a flexible, socially-driven theoretical model that aligns with composition studies' broader pedagogical evolution. This model not only supports GTAs in developing their individual teaching philosophies but also fosters a sense of community that is crucial for professional growth across different institutional contexts. Through reflection, dialogue, and peer learning, GTAs can develop into more engaged, self-aware, and adaptable educators.

GTAs have confirmed that they rely on one another to develop their professional identities and pedagogical practices. Utilizing TCs within this study helps create dependable opportunities for this practice to take place.

The Role of Peer Mentorship in GTA Professional Development

This study aims to contribute to a theoretical model for GTA professional identity development through storying and ad hoc peer mentorship, offering a potential framework that may be applicable across institutional contexts. The reliance of GTAs on one another for professional growth and pedagogical refinement underscores the importance of peer mentorship in shaping their identities as educators. GTAs have confirmed that they rely on one another to develop their professional identities and pedagogical practices. By institutionalizing Teaching Circles, this study not only formalizes support structures for GTAs but also reinforces the collaborative ethos of composition pedagogy. The historical overwork of composition instructors (both faculty and graduate students) has been a consistent issue since the early twentieth century. By institutionalizing peer mentorship, this study offers a sustainable approach to GTA development, aligning with contemporary best practices in teacher training programs. The structure of these mentorship opportunities allows for continuous engagement and support, ensuring that GTAs are not left to navigate the complexities of teaching in isolation. This also helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, as GTAs can discuss and refine their teaching methods in a structured yet flexible environment.

Composition teachers face additional difficulties because they are continuously criticized for their work by peers, administrators, colleagues, and the general public, all of whom have opinions on how writing should be taught. As a group, compositionists have

failed to achieve the academic and social subjectivity necessary to give them the power to alter the views of others outside of their own discourse community regarding composition and composition teachers (Giberson 1-2). In 1900, composition teachers were "oppressed, ill-used, and secretly despised" by other members of the discipline, according to Robert Connors, who also claims that they were "increasingly marginalized, overworked, and ill paid" (55). Even though composition's standing has somewhat improved over the past century, he is adamant that it will never be on "genuinely equal footing with the work the department does" until "teaching and studying writing can be made work the entire English faculty wants to share in." (79) There has been very little effort made to elevate composition and composition teachers from their poor status within the field, despite the fact that this has been known and documented throughout the history of the English language arts.

By integrating mentorship into GTA training, this study provides a practical solution to these challenges. The structured yet flexible mentorship opportunities embedded in this model offer GTAs a space to navigate the complexities of their teaching roles while bridging the gap between theory and practice. This approach fosters ongoing engagement, ensuring that GTAs are not isolated but instead benefit from a communal learning environment. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of this model challenges the entrenched marginalization of composition instructors by equipping GTAs with the necessary support and agency to develop their professional identities with confidence. Ultimately, this study's model of storying and ad hoc peer mentorship presents a doable and adaptable solution for GTA development. By embedding mentorship within institutional frameworks, it promotes sustainable professional growth, strengthens composition pedagogy, and contributes to the broader conversation about the evolving role of GTAs in higher education.

Providing Space for GTAs as Learners and Sponsors of Literacy

The study provides a theoretical model that frames storytelling and ad hoc peer mentorship as essential mechanisms for GTAs to develop their professional identities. By creating a space for GTAs to reflect on their experiences as both learners and sponsors of literacy, the study aligns with broader institutional challenges and perceptions surrounding first-year composition (FYC) courses. The study provides a space for GTAs to tell their stories as learners and as sponsors of literacy in first-year writing programs. Historically, writing instruction has evolved from a rigid, prescriptive focus on "correctness" to an understanding of writing as a rhetorical and contextualized practice. GTAs play a crucial role in this transition by bringing their own experiences as writers into their teaching. The historical marginalization of composition instruction, once seen as a remedial necessity, mirrors the contemporary challenges GTAs face in gaining professional legitimacy. By fostering storytelling and mentorship, this study empowers GTAs to claim their identities as both learners and educators. This recognition of their dual role not only enhances their teaching effectiveness but also contributes to their long-term professional development within academia.

Today, FYC has expanded into a set of required classes known as "general education courses" that spans across other disciplines. This expansion has generated counterarguments to their necessity in higher education. In "First-Year Composition Should be Skipped" Paul Cook explains, "I get it. These are anxious and expensive times. And if a college degree is just another product, as many believe, then it's damn near one's duty as an American to scrutinize every facet of the investment and save valuable credit hours whenever possible." He counters by explaining that effectively made FYC courses can have long-term effects on

student success and should not be "lumped in as just another add-on to an already pricey purchase." (Cook) Additionally, the majority of Americans who want to advance in their careers now require some sort of degree. Since the 1970s, tuition has skyrocketed by over 1,225 percent, according to Bloomberg Business. it is reasonable that parents and students, over seventy percent of whom will pay for school by taking out some kind of student loan, would be looking for any chance to save money given the high expense of a four-year degree in an increasingly unstable economy (Cook).

Concerns about the low reading levels of incoming college students in the late nineteenth century led to the creation of the composition course. However, there were no instructors who had dedicated their professional lives to mastering composition (Crowley, *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays* 141). Teachers were chosen from among willing individuals who could write and speak English fairly well. These individuals needed to learn a subject as fast and effectively as possible. This is still a contemporary issue and adds to the disregard that other disciplines have for the study of composition and rhetoric. According to Barnhisel, Stoddard, and Gorman, in addition to my own professional experiences, FYC courses have little respect among other academics, students, and parents (461). Though there have been actions made to challenge this misconception of FYC (e.g., cross-discipline collaboration, increased scholarship, a push for WPA tenure positions, among others), it is still a largely prevailing opinion that FYC and writing studies as a whole is a simplistic field that "anyone can do." Scholars including Mina Shaughnessy, Donald Murray, James Britton, and Peter Elbow have demonstrated since the 1970s that writing is not a skill that people can "gain and attain." In order for first-year writing to fulfill its goal of enhancing student literacy, academics like Kathleen Blake

Yancey, Anis Bawarshi, Mary Jo Reiff, and Elizabeth Wardle have argued in recent years that writing instructors must confront the problem of transfer, which holds that students frequently fail to transfer knowledge from one class or field to another. Nevertheless, despite their best efforts, a particularly misleading impression of writing and writing instruction exists: FYC is a foundational course in language, grammar, and syntax that gets students ready for academic writing in the more "legitimate" university courses, and its teachers are mostly behavior-modifiers and error-correctors (Ball and Loewe).

There is no doubt that the field of composition gets more respect today than it had decades ago. However, the composition subclass is still present, and many of the factors that led to its creation continue to influence its application and advancement today. The overwork of composition teachers is still a major issue, even though the two-hundred-student composition overloads of the past are largely gone. There are more instructors, part-timers, and lecturers teaching composition today than ever before (Connors 209). According to Meaghan Brewer, graduate instructors teach almost a quarter of composition classes (3-4). Given this reality, understanding the needs and attitudes of new graduate instructors is especially important. The historical marginalization of composition instruction mirrors the contemporary challenges GTAs face in gaining professional legitimacy. Composition has often been perceived as remedial, and those who teach it (including GTAs) are frequently viewed as lesser educators compared to faculty in other disciplines. This perception significantly affects GTA identity development, making mentorship and storytelling vital tools for validating their roles. Despite the increasing professionalization of composition studies, GTAs remain at the forefront of FYC instruction, often with little institutional support. The study suggests that ad hoc peer mentorship can serve as a counterbalance to

these challenges. Through informal mentoring relationships, GTAs can help each other navigate the complexities of balancing teaching with professional growth, challenging misconceptions about FYC, and claiming their identities as both learners and educators. By fostering peer mentorship, the study acknowledges that GTAs do not merely inherit the historical challenges of composition instruction—they also have the opportunity to reshape the field through collaboration and reflection.

Departmental administrators do not usually assign composition courses to full-time literary faculty for many reasons including their own coursework responsibilities, specialized training, concerns they may not be prepared to teach these courses, as well as the lack of respect that comes with teaching composition classes. It is worth noting that are exceptions to this mentality, as is evidenced at UMKC and its faculty willingly taking on this so-called "despised" lower class coursework with enthusiasm, respect, and ideas for how this field can continue to evolve. However, at the moment there only exist exceptions and this is not the general rule. Rhetoric, although it has forced literary studies to recognize it as a legitimate scholarly specialty, still gets too little respect at too many institutions. With the lack of specialists to guide and teach it, there has cropped up the assumption that this field is lesser and can be taught by anyone willing to do so. This has further led to the discussion of whether it is necessary or not. Anyone who has taught composition or studied its history and theories will likely tell you that this is a false notion. However, this does not offer much support in convincing outsiders of its value and recognition. It is also difficult to recruit those willing to become experts in this field with the shadow of its reputation hanging over it. Voluntarily stepping into this position invites an uphill battle that not many are keen to take on.

However, even with the more cynical standpoint that argues that higher education as merely an obligatory yet burdensome step toward employment, reading and writing continue to play a vital role in the functioning of society (an irony that is not lost when recognizing the necessity of this field in relation to its standing among other disciplines). A 2011 survey revealed that eighty-six percent of corporate recruiters prioritized strong communication skills. Similarly, a 2013 survey by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that eighty percent of the 318 employers surveyed believed colleges should place greater emphasis on written and oral communication (Ball and Loewe). Both studies highlight a common theme: communication is fundamentally linked to reading and writing abilities, and employers seek individuals who can communicate effectively. Integrating reading and writing instruction enhances students' proficiency in both areas. This reinforces the argument that, despite its appeal, skipping First-Year Composition (FYC) is generally a poor long-term decision for most incoming college students. Another misconception about writing and FYC is that it merely serves as a foundational course focused on language, grammar, and syntax, preparing students for “legitimate” academic writing in other disciplines. Additionally, there is a mistaken belief that FYC instructors function primarily as grammar correctors and behavioral enforcers (Ball and Loewe). This idea was generated from FYCs origins and who was hired to teach these courses, many of which had professions involving correcting errors and modifying behaviors. This persists leaving teaching FYC largely to GTAs who are not experts or specialists in this discipline. Unfortunately, many new composition GTAs enter into their positions under this mindset of editing and grading as well.

Storytelling further enables GTAs to articulate their experiences in ways that challenge dominant narratives about FYC and their roles within it. The act of "storying" allows GTAs to acknowledge and confront institutional barriers, validate their professional growth, and redefine their roles beyond error correction and grading. This recognition is crucial in shifting the perception of FYC instructors from mere graders to educators engaged in meaningful literacy instruction. By emphasizing storytelling and peer mentorship, the study provides a scalable framework for GTA professional identity development that can be applied across institutions. This model empowers GTAs to reclaim their agency within academia, gain professional legitimacy, and contribute to the evolution of composition studies.

Rather than demand WPAs do more, this study helps take on some of that responsibility while simultaneously offering additional support.

This study has the potential to maximize the GTAs resources that help them learn to teach composition as well as to lessen the load WPAs are carrying.

Maximizing GTA Resources and Alleviating WPA Burdens

This study aligns with the theme of storying and ad hoc peer mentorship as a theoretical model for GTA professional identity development by emphasizing how structured mentorship opportunities contribute to GTA growth while addressing broader institutional challenges. Through storying, GTAs can share experiences and reflect on their teaching journeys, helping them make sense of their roles, develop confidence, and gain pedagogical insights from peers. This reflective process fosters professional identity formation by allowing GTAs to articulate and understand their evolving roles as instructors. This study has the potential to maximize the resources available to GTAs as they learn to teach composition,

while simultaneously lessening the workload carried by Writing Program Administrators (WPAs). The history of composition studies reveals persistent challenges related to faculty workload and the reliance on graduate instructors for composition courses. By creating structured peer mentorship opportunities, this study alleviates some of the burdens traditionally placed on WPAs, ensuring that GTAs receive support from experienced peers and institutional structures rather than depending solely on administrative oversight. The increased availability of mentorship and training resources also helps GTAs feel more confident and prepared in their roles, leading to a stronger, more self-sufficient teaching community.

Additionally, ad hoc peer mentorship plays a crucial role in supporting GTAs as they navigate teaching responsibilities. Rather than relying solely on WPAs for guidance, mentorship networks create collaborative learning environments where GTAs can exchange knowledge, share best practices, and reduce the isolation often associated with teaching composition. This mentorship model provides GTAs with the support they need while also ensuring that their development is not left to chance but actively cultivated through structured yet flexible institutional mechanisms. Rather than demanding that WPAs take on more responsibilities, this study helps distribute some of that workload while simultaneously offering additional support. The administrative challenges faced by WPAs are deeply tied to historical trends in composition studies, particularly the undervaluing of writing instruction within academia. The evolution of graduate education in rhetoric and composition has led to more sophisticated training programs, yet GTAs still often enter their roles with little preparation. By embedding mentorship and reflective practices into GTA training, this study strengthens writing programs while reducing the strain on WPAs. Additionally, by providing

structured guidance for GTA professional development, WPAs can shift their focus from crisis management to long-term programmatic planning, fostering a more sustainable and effective educational environment for both instructors and students.

Beyond individual growth, the framework of storying and peer mentorship is adaptable across institutional contexts, making it a scalable solution for enhancing GTA professional development. By embedding these practices into GTA training, writing programs can foster a more sustainable model for professional identity development while simultaneously alleviating some of the burdens placed on WPAs. Instead of focusing on crisis management, WPAs can shift their attention to long-term programmatic planning and curriculum development, ensuring a more effective educational environment for both instructors and students. Ultimately, this study provides a replicable model that strengthens both individual GTAs and writing programs as a whole, contributing to a more resilient and well-supported teaching community.

This study helps provide support for a shift in focus in telling GTAs what they should know and think to listening to what GTAs understand from their own stories and perspectives.

Modern Rhetoric and Composition

The evolution of modern rhetoric and composition aligns closely with the study's theme of shifting from dictating knowledge to listening to individual perspectives, particularly in the context of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and writing pedagogy. While there have not been many historical turning points (at least none compared to the establishment of rhetoric as an independent field in the 1960s-most scholarship cites the history *up to* the twenty-first century, but not *in to* it), the discipline of rhetoric and composition has continued to grow and evolve over the past several decades. The creation of

a strong academic discipline is among the most significant historical developments of this era. According to the Modern Language Association's *Joblist*, the only discipline that offered more positions over the previous ten years than composition and rhetoric was British literature (Lynn 233). The professionalization of composition and rhetoric was greatly aided by the revival of classical rhetoric and the continuous exploration of the history of writing pedagogy. The idea that writing is a process that is amenable to intervention, practice, and explicit tactics is arguably the most significant concept guiding the area. Instead of considering writing as merely a physical act that "anyone can do," the restricted focus of conventional rhetoric on grammar and style has changed, and rhetoric and composition are now seen as essential components of education that enable students to express their ideas (Lynn 234).

Writing also serves as a tool for learning and discovery because it allows authors to develop their thoughts and understandings. This mirrors the shift in focus from telling GTAs "what they should know and think" to engaging with their personal insights and experiences. As composition theory evolved, scholars recognized that writing is not merely an individual skill but a socially constructed practice shaped by different discourse communities (Slater, Jarron, and Rosselot-Merritt). Instead of imposing top-down knowledge, educators began to value the ways writers interpret their experiences within their own social and rhetorical contexts.

Early groundwork (around the 1960s-early 1970s) for the famous "social turn" can be seen in the development of "new rhetoric" which examined language use in social contexts and the work of scholars like Kenneth Burke who emphasized the social and cultural dimensions of language. Terms like "discourse community" and "social constructionism"

became prominent in the mid to late 1970s and highlighted the idea that writing is shaped by the specific social groups and conventions writers participate in (Slater, Jarron, and Jeremy Rosselot-Merritt). In *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, published in 1970, Richard E. Young, Alton Becker, and Kenneth Pike combine rhetoric with process in the writer's work: "[T]he discipline of rhetoric is primarily concerned with the control of a process. Mastering rhetoric means not only mastering a theory of how and why one communicates, but mastering the process of communication as well" (9). Although the term "process" has been widely used in composition studies scholarship for a number of decades, there has been much discussion about what it can or should signify for writing research and instruction for almost as long.

Composition research began to focus on the social contexts and personal histories that give rise to writing when compositionists started to take the "social turn" in the 1980s. At the same time, research genres began to more explicitly incorporate narrative (Vandenberg, Hum, Clary-Lemon 3, Journet 14). A distinct type of scholarly investigation gained traction during this period, as evidenced by new publications that included autobiographies and life accounts. "Narrative research, in all of its various manifestations, is deeply implicated in contemporary conflicts over theory, methodology, and politics in scholarly investigation" (Casey 211). As is the nature of composition, different versions deconstruct and reassemble, and new designs appear while older formulations endure. Process-based writing pedagogies were criticized for remaining "too close to the text" in the early to mid-1980s (Reither 142). Sondra Perl's *Landmark Essays: On Writing Process*, within which she is editor, details by the late 1980s "the scene of writing is more often understood not as a room in which a writer is isolated and alone, but as a room in which many voices reside, those that both shape the writer and to which he or she responds in return" (xvi). This movement rejected the idea of a

singular “correct” approach and instead highlighted the value of individual stories in shaping knowledge. Similarly, this study emphasizes that GTAs bring their own experiences and perspectives into their teaching, shaping their pedagogical approaches in ways that traditional prescriptive models may overlook. In addition to strengthening the social turn, composition studies in the 1990s started to focus more on how specific narratives are created within genres and, consequently, are built from the common theoretical, methodological, and rhetorical commitments of the community (Journet 14-15).

The social turn may actually be viewed as a sequence of three turns, as stated by Barrett Bowlin, Thomas Girshin, and Kelly Kinney in a 2010 issue of *Composition Forum*:

> The first [...] emphasizes teaching writing and learning how to write as collaborative, interactive processes. The second shift grows out of the first, but, rather than focusing primarily on instructional practice, as James Berlin writes in *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, it examines and critiques the signifying practices that shape subject formation—and, by extension, the discipline—‘within the framework of economic, social, and political conditions’ (83). While scholarship represented by the third social turn does not ignore classroom pedagogy or critical theory, it also does something quite more: it takes as its starting point embodied activism.

The study’s approach of centering GTA experiences aligns particularly with this third phase, which values real-world engagement over rigid instructional practices. As composition research continues to evolve, the growing emphasis on personal narratives and discourse communities underscores the importance of listening to educators’ lived experiences. This study contributes to that ongoing shift, advocating for the recognition of GTAs’ perspectives as essential sources of insight for teaching and learning, rather than imposing a singular,

predetermined framework on their pedagogical development. The "social turn" significantly influenced contemporary composition pedagogy, leading to a greater focus on collaborative writing, awareness of audience and social context, and teaching students how to navigate different discourse communities. By embracing these new stances, composition has advanced into the twenty-first century with a growing recognition that narrative is essential to how individuals arrange and interpret their lives. Pursuing this type of research method aligns with this study's goal of gaining information from the perspective of local composition GTAs and WPA paralleling theory with their experiences.

Assumptions About Modern FYC and Their Realities

The theme of shifting from telling GTAs what they should know and think to listening to their perspectives is deeply connected to the evolving approach in writing pedagogy. Due to the wide-ranging impact of the Writing Program Ecology (WPE), the preparation of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) remains a frequent topic of discussion within rhetoric and composition studies. National organizations such as the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) have issued statements advocating for changes in both the training of writing instructors and the content taught in undergraduate composition courses (Cicchino 7-8). This shift toward a more rhetorical approach in writing instruction is exemplified by the "Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing," developed in 2011 by CWPA, NCTE, and the National Writing Project (NWP). This document encourages educators to foster "writing, reading, and critical analysis experiences […] aim[ed] to develop students' 'rhetorical knowledge,' 'critical thinking' abilities, 'writing processes,' 'knowledge of conventions,' and 'ability to compose in multiple environments'

(1). “Framework…” later goes on to describe rhetorical knowledge as “the basis of good writing” and pairs rhetorical awareness with the development of metacognition (6).

Another document targeting WPE is the “CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing.” The CCCC document recommends teachers of writing acquire five knowledges: rhetorical knowledge, linguistic knowledge, instructional knowledge, knowledge of ethical and effective research methods, and technical knowledge. These texts reinforce a student-centered, context-dependent understanding of writing. Similarly, GTA preparation should not impose a singular, standardized perspective but rather encourage instructors to develop their own pedagogical approaches based on their experiences and evolving understanding. Many GTAs enter the field of composition with limited knowledge of writing studies, often carrying misconceptions that FYC is primarily about grammar or correctness. Rather than prescribing fixed methods, training should engage with GTAs’ prior disciplinary backgrounds and perspectives, allowing them to shape their teaching methods in ways that align with contemporary composition theory.

In addition to the reform documents mentioned, Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle’s 2015 collection *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* similarly has implications for GTA WPE. Threshold concepts are defined by Kathleen Yancey in her introduction to this collection with several denotations: “a canon, a list of the defining key terms of the discipline,” “boundary objects,” “a heuristic or portal for planning,” and “a set of propositions” (xix). Rhetorical knowledge is represented in the first section of the collection. Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s prioritization of rhetoric as the first threshold concept of writing studies points to it as a cornerstone of contemporary writing studies. This collection reinforces what has been presented in the other national documents’ statements: as

a field, we seem to be emphasizing the importance of a rhetorical approach to the composition classroom. This hypothetical shift has potential effects on how we prepare our teachers to enter those classrooms. This emphasis is not always translated to new GTAs in composition. The majority of them are not only new to teaching, but also to the field of writing studies and are unaware of what is considered as essential or necessary.

Reflecting upon the FYC curricula addressed by the composition scholars who contributed to *First-Year Composition: From Theory to Practice*, editors Deborah Coxwell-Teague and Ronald F. Lunsford draw three important conclusions: 1) FYC does not focus on grammar, persuasion, or "the improvement of writing," 2) Mechanics and conventions ought to be addressed in the context of genre and audience, and 3) Whether or not a student's final essay is better than the first one (s)he submitted should be of less significance than the development of foundational dispositions like rhetorical awareness and writing processes. Unfortunately, these best practices remain largely aspirational. College FYC classrooms vary dramatically, even within individual writing programs, and programs that are standardized often are heavily influenced by programmatic, economic, and political pressures. Further, though decades' worth of scholarship has renounced reductive formulas such as the five-paragraph essay, these models are difficult to escape when they are grounded in the dominant academic discourse (Grayson 47-48). The writing these models encourage is primarily deductive in nature, demands excessive explication, and does not require writers or readers to use inductive reasoning. Regrettably, for those not familiar with or trained in WPE, such as incoming GTAs with specialties in creative writing or other subject areas, the dominant stereotypes and misconceptions are unknowingly perpetuated due to a lack of training and background.

The idea that first-year writing exists to train students to write correctly does everyone a disservice. It muddies all the other opportunities for learning in first-year writing that go beyond the creation of essays that are academic in nature. Case in point, academic writing is context dependent. As Elizabeth Wardle writes, "There is no such thing as writing in general. Writing is always in particular." ("You Can Learn to Write in General") While first-year writing can teach students basic skills in conducting research or structuring arguments, it is quite limiting to say that these skills are only specific to academic writing in general. This is a misconception that many take as fact, including many new GTAs. This is understandable, given their lack of exposure to the nuance in the field of rhetoric and composition. Contrary to this misconception, there are varying kinds of writing courses, serving different purposes and striving to help students improve an assortment of rhetoric-based skills.

Part of the structure is dependent on the type of university and its larger goals. According to Allison Laubach Wright, "To be known as 'Tier One" [is] both a *marker* of excellence and a *means* to achieving further excellence as an academic institution. Tier One status here functions as a brand which the university has claimed, monetized, and profited from." (271) Tier One universities are generally more research-focused, emphasizing innovation, creativity, and scholarly advancement. In contrast, Tier Two universities are recognized for their strong academic programs, often maintaining a regional emphasis rather than a national or international scope. However, with this binary ranking comes issues. Bill Readings argues that university rankings, such as those conducted by *Maclean's* in Canada and *U.S. News & World Report* in the United States, are problematic methods by which institutions attempt to demonstrate excellence. These rankings operate similarly to consumer reports, providing data that allow schools to be compared like products. Wright notes a recent

shift in discourse, emphasizing the search for the best "value" in higher education (273). Compounding this issue is the way universities adopt these external, consumer-driven metrics to shape and modify their programs. By internalizing a system rooted in consumerist language as a measure of excellence, university administrators, faculty, staff, and students contribute to a model in which academic success is increasingly tied to profit-oriented values. Despite these issues, the ranking system continues on and shows no signs of being altered.

UMKC was up until considered Tier Two up until February of 2025 when it officially switched to Tier One and displayed its orientation towards the local populus as well as its focus on academic development. The two required composition courses, English 110: Introduction to Academic Prose and English 225: Intermediate Academic Prose general education writing courses, are structured around the student population and their academic development. English 110 introduces students to college-level reading, writing, and rhetorical analysis. Students engage in analyzing and creating texts while exploring key writing concepts, various rhetorical contexts, and cultural aspects of writing. They also develop skills in self-analysis, revision, editing, and academic citation. English 225 builds upon the foundation established in English 110 by placing greater emphasis on research and the application of writing skills across different contexts and genres. Students learn primary and secondary research methods to develop research projects centered on writing studies.

The variability in writing instruction across institutions highlights the importance of adaptability in GTA training. As discussed, universities operate under different economic, programmatic, and institutional pressures, making it impractical to enforce a one-size-fits-all model. Training, therefore, acknowledges these differences and integrate GTAs' own observations and experiences to prepare them for the realities of diverse classroom settings.

This aligns with the emphasis on rhetorical awareness and metacognition in writing studies, which encourages GTAs to reflect on their assumptions and classroom experiences. By fostering a reflective approach, GTAs can critically engage with composition pedagogy and develop responsive teaching strategies rather than simply following prescriptive methods.

Just as composition scholars advocate for teaching writing as a dynamic, context-dependent practice rather than enforcing rigid structures like the five-paragraph essay, GTA preparation should follow a similar philosophy. Moving away from a top-down approach that dictates how GTAs should teach, training programs should instead create opportunities for exploration, questioning, and refinement of pedagogical strategies. Encouraging GTAs to engage with their own perspectives and experiences will not only improve their understanding of writing instruction but also empower them to become more effective and adaptable educators.

This study helps provide a space for GTAs to tell stories about themselves as learners and as sponsors of literacy in First Year Writing programs.

This study underscores the critical role of GTAs in shaping literacy instruction in First-Year Writing programs by providing a structured yet organic space for them to tell their stories, reflect on their pedagogical growth, and develop their professional identities. Through Teaching Circles, GTAs engage in peer-driven discussions that allow them to navigate their dual roles as both students and educators, facilitating professional identity formation through narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research" 2). One of the key contributions of this study is its use of narrative inquiry as a method to document and analyze the experiences of GTAs in Teaching Circles. Pinnegar, Pinnegar, and Lay argue that teachers' knowledge is built on their personal

experiences and the stories they tell, reinforcing the idea that learning to teach is not just about acquiring theoretical knowledge but about making sense of one's experiences through storytelling (55). Similarly, Savvidou emphasizes that teacher identity is constructed through the telling, pondering, and processing of stories, aligning with the study's findings that GTAs develop their professional identities by narrating and analyzing their lived experiences (63). Additionally, the study builds on the work of Peter Elbow and Donald Murray, both of whom advocate for reflective practice in composition pedagogy, arguing that teachers benefit from discussing their teaching experiences (Elbow 7; Murray 11). However, traditional GTA training programs rarely integrate structured spaces for such discussions, instead prioritizing top-down instructional models that limit opportunities for GTAs to engage in peer mentorship (Britton and Shaughnessy 25).

The study draws on Deborah Brandt's concept of "literacy sponsorship," which argues that literacy learning is shaped by institutional sponsors who control access to literacy knowledge. GTAs in FYW programs function as literacy sponsors by shaping students' writing experiences, yet they often lack structured mentorship themselves. Instead, they rely on ad hoc peer mentorship through informal conversations in hallways, offices, and coffee shops (Marshall 414). Teaching Circles serve as a formalized version of these peer interactions, giving GTAs a consistent space to share insights, refine pedagogical approaches, and develop their identities as writing instructors. Prior research has examined how peer mentorship influences GTA professional development, but scholars such as Christine Denecker, David Fleming, and Casie Moreland argue that institutional training programs often overlook the importance of informal learning in GTA development (27). Similarly, Anderson and Romano highlight that GTAs rely heavily on each other for teaching support,

yet most formal training structures do not integrate these informal learning processes into structured professional development (53).

The use of Teaching Circles as a research method and professional development tool aligns with scholarship on collaborative learning communities. Margaret Marshall found that Teaching Circles foster camaraderie, promote a sense of shared purpose, and support pedagogical growth, making them an effective alternative to hierarchical training models (417). Additionally, Moore et al. conducted a case study where Teaching Circles helped instructors develop more inclusive and equitable teaching strategies (14). The study also builds on Virginia Anderson and Susan Romano's research, which found that GTAs often feel disconnected from their Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) due to professional barriers. This is echoed in the findings of this study, where the participating WPA, Rachel, intentionally steps out of professional development meetings to allow GTAs to engage in honest discussions without administrative oversight (Marshall 414).

The concept of "storying" plays a central role in this study's findings, demonstrating how GTAs construct, reconstruct, and negotiate their professional identities through storytelling. According to Goodson, "storying" is an ongoing process of reflection where teachers make sense of their personal and professional experiences (27). Similarly, Zittoun and Brinkmann argue that storytelling is a narrative process of meaning-making, allowing educators to connect their past experiences with their present teaching challenges and future aspirations (42). GTAs in this study reported that Teaching Circles provided a unique opportunity to articulate their struggles, successes, and evolving teaching philosophies. This aligns with Van Lankveld et al., who found that effective teacher development fosters a sense of appreciation, connectedness, competence, and professional commitment (333). The study's

findings suggest that GTAs who engage in storytelling develop stronger self-awareness and confidence in their roles as educators.

One of the most significant contributions of this study is its critique of traditional GTA training models, which often emphasize theoretical knowledge over practical teaching experience. According to Catherine Latterell, most universities structure GTA training around a one-time practicum that prioritizes short-term survival skills over long-term professional identity development (46-47). Similarly, Yancey, Cole, May and Stark argue that composition pedagogy must balance theory and praxis, yet many GTAs receive limited hands-on teaching experience before entering the classroom (17). The study's findings align with Reid and Estrem, who argue that GTAs develop their teaching philosophies through reflective practice, peer mentorship, and real-world classroom application ("The Effects of Writing Pedagogy" 224). Teaching Circles facilitate this process by creating a collaborative space for GTAs to experiment with new teaching methods, reflect on their experiences, and refine their approaches based on peer feedback (Fassinger and Gilliland 12).

This study provides a new theoretical model for GTA professional development, advocating for a shift from traditional, top-down training models to peer-driven, narrative-based approaches. By amplifying GTA voices and recognizing the value of storytelling in professional identity formation, this study challenges the assumption that GTAs must be passive recipients of pedagogical training. Instead, it positions GTAs as active agents in their own professional development, capable of shaping their literacy instruction through shared narratives, peer mentorship, and reflective practice. The findings suggest that institutions should integrate narrative-based Teaching Circles into their GTA training programs, ensuring that new instructors have the space, support, and agency to develop their pedagogical

identities. This approach not only benefits GTAs but also enhances the overall effectiveness of First-Year Writing programs, reinforcing the importance of literacy sponsorship and collaborative learning in composition pedagogy.

Conclusion

GTA ad hoc peer mentorship is an informal yet crucial method GTAs use to support one another in their teaching development. Despite its effectiveness, peer mentorship is not consistently integrated into existing professional development programs. By implementing and analyzing these narrative-based Teaching Circles, this study seeks to determine their effectiveness in addressing the gaps in GTA training. The research employs qualitative methodologies, including narrative inquiry and phenomenology, to capture the lived experiences of GTAs and WPAs. Narrative inquiry is particularly important as it emphasizes storytelling as a means of professional identity development. Ultimately, this study aims to provide a theoretical model for incorporating peer mentorship into GTA professional development. It advocates for a shift from top-down training methods to more inclusive, experience-driven approaches that prioritize the voices of GTAs themselves. By examining how narrative-based Teaching Circles influence teaching strategies and pedagogical growth, it is clear that there is potential for peer mentorship to alleviate the burden on WPAs while fostering a stronger sense of professional identity among GTAs. In the following chapter, I conduct a review of literature that presents the multiple layers in scholarship as they relate to WPE, GTA training and positioning, PLCs (specifically Teaching Circles), and narrative inquiry. In Chapter 3, I will present the methodology for this study and following this in Chapter 4, I will detail the results and implications of the conducted study. Finally, to

conclude in Chapter 5, I will analyze the results of this study as well as discuss the next steps and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, I ground my research in the relevant challenges and issues of being a new college writing teacher while studying a discipline outside of composition and rhetoric. Combining scholarship from composition and rhetoric and education has helped me identify a range of strategies for preparing MFAs for their new teaching role and where my own research has theoretical and practical contributions. I will show that Writing Program Education programs must quickly train new GTAs in the complexities of composition pedagogy to meet the public charter that first year writing prepares thousands of diverse students for college writing. However, with this rapid training comes its own challenges, such as prioritizing the day-to-day "survival" of GTAs, crash courses in complex materials, and GTAs facing a state of liminality. WPAs offer what training and support they can but are not necessarily in a position to provide the level of professional development that is needed for the GTAs under their leadership to be successful. WPAs are fighting an uphill battle among other academics, not only for resources, but also respect. In fact, many grant agencies still do not list "composition" as a field of study (Fleming 13). Furthermore, WPAs, GTA, and non-tenured faculty are acutely aware of their limited status and authority (Denecker and Moreland, Anderson and Romano, Fleming 206).

According to Barnhisel, Stoddard, and Gorman, in addition to my own professional experiences, FYC courses have little respect among other academics, students, and parents (461). Since the 1970s, scholars like Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, James Britton, and Mina Shaughnessy have challenged the notion that writing is a skill that can be simply acquired

and mastered. More recently, researchers such as Kathleen Blake Yancey, Anis Bawarshi, Mary Jo Reiff, and Elizabeth Wardle have emphasized the issue of transfer-the challenge that students often struggle to apply writing knowledge across different courses or disciplines. Despite their efforts, a common misconception about writing and writing instruction is that First-Year Composition (FYC) is merely a foundational course focused on language, grammar, and syntax, designed to prepare students for so-called "legitimate" academic writing in other university courses. Additionally, FYC instructors are often mistakenly seen as primarily responsible for correcting errors and modifying student behavior (Ball and Loewe). Many new composition GTAs enter into their positions under this mindset as well. Therefore, GTA narrative-based Teaching Circles create a space for GTAs to utilize on a consistent basis their biggest resource: each other. TCs can take pressure off of the WPA(s) while still meeting the issue of lack of preparation and assistance that GTAs are missing. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) not only are the primary places where educators build relationships with other professionals, but they also serve as spaces for professional development. The TCs in this study serve as a kind of PLC because the focus is on the support and development of the participants' professional identities rather than discussions concerning scholarship.

In this chapter, I will review and analyze existing literature on narrative inquiry, storytelling, and GTA development, along with a discussion of my study's conceptual framework. The research explored here highlights that for universities to support GTAs in fully developing their professional identities and enhancing their teaching practices, they must actively consider and incorporate GTA perspectives throughout the process. Ultimately,

narrative-based Teaching Circles are the foundation of this project in their role of being the vehicle for GTA peer mentorship and the space for GTAs to give voice to their narratives.

Preparing GTAs for Teaching FYC

Within this section, I analyze the different effective strategies utilized to train new GTAs and what this impact means for their professional development as new composition teachers as well as explore what WPE looks like on a larger scale. Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak recommend three primary approaches to teaching GTAs which are both effected by GTAs narratives and influence their perspectives in turn. This is primarily referring to GTAs prior experiences, conceptions, and practices that they bring into their training, which parallels a constructivist teaching approach. However, this is not always common practice as evidenced by Wendy Bishop's 1990 study, which found that many WPE programs still follow a traditionalist approach. Part of comprehending GTAs' narratives is to first recognize how new GTAs are trained in Writing Program Education (WPE) and how this training impacts GTAs, particularly those from other areas of English, such as creative writing.

Writing Program Education

The field of writing studies has invested significant time and effort in exploring the most effective ways to train graduate students as new instructors. This includes examining the relationship between theory and practice in teacher preparation, various training programs, and professional development opportunities (Dobrin; Dryer; Fisher; Latterell; Rupiper and Lowery; Obermark et al.; and Reid et al.). Reid and Estrem introduced the term Writing Program Education (WPE) to describe the continuous education, mentorship, and support

provided to new college-level writing instructors, particularly GTAs entering First-Year Composition (FYC).

Wide-Scale Writing Program Education

The topic of the preparation GTAs for the college composition classroom has been discussed in writing program administration scholarship for many decades. Many of these discussions are reflected in published works, including national position statements such as "the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (3.0), Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing, Students' Right to Their Own Language, and the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing." (Estrem and Reid, "What Do We Know About the Work of Writing Program Administration?") These documents outline best practices for designing teacher preparation programs. Additionally, numerous articles, book chapters, and full-length studies have been dedicated to this subject. Writing Program Education (WPE) refers to the "complex, ongoing, evolving process in which instructors of writing are encouraged-through multiple venues and in multiple contexts-to teach, reflect, innovate, and theorize about the practice of teaching writing in college" (Reid and Estrem, "Writing Pedagogy Education: Instructor Development" 224).

Writing Program Education (WPE) broadens the concept of teacher preparation beyond initial pre-service orientation, emphasizing that teacher development is ongoing, recursive, and influenced by multiple sources. However, it is important to recognize that WPE is still a relatively new concept. This raises a crucial question: "Has the approach to preparing undergraduate composition instructors for the classroom evolved in response to these reform documents?" (Cicchino 10). Although these texts suggest that significant changes are occurring in the field of composition, it remains unclear if or how these shifts are reflected in

GTA preparation. While we have insights into local practices within the current landscape, we cannot make broad generalizations about how the field as a whole is training GTAs to teach writing today, suggesting that there is not a "one size fits all" model and that there is constantly being developed different approaches and theories on WPE and GTA preparation. Educators must resist becoming comfortable with the practices we know and be open to continually developing ourselves and how we teach.

While some Writing Program Education (WPE) initiatives encompass various faculty ranks-including graduate instructors, adjuncts, lecturers, visiting assistant professors, and tenure-track faculty-this dissertation specifically focuses on preparation programs for graduate students who teach composition while pursuing their studies. The significance of WPE is evident when considering that GTAs serve as key representatives of both writing programs and the field of composition studies for their students, given the substantial number of undergraduate writing courses they teach. Amy Teresa Cicchino, citing a 2009 report from the American Federation of Teachers, found that at doctoral-granting institutions, GTAs are responsible for teaching forty-one percent of all courses offered across the institution (10). Likewise, within composition programs, data from the National Census of Writing indicate that sixty-three percent of doctoral-granting institutions report GTAs teaching at least half of all First-Year Composition (FYC) courses. Given that GTAs instruct the majority of courses in many composition programs, they serve as primary representatives of the field in undergraduate writing classrooms. This underscores the critical importance of examining how the field prepares these instructors. Although GTA preparation influences how composition is perceived at the undergraduate level, there is a noticeable lack of recent,

comprehensive descriptions of how Writing Program Education (WPE) is structured and implemented for GTAs across different institutions (Cicchino).

Although some educators may have insight into how specific programs prepare their GTAs for the writing classroom through local studies, there is still uncertainty about whether and how Writing Program Education (WPE) is being implemented on a broader scale. In "Training the Workforces: An Overview of GTA Education Curricula," Latterell cites the "spring 1994 issue of Rhetoric Review titled 'Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition: A Catalog of the Profession,'" which notes that "as of 1993, 72 doctoral programs in English studies offer a specialization in rhetoric and composition" (8). Cicchino remarks that in 2019 that, according RhetMap (a data visualization map created in 2012 by Jim Ridolfo), listed ninety-one institutions on its "Doctoral Map." This means that since Latterell's study, nineteen new doctoral programs have been established in rhetoric and composition, indicating a twenty-six percent increase. After having checked RhetMap myself, it currently lists ninety-four doctoral programs in 2023. This continued increase suggests that it is difficult to gather an accurate visual of WPE on the wider, national scale. Truthfully, it is not known how WPE is practiced on a larger range which suggests that there is likely to be a fair amount of variation in training from one program to another. While this unfortunately does not create a clear picture of common practice, it does open the door for the possibility of continual growth and exposure to differing theories and practices.

In "Training the Workforces: An Overview of GTA Curricula," Catherine Latterell explains that for many graduate students, writing teacher preparation programs provide their first exposure to rhetoric and composition studies (7). Preparation programs have evolved from a more mass management approach into more complex structures (491). This

emphasizes my earlier point of there not being a clear common practice across all programs. Today, GTAs are prepared to teach undergraduate writing through a variety of methods. These approaches include, but are not limited to, reading teachers' guides, enrolling in coursework such as teaching methods and seminar courses, attending professional development workshops and orientations, serving on committees, engaging in mentoring relationships with faculty or peers, observing experienced instructors, receiving teaching observations, maintaining teaching journals, sharing syllabi, designing assignments and lesson plans, and developing teaching portfolios. There has been a shift away from a single, one-time GTA training orientation toward a broader understanding of preparation as an ongoing education in writing pedagogy.

However, according to Cicchino, a national study of these preparation programs has not been conducted for twenty years. In 1996, Latterell conducted a second national study of teacher preparation programs titled, “The Politics of Teaching Assistant Education in Rhetoric and Composition Studies.” This study identified four key components of GTA teaching preparation: apprenticeships, practica, teaching methods courses, and theory seminars. Latterell’s research explores the structure of these preparation methods, ultimately concluding that effective GTA training requires a balance of both theoretical and practical knowledge. The study examined materials from thirty-six institutions, including course descriptions, syllabi, and GTA handbooks, to analyze how GTAs are being prepared for teaching.

Her survey findings demonstrate that three-fourths of the institutions surveyed use a one-time practicum to prepare GTAs, with the “short-term goal of helping new GTAs survive their initial teaching experiences” (“The Politics of Teaching Assistant Education…” 46-47).

Latterell emphasizes that GTA preparation courses should integrate both practical and theoretical knowledge, enabling GTAs to establish a framework for understanding and reflecting on their pedagogical decisions. It is important to note that Writing Pedagogy Education (WPE) balances multiple facets, including "1) the development of local, pedagogical, and theoretical knowledges, 2) WPAs employing a variety of strategies to manage those purposes such as blending, loading, and embedding, 3) liberties and constraints in designing and delivering WPE, and 4) The design of WPE is highly localized in that it is deeply impacted by programmatic and administrative histories and the population who deliver and receive WPE" (Cicchino 1).

Various studies on Writing Program Education (WPE) have contributed to critical discussions on GTA professional development. These inquiries explore how GTAs develop their personal teaching and writing theories, the benefits and challenges of peer mentoring, the emotional transition GTAs undergo as they assume their roles as teachers and scholars, and how GTA preparation programs are structured across institutions. In *Subject to Change: New Composition Instructors' Theory and Practice*, Christine Farris examines the experiences of four GTAs to understand how their theories of composition, teaching practices, and attitudes evolve during their first year in the classroom. Similarly, Sally Barr Ebest's book, *Changing the Way We Teach: Writing and Resistance in the Training of Teaching Assistants*, follows the development of eighteen GTAs, exploring how their experiences as new instructors-combined with their exposure to composition theory-foster both resistance and transformation in shaping their professional identities as composition teachers.

Betty Pytlik and Sarah Liggett's edited collection, *Preparing College Teachers of Writing*, examines the historical, theoretical, and structural aspects of GTA preparation programs. The book includes chapters on topics such as preparing GTAs for the job market, viewing GTA education as a dialogic process, and using reflective models for designing GTA preparation programs. While these localized studies provide valuable insights into GTA training, they often focus on individual institutions rather than offering a broader, multi-institutional perspective (Cicchino 4). This is understandable given the variables each institution has to take into account when designing and employing WPE. Like so many things in education, there is no "one size fits all" model to be applied across contexts. Additionally, this further supports Cicchino's findings about not knowing what WPE and GTA preparation looks like on a wider scale.

The literature on Writing Program Education and its mandate to train GTAs aligns with the goals and outcomes set forth by the National Council of Teachers of English Conference on College Composition and Communication (NCTE-CCCC) and the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA). The CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing advocates for continuous professional development, theoretical grounding, and pedagogical support. The WPA Outcomes Statement emphasizes that GTAs should not only learn composition theory but also be encouraged to reflect on their teaching practices through structured mentorship and professional communities. Despite these frameworks, many programs still struggle to implement equitable and sustainable training due to funding limitations, administrative constraints, and institutional biases against composition studies.

Reviewing this body of literature revealed to me the importance of how varied WPE programs can be and how heavily prior experiences play a part in the development of GTAs

professional identities. Many new GTAs enter composition teaching without prior training in composition and rhetoric, often coming from other areas such as creative writing or literature. WPAs struggle to provide sufficient training, given the constraints of time, resources, and institutional recognition. There is a public perception that FYC is remedial rather than foundational, affecting how writing instruction is viewed and valued within institutions. Scholars such as Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, and Mina Shaughnessy challenged the misconception that writing is merely a skill to be acquired rather than an evolving practice that requires guidance and instruction. More recent scholars, including Kathleen Blake Yancey and Elizabeth Wardle, emphasize the challenge of transfer, where students struggle to apply knowledge from one context to another. The false perception persists that writing instruction is primarily about grammar correction, reinforcing outdated models of FYC instruction.

The narrative-based Teaching Circles within this study revealed not only how they perceive their WPE, but also revealed the link between prior conceptions of teaching and writing and identity development. WPE also revealed the distinction between theory and praxis. No educator is ever completely prepared and fully trained to teach something for the first time. As I was working on my teacher's license when I was still completing my bachelor's degree, I found there was a distinct difference between theory and praxis that no amount of studying or classroom work could prepare me for (a sentiment that has been echoed by many colleagues over the years). While there is a great deal to be learned from reading, research, and classroom discussion, there is no true teacher such as experience. So, it truly is an impossible goal to "create" new teachers who meet all of the core standards.

Additionally, to suggest that educators are "produced" falls too closely with traditional teaching where students are viewed as a blank slate to be filled out by the expert (i.e., the teacher). New educators bring prior experiences that play a part in their professional development. Now, it is important to note that constructive teaching methods evolved from the traditional approaches. So, it is less of an "one versus the other" so much as an evolution to a more realized practice. Aspects of the traditional methods are still important. There is still an expert leading the class, but outside factors and experiences now are being integrated into how it is being led.

WPE is critical in shaping the professional identities of new composition instructors. However, the field still faces challenges in standardizing training across institutions, addressing misconceptions about writing instruction, and ensuring that GTAs receive comprehensive preparation. While national organizations like NCTE-CCCC and CWPA provide frameworks for best practices, local programmatic variation remains a significant factor in how GTAs are trained. In the following section, I will discuss specific approaches, many of them following a more constructivist approach, to WPE beyond the general recommendations that Yancey et al. suggest.

New Writing Teacher Training

Valuable program data has emerged from WPA and WPE research, contributing to the field by allowing experienced educators to share their experiences and insights on how they train New Writing Teachers (NWTs). However, this has expanded into considering the perspective and stories of the NWTs as well and, in the case of this study, composition GTAs. Within this section, I analyze the different approaches to NWT training (specifically the delivered vs experienced curriculum) and the different levels of competency (i.e.,

unconscious incompetency, conscious incompetency, unconscious competency, and conscious competency) GTAs present during their training. I will also explore how transfer connects to NWT training and how, in order for this to occur, GTA need to be able to connect the familiar with the unfamiliar. The transfer of prior knowledge and experiences into current ones plays into the method of narrative inquiry, specifically the participants' past, present, and future which are displayed through (re)storying. "People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context" (Connelly and Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry" 2).

In the context of transfer theory, composition scholarship has primarily examined how undergraduate students apply their writing experiences from composition courses to writing in other disciplines or workplace settings (McCarthy; Bergmann and Zepernick; Beaufort, Nelms and Dively; Wardle). Since the 1970s, scholars like Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, James Britton, and Mina Shaughnessy have demonstrated that writing is not merely a skill that individuals acquire and permanently retain. Modern scholars (see Kathleen Blake Yancey, Anis Bawarshi, Mary Jo Reiff, and Elizabeth Wardle) agree with this stance and, in recent years, have extended this claim of the nuance of writing to the idea that the transferability of writing is a new challenge that teachers must face.

Further research has examined undergraduate writers' perceptions of learning writing (Beach, Rounsaville et al., and Reiff and Bawarshi). While much of the scholarship on transfer theory has focused on undergraduate students' experiences and perspectives, its direct application to writing pedagogy education is still emerging. Driscoll applies transfer theory as a theoretical framework in her study on how experienced Ph.D.-level GTAs teach

for transfer. She found that GTAs benefited from connected pedagogies, which involve making direct, explicit links between their experiences and pedagogical theory to inform their teaching practices. Similarly, Qualley discovered that GTAs not only needed clear connections but also the ability to articulate their learning and experiences.

For learning transfer to take place, GTAs must be able to connect what they already know with new, unfamiliar concepts. Ebest argues that GTAs often feel unprepared for pedagogy because many "are generally unaware of how they were taught" (43). Furthermore, some GTAs may have never taken a First-Year Composition (FYC) course themselves, as they tested out of it during their undergraduate studies (Ebest; Reid, "Teaching"). However, Dryer's research found that GTAs who had taken FYC did not necessarily feel more familiar with or confident in the course compared to those who had not. Since GTAs rely on both firsthand experiences and professional training to shape their teaching approaches, they are more likely to experience challenges when new pedagogical theories or practices contradict their prior educational experiences (Reid et al.). So, while ultimately GTAs do transfer their prior knowledge and experiences into their current roles as new writing teachers, there are still limitations to this transfer in their preparation to their new positions. Their experiences play a major part in how they approach their new roles, but there is also the important component of formal training, which in itself is also limited.

In her contribution to A *Rhetoric for Writing Program Administrators,* E. Shelley Reid defines GTA education as "a specific subset of faculty development that focuses on the education and support of novice or relatively inexperienced teachers who are positioned as students in your [the WPA's] program to help them prepare to move into independent classroom teaching" (197). In her chapter on graduate GTAship in *The Writing Program*

Administrator's Resource, Meg Morgan emphasizes that training in composition is a fundamental aspect of GTA education.

While both of these are true in theory, the practical execution has shown to be more incomplete in nature. In their study, "What New Writing Teachers Talk About When They Talk About Teaching," Heidi Estrem and E. Shelley Reid critique the traditional one-semester practicum course, arguing that it reinforces the flawed notion that learning to write and teach is a one-time process. They highlight how this approach fosters the misconception that after attending a few training sessions and receiving approval for a syllabus, an instructor is fully prepared for the rest of their career. The reality that contrasts this assumption is that becoming an educator entails growth and a process that is complicated and recursive. Estrem and Reid argue that it is important that "pedagogy educators teach explicitly for integration and transfer of new material, as well as for increased reflective problem-solving, rather than for knowledge of the field or even full competence as classroom practitioners" (Reid et al. 60).

Research on New Writing Teachers (NWTs) primarily examines individual programs, practices, and studies, focusing on the curriculum as it is implemented (Yancey, "The Visible, the Invisible, and the Remix" 17). Many studies explore formal structures of programmatic enculturation, including mentoring (Rickly and Harrington; Blackmon and Rose; Christoph et al.), professional development (Yancey; Hea; Turnley), and practicum courses (Dobrin; Skorczewski; Welch; Powell et al.). The evidence in these studies often comes from institutional documents (such as syllabi), classroom materials (including writing assignments and teaching portfolios), administrator surveys, or WPA reflections on practicum experiences (Bolin, Burmester, Faber, and Vandenberg; Reid; Juzwik et al.; Latterell; Huntley; Trubek).

Valuable and essential program data have contributed to WPA and WPE research, allowing experienced educators to share their perspectives on how they believe they teach New Writing Teachers (NWTs). However, this research has primarily highlighted what and how faculty-administrators teach rather than focusing on what and how NWTs actually learn, often limiting its scope to the visible aspects of the delivered curriculum (Yancey, "The Visible, the Invisible, and the Remix" 41). Yancey's critique of this approach underscores the issue of studying only the explicit and structured elements of NWT experiences, highlighting the need for a broader perspective: "The delivered curriculum, all too often, is the curriculum. At the same time, the delivered curriculum (over)relies on students playing a singular role: […] the delivered curriculum, asks students to tell us what they know, not what they don't know. It rewards students for strongly asserting their claims to knowledge […]" (41).

Recent research on New Writing Teachers (NWTs) has employed interview-based studies that emphasize the experienced curriculum. These studies (see Barr Ebest, Dryer, Restaino, Rodrigue) respond to long-standing calls for incorporating graduate student perspectives, using NWT experiences as visible and valued evidence. However, despite efforts to shift the focus from the delivered curriculum to the experienced curriculum, scholars and educators still face challenges regarding when and where they study NWTs, as well as the disciplinary frameworks that shape their research approaches. These limitations prevent a more comprehensive exploration of NWTs' lived experiences and the complexities of their learning (Gramer 44).

Part of the experienced curriculum is how NWTs view and develop mastery of content and pedagogy. In the chapter entitled, "How Do Students Develop Mastery?" within *How*

Learning Works, Ambrose et al. discuss Jo Sprague and Douglas Stuart's model of the stages of mastery: "unconscious incompetence," "conscious incompetence," "conscious competence," and "unconscious competence" (97). In the stage of unconscious incompetence, a person does not recognize their lack of knowledge; in conscious incompetence, they become aware of what they do not know; in conscious competence, they recognize their own understanding; and in unconscious competence, they possess knowledge without actively thinking about it (96-97). While the learning process is likely more complex and nonlinear than this model suggests, it serves as a valuable framework for teachers to reflect on their own position relative to their students' knowledge levels and consider how this dynamic may influence the learning experience. Additionally, they emphasize the cognitive demands involved in deconstructing the complexities of teaching. Ambrose et al. highlight the example of teachers guiding students through discussions as a model of this challenge that "requires several subskills: the ability to pose appropriate questions, listen empathically, maintain flow, respectively correct misconceptions, [and] manage time effectively." (220) NWTs mastery may still fall within the delivered curriculum if their experiences, opinions, and narratives are not integrated into the process.

The primary method of research for this study is narrative inquiry, which relies on the combined experiences and opinions of researcher and participants. As will be discussed in chapter three, GTAs, adjuncts, and other Non-Tenured Track (NTT) faculty, have very little voice, especially in published scholarship. My study aims to bring out the experiences and opinions of some of these voiceless groups. Doing so not only provides an invaluable perspective from a stakeholder who teaches the majority of FYC, but it further solidifies the practice of the experienced curriculum by turning to those who are experiencing it. Recently,

Writing Program Education (WPE) has shifted its focus toward individual teacher decisions, aligning with the concept of the experienced curriculum. Dylan Dryer, Carolyn Wisniewski, Meaghan Brewer, and Meridith Reed examine the experiences of GTAs in practicum courses, exploring how participants perceive and understand both teaching and writing. Interconnected with GTAs experiences are their ability to transfer their skills from one experience to another as well as teach transfer.

Spanning from the conversation in this section, I observed the importance of how scholarship is beginning to lean more heavily into the experienced curriculum and taking into serious consideration the perceptions of the recipients of NWT WPE. Transfer is particularly relevant to NWTs (in the instance of this study GTAs), both in transitioning their own knowledge and experiences, as well as teaching it to their own students. Similarly, within the narrative-based Teaching Circles and interviews in this study, I look at the stories and perceptions of the participating GTAs and how they continue to develop their professional identities.

Storying in Teacher Development

Recent research on teachers' instructional development suggests that their knowledge is continuously evolving and shaped by their lived experiences and the stories they share and revisit (Elbaz-Luwisch and Pritzker; Graven; Pinnegar, et al.). By narrating, reflecting on, and analyzing these experiences, educators “test their own theories of teaching against experience,” allowing them to shape their professional identities and refine their teaching practices (Savvidou 63). Teachers' instructional growth and development are closely linked to their evolving identities through the process of narrating, reflecting on, and experiencing their own stories. Similarly, the interplay between personal and professional identity plays a

crucial role in shaping educators' professional identity (Klein, Alsup, Korthagen). The stories teachers share and engage with influence not only their professional identity but also their personal lives (Pinnegar et al.). Additionally, it is essential to examine how the rhetorical context of teachers' professional knowledge, including their communities and work environments, affects their development (Clandinin and Connelly, *Teachers as Curriculum Makers*, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research").

Within this section, I analyze the different types of storied experiences: secret, sacred, and cover and how these tie into GTAs experiences with constructivist education and how their professional identities develop as a result of these experiences. In their study, "'Everyone Wants You to Do Everything': Investigating the Professional Identity Development of Teacher Educators," Brad Olsen and Rebecca Buchanan explore how teacher educators form their understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They selected sixteen teacher educators from four universities in California, conducting interviews and gathering documents related to their programs and the broader context of teacher education in the state. Their analysis applied the concept of teacher identity to view these educators as dynamic individuals who continuously integrate their past, present, and future experiences into their professional growth. Additionally, they utilized environmental systems design to examine the complex and context-specific environments in which these educators operate.

A distinction between the types of educators' stories tend to fall into three categories: secret stories, sacred stories, and cover stories. Reflecting on these stories allows educators the opportunity to study "the dynamics of the relations between teachers' personal practical and professional knowledge" (Clandinin and Connely, *Teachers as Curriculum Makers* 25). The narratives teachers share about their teaching (cover stories) frequently differ from their

real classroom experiences (secret stories), which in turn may not align with the "theory-driven view of practice" (Clandinin and Connelly, *Teachers as Curriculum Makers* 25). As a result, determining teacher knowledge and assessing effective teaching can vary, as perceptions of effectiveness depend on who is telling the story, who is listening, and who is shaping the narrative. Connelly and Clandinin characterized curriculum as a lived experience or an unfolding story. Their perspective on curriculum as "a course of life" suggests that teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and instructional approaches are shaped by personal experiences (393). Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) draw from their own experiences to shape curricula and influence student learning, as professional and personal experiences are deeply interconnected with education (Schlein and Schwartz). Experiences and lived stories also constitute as curriculum given that curriculum "is alive with the interaction of persons, situations, from the past, present, and future" (Kitchen, et al. 7). Viewing curriculum through the lens of past, present, and future is crucial, as reflecting on personal experiences allows us to share and reshape past narratives, grow in the present, and influence the future (Connelly and Clandinin, *Teachers as Curriculum Makers*).

"The stories we live and tell are profoundly influenced by the lives and told narratives in which we are embedded" (Clandinin et al.1). Through a sort of trickle effect, who an educator is, starting with administrators, significantly affects the narratives of professors, adjuncts, and GTAs, and they in turn affect the narratives of those they teach and mentor. Who we are as teachers in the classroom as well as how we teach and learn can have a significant effect (either positive or negative) on those in our communities, as each story exists within the same space as the other (Randall). "Stories connect us to one another, help to shape our identities, and serve to keep our brains integrated and regulated" (Cozolino 187).

Ultimately, as educators, we must acknowledge that each student has a distinct story and is navigating their own unique educational path. We have "[…] to help them reach their destination not our destination" (Eyler 147). The same applies to GTAs. As will be explored in a later section, many scholars argue that GTAs should have the opportunity to share their perspectives based on their authentic, lived experiences, including the use of position titles that accurately reflect their roles. Anglesey, Edwards, Lambrecht, and Lovas emphasize that GTAs' voices should play a more significant role in these discussions, as their insights offer valuable knowledge that could benefit various audiences (4). Most scholarship writes *about* GTAs and there is very little opportunity for the more engaged "writing with" or "writing for" kind of research (Deans; Macauley, "Introduction: The Space Between" 4).

Constructivist education acknowledges that there are outside factors prior to (and concurrent with) the student entering the classroom that influence learning. Each student has a unique story, and it can be detrimental when teachers project their own experiences onto their students (Abdal-Haqq, Eyler, Klipfel, and Cook). A constructivist approach to teaching encourages students to take an active role in shaping their own learning, shifting instructors away from a traditional master-apprentice model of "accurately relaying intriguing ideas" to a guiding supportive role of creating and providing "learning contexts within which students create their own ideas, as individuals and as a social group" (Eyler 52). The same is true for training GTAs-while there will always be an expert guiding learning, they are not blank slates to be filled or puppets to be controlled behind the scenes. It is a collaborative effort to develop one's professional identity. When teachers, especially those new to the profession, understand their own narratives, they become more empowered in their role, enabling them to support students in taking ownership of and shaping their own stories (Randall).

Additionally, narrative teacher education creates space for recognizing the diversity of experiences individuals within a community present (Tanaka). To effectively support students, educators must acknowledge the diversity of their experiences. Teachers should consider each student's unique learning needs and personal narratives to better address the needs of a diverse student body (Chan and Ross). Narrative teacher development not only helps GTAs gain a deeper understanding of themselves but also enhances their ability to connect with their students. When members of an academic community are encouraged to share and listen to one another's diverse stories (recognizing that no single story defines everyone) this exchange fosters greater interconnectedness and cultivates a more inclusive, unified community (Adichie, Tanaka). It is important to acknowledge that while there are benefits in integrating narratives into professional development, there are also limitations. Narratives can be inherently subjective and may offer a limited perspective, while preexisting beliefs about education (whether accurate or not) can shape fixed expectations that are difficult to overcome (Connelly and Clandinin, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research" 151; Craig, "Parallel Stories: A Way of Contextualizing Teacher Knowledge").

In this section, I observed the importance of how GTAs stories (cover, sacred, and secret, past, present, and future) influence their professional identities a great deal. Through my observations in the narrative-based Teaching Circles, participants have brought forth their own stories to each other and how it influences their current positions as NWTs. Constructivist education acknowledges that there are outside factors prior to (and concurrent with) the student entering the classroom that influence learning. This is true for the GTA participants as well as their prior experiences influence their approach to teaching. For

instance, one participant acknowledged how different teaching college level writing is compared to middle and high school. Another told a secret story and admitted how worried she is about teaching in a field that she is not familiar with. They continue to live and retell their stories as they progress forward. In the narrative-based Teaching Circles, surrounded by peers in a similar position, the stories turned more secret than cover as they developed rapport and safety with each other. The sacred stories were discussed as well, particularly in the last Teaching Circle when participants debated on which major essay to teach and best practices to employ into their pedagogy. It is a collaborative effort to develop one's professional identity as the participating GTAs have experienced. They have shared stories, resources, advice, and vented to one another in moments of frustration or anxiety. In the following section, I will take a temporary step away from the stories of GTAs and look towards their general positionality and how it plays an essential role in developing their professional identities.

Positionality

Within this section, I analyze GTA's, positionality and the different issues and obstacles they face, such as the pressures of graduate school and stepping into their professional careers. I will also discuss the obstacle of GTAs fully integrating into program development as well as the issue of labor wages and exploitation of labor. GTAs also have to face the disorienting experience of orientation, particularly when they are new to composition and teaching as many of the participants in this study are, as well as creating a sense of self-efficacy in the face of their own liminality. WPAs' place in relation to GTA positionality and how they are forced into a type of relationship filled with codependence and confrontation is another important facet that will be explored. Both WPAs and GTAs coexist closely in their

appointments and are reliant on one another as they progress through their positions. These past, current, and future experiences with each other contribute to their professional identity development.

GTAs typically have little control over their responsibilities in their roles. In many ways, they are recruited into tasks valued by their employers in exchange for access to graduate education and their desired careers. Many GTAs, particularly those whose academic focus is not in composition and rhetoric (such as the participants in this dissertation's study at UMKC), would likely opt out of teaching First-Year Composition (FYC) if given a choice. Instead, they would prefer to engage in work more aligned with their personal interests, such as teaching creative writing or literature, exploring archives, or conducting empirical or ethnographic research. However, in reality, GTA positions are often the only means by which graduate students can afford to pursue their degrees (Macauley, "Introduction: The Space Between" 5-6).

GTAs face immense pressure to succeed in graduate school. They must navigate teaching responsibilities in unfamiliar programs, curricula, and institutions while simultaneously conducting career-defining research and advancing their professional development within their field and academic institution (Macauley, "Mentoring Graduate Students Through the Process: Meeting the Challenges of Teaching, Coursework, and Application Submissions" 8). These challenges persist, and may even intensify, for GTAs teaching First-Year Composition (FYC) who do not plan to pursue a career in rhetoric and composition, as they must also contend with disciplinary differences. For both new and returning GTAs, balancing work, seeking guidance, making academic and professional choices, exploring opportunities, and managing anxiety and imposter syndrome can often feel overwhelming and relentless. GTA

mentors often remember these processes vividly due to the intense experiences they had while going through them. One could argue that GTAs begin as students and transition into professionals, with their understandable anxiety being a natural part of that progression. However, this perspective oversimplifies the situation and overlooks the significance of GTAs' lived experiences. A complete understanding of a GTAship must incorporate both viewpoints, as neither alone fully or accurately captures the reality of the experience (Macauley, "Mentoring Graduate Students Through the Process: Meeting the Challenges of Teaching, Coursework, and Application Submissions" 8-9).

Several articles in *Forum: Issues about Part-time and Contingent Faculty* have highlighted the challenges faced by adjunct instructors and GTAs, including low wages that are often at or just above minimum wage. These financial constraints frequently force instructors to teach at multiple institutions while managing more than four courses per term (Griggs A4). For instance, in a 2008 *Forum* article, Evelyn Beck noted that her institution compensated only $1,100 for a three-credit-hour writing course (A1). Even the most recent report from the Coalition on the Academic Workforce found that the median pay per course was $2,700 (12). Considering that NTT faculty and graduate educators are the "boots on the ground," it is concerning how easily GTAs and other contingent faculty are treated as disposable, despite being responsible for teaching the majority of writing courses nationwide. Their insights and experiences play a vital role in the continuous improvement of writing programs.

Colby and Colby contend that the biggest issue with NTT positions is their potential to diminish both the quantity and quality of scholarship in the field of composition. Ongoing research in FYC pedagogy is crucial for maintaining effective teaching practices (62). This is

true as well for GTA positions, who do not make a livable wage in their positions alone and are juggling being both a student and an educator. Consequently, these positions often lack sufficient incentives for conducting research and publishing in the field. With minimal compensation, the motivation to engage in scholarly work is further diminished. If NTT faculty and GTAs are primarily assigned teaching responsibilities, the drive to study their own teaching practices, analyze students' writing, or explore the broader applications of writing beyond the classroom becomes less of a priority. Furthermore, excluding contingent faculty and GTAs from departmental decision-making disconnects them from both the curriculum and course administration, ultimately weakening their relationship with the writing program and diminishing their investment in teaching. The absence of collaborative engagement also prevents WPAs from benefiting from the valuable practical experience that contingent faculty and GTAs bring to the table. In assessment and program development, both WPAs and contingent faculty contribute equally important forms of knowledge (Babb and Wooten 171).

Efforts to address the issue of exploitation have typically taken one of two approaches: either standardizing program curricula or rejecting standardization entirely. Suellynn Duffey et al. discuss this divide in their attempt to balance GTA agency and powerlessness by designing "a collaboratively structured program" that encourages new graduate instructors and writing program administrators to actively shape their professional identities, teaching philosophies, and instructional practices through peer teaching groups (80). However, what they found was "Either we all made the same assignments and conducted the same discussions in our groups, or we all went our separate ways down the slippery slope of permissive pedagogical relativism" (81). In the first occurrence, WPAs believe they are

supporting contingent faculty and GTAs by relieving them of the time-consuming task of course development. Conversely, in the second, WPAs feel they are assisting GTAs by giving them the freedom to design courses they find engaging. Babb and Wooten propose a balanced solution, suggesting that a degree of standardization, while still allowing instructors flexibility to personalize their courses, creates the most effective teaching environment for both WPAs and contingent faculty, including GTAs (180). By collaboratively developing and applying course standards, such as goals, guidelines, and rubrics, WPAs can maintain consistency across course sections while still giving instructors the flexibility to structure their courses in a way that aligns with their individual teaching approaches.

Moreover, WPAs often encounter ongoing constraints from upper-level administrators when trying to enhance student writing outcomes. While WPAs may appreciate NTT instructors and GTAs for their adaptability and creativity, the university system they work within tends to view these educators as expendable. This institutional contradiction creates a complex dynamic of both reliance and tension between NTT faculty, GTAs, and the WPA. In "Intractable Writing Program Problems," Elizabeth Wardle states, "This set of problems can be paralyzing, preventing composition courses and programs from moving forward and acting on the knowledge of our field in both their curricula and their employment practices." Restaino critiques the structure of WPE for encouraging GTAs to adopt survival strategies. She asserts that GTAs are pushed into teaching too soon and often depend uncritically on standardized instructional materials. To address this, she advocates for a delayed introduction to teaching, along with greater support to help GTAs develop a more comprehensive understanding of the field. She also emphasizes the need for a space where GTAs can experiment and bridge the gap between theory and practice (112). Leslie R. Anglesey echoes

this stating that the problem is focusing only on the survival of GTAs and in doing so the programs guide GTAs simplify the liminal space new GTAs inhabit (169). In other words, orientation programs primarily act as a temporary solution to uphold the structure of first-year writing courses and programs, rather than genuinely supporting GTAs, whose identities remain in flux.

These are important concepts in theory, but there is a realistic aspect that needs to be considered. There are restraints on WPAs that prevent them from taking action they would like to implement into WPE in addition to the time constraint that exists with WPE and when GTAs begin teaching. Additionally, oftentimes WPAs must focus on pragmatic problem-solving that often means focusing on "putting out fires." Catherine Latterell suggests that WPAs "often navigate a realm of compromise where we are asked to accept less-than-ideal circumstances and already blurred authority" (37). Fortunately, when NTT faculty and GTAs are involved, WPAs gain valuable insight into instructors' and students' classroom experiences within writing programs (Babb and Wooten 172). Collaboration benefits all parties: WPAs remain engaged with the daily realities of writing classrooms, while contingent faculty stay connected to current research trends through the WPA, who provides a theory-driven perspective on curriculum development.

Writing program administrators may be reluctant to place too much emphasis on the role of orientations in shaping GTAs' identities, given that these programs are often constrained by limited financial, material, and human resources. As Michael Stancliff and Maureen Daly Goggin highlight in their study of GTA training, orientations can be inherently "disorienting" experiences (16). Beyond the classroom, GTAs also face additional uncertainties, such as relocating, adjusting to new cities, and adapting to unfamiliar environments. These tangible

challenges are further compounded by the emotional and psychological complexities of identity formation, as many GTAs transition from being undergraduate students to simultaneously navigating the roles of graduate student and teacher (Anglesey 170).

Schoettler and Saur suggest that fostering self-efficacy can empower GTAs by enhancing their awareness of their own capabilities, both in the classroom and within the broader field. This awareness is particularly significant given the liminal position of GTAs, as they navigate multiple roles-serving as students, instructors, and members of various academic and non-academic communities (153). An important reality to consider with the lived experiences of the GTAs is their struggle with feelings of shame, their efforts to navigate their roles within academic communities, and their process of redefining the concept of failure. Through these facts, GTAs bring attention to the potential for personal and professional development. This awareness can enable GTAs to develop a stronger understanding of their skills as new instructors while also helping them navigate the unique challenges of their role as composition teachers, both within the classroom and the broader university environment.

Albert Bandura breaks down the formation of self-efficacy into two terms: “efficacy expectation” and “outcome expectancy” (193). Efficacy expectation is defined as “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes” (Bandura 193). For instance, a GTA may confidently anticipate delivering an effective lesson on writing structure. Outcome expectancy refers to “a person’s estimate that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes” (Bandura 193). In this scenario, the GTA might expect that dedicating sufficient time to lesson planning and consulting with a mentor will result in a successful first lesson on structure. They trust in their ability to achieve specific outcomes,

believing that their preparation and execution will ultimately lead to success. Research consistently links teacher effectiveness to their instructional strategies. Educators with high self-efficacy tend to be more successful in teaching large groups, demonstrate greater persistence in supporting struggling students, and develop more effective instructional methods (Ashton and Webb; Gibson and Dembo; Woolfolk Hoy and Davis).

Within the field of composition and rhetoric, Kellie Sharp-Hoskins and Amy Robillard claim that "rhetoric and compositionists are ideologically hailed to narrate and interpret pedagogical experiences in binary terms-good teachers and bad, good students and bad-which are secured and enforced through emotion" (306). Sharp-Hoskins and Robillard argue that the fear of experiencing shame as a composition instructor—stemming from not meeting the expectations of what defines a good teacher—can ultimately constrain how instructors discuss their pedagogical experiences with others. In other words, the binary distinction between good and bad teachers not only affects teaching effectiveness but also limits the ways instructors articulate and reflect on their teaching practices.

Reviewing this set of literature showed me just how much is stacked against NTT faculty and GTAs and how hard they have to work to earn a place in their positions. While there have been some strides towards making changes, such as creating opportunities for internships, research grants, and acknowledging the perspectives of these dismissed groups, everything largely remains the same. GTAs are still largely underpaid, undertrained, overworked, and under recognized. WPAs do what they can within their positions to assist and prepare GTAs, but WPAs face constraints of their own that do not always make this possible. One of the biggest challenges GTAs face in their positions beyond the economic struggles is their liminality as will be discussed in the following section. GTA positionality

represents a complex and often precarious professional identity. GTAs occupy a liminal status-they are neither fully students nor fully educators, which creates a sense of uncertainty and marginalization. Their professional identity is shaped by several key struggles. GTAs are underpaid, overworked, and under-recognized, making it difficult for them to establish a stable professional identity or feel valued within the academic system. Despite their teaching responsibilities, GTAs are often undertrained, which can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and a lack of professional confidence. Additionally, while WPAs may try to support GTAs, they too face institutional constraints, meaning that GTAs have limited power to change their conditions**.** GTAs must also work hard to earn their place, which suggests that their labor and contributions are often overlooked or undervalued. Overall, the GTA position is characterized by liminality, economic struggle, and institutional constraints, making their professional identity unstable and challenging to navigate. One of the biggest challenges GTAs face in their positions beyond the economic struggles is their liminality. This state of liminality, which is so intertwined with GTA professional identity, will be discussed in more extensive detail in the following section.

Liminality

Liminality is a term used to describe dwelling in the in-between (Bell, Cody and Lawlor). Those who take up a liminal position are considered to be "[…] neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony." (Turner, "Liminality and Communitas") The liminal nature of the rhetoric and composition GTA role is not "a one-time jumping of the gap to credentialing but the accumulated reality of jumping back and forth repeatedly between the two, often for a number of years." (Macauley, "Introduction: The Space Between" 4) Graduate programs

must offer secure and well-supported opportunities for GTAs to navigate the complexities of recognizing and understanding their own liminal status, along with its potential benefits and challenges. Liminal movement involves a conscious engagement with disciplinary ways of thinking and practicing, sometimes even across multiple fields. For new writing instructors, in particular, this journey requires balancing the relationship between theory and practice while supporting students' literacy development within specific academic contexts (De Piero and Johnson 211). Within the following section, I will analyze the kinds of liminality GTAs face in their positions as NWTs as well as the primary places liminality takes place for them.

Although GTA preparation programs are designed to facilitate the transition from student to teacher, this shift is not seamless. Even while teaching in the classroom, GTAs continue to occupy dual roles, often feeling like students because they are still students. However, their experiences as students vary widely, ranging from first-term MA students in literature managing a full graduate course load to doctoral candidates balancing dissertation writing, conference presentations, and research publication (Adler-Kassner and Wardle; Gramer; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 117-18). The extent to which GTAs perceive themselves as students is influenced by several factors, including how their own students respond to their teaching, the attitudes of faculty members toward them, and the degree to which institutions recognize and value their contributions to pedagogy.

Existing knowledge plays a crucial role in shaping teachers' development. As Rachel Gramer highlights in "Putting Learning First: Challenges and Possibilities for New Writing Teacher Research," GTA preparation should start by focusing on what she refers to as new teachers' "identities, learning, and motivated behaviors." Prior knowledge for GTAs can include prior processes, knowledge, dispositions, beliefs, values, and experiences. Dylan

Dryer proposes that GTAs' own insecurities and uncertainties about writing can shape their teaching practices. The journey to becoming a teacher is an ongoing process that starts long before formal pedagogical training, before a practicum experience, and even before an instructor greets their first class on campus (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 127). Many teachers undergo multiple GTA preparation experiences, further blurring the boundaries of liminality. Teacher preparation extends beyond formal training to include various professional experiences, undergraduate education, and even the teaching they observed as students-experiences that, whether consciously recognized or not, serve as their earliest models of classroom instruction. As Yancey et al. phrase it, GTA preparation is multi-situated (128).

Kathryn M. Lambrecht speaks about her own experiences as a graduate student, to which my own experiences have been very similar. She reflects on how, throughout her graduate studies, she gradually gained confidence in her ability to engage with material as a student and became more assured in her capacity to convey that knowledge as a teacher (134). This level of comfort and confidence could not be rushed. She acknowledges that the dual experience of learning and teaching only starts to feel natural through practice and repetition. However, one constant was the lingering sense of not fully belonging. Lambrecht stated that she "might not ever *excel* in the academy, even if I was growing more confident I could *survive* in it." (134)

In academia, knowledge and inquiry are often seen as limitless. However, there is a common belief that, with sufficient planning, research, and critical thinking, scholars can navigate and resolve disciplinary challenges by building on existing work within just a few years. As a result, graduate school becomes an intense process of rapid learning and

adaptation, often overlooking the inherent limitations of human knowledge and capability. Lambrecht advocates for a rethinking of GTA liminality, framing the process of developing expertise not as a deficiency but as a potential source of agency that can be leveraged to improve teaching. Lambrecht proposes that challenges such as impostor syndrome can stem from the same liminal state that, when reframed as a strength rather than a weakness, can foster a distinct form of agency. This perspective positions liminality as a source of connection with students and fellow GTAs, rather than as a lack of institutional expertise (135). In their study, Christiane Brems et al. discovered that a teacher's experience with impostor syndrome significantly influenced their interactions with students, colleagues, and superiors. Their research on impostor syndrome and feelings of inadequacy among faculty revealed that "personal and professional goals and self-assurance about personal competence correlated positively with better teaching evaluations and more numerous and comfortable academic relationships" (183). For GTAs, building strong relationships with students and other academic professionals is essential for success.

Being in a liminal stage means existing in an intermediate space, neither fully belonging to one category nor the other, often resulting in a sense of instability and contingency (De Piero and Johnson 209). Constantly shifting between moments of confidence and doubt can be challenging and exhausting. However, this fluidity can also be viewed as a valuable strength. Experiencing liminality in academic expertise provides GTAs with a unique form of expertise—their firsthand understanding of what it means to be a student. They are familiar with both the struggles and successes, the progress and setbacks, and the continuous process of learning and growth. From this perspective, the liminal position of graduate student GTAs becomes a valuable source of connection and empathy with their students. It is essential to

recognize that these overlapping identities are not entirely separate, rigid, or distinct from one another. Jane Danielewicz writes in her book *Teaching Selves: Identity, Pedagogy, and Teacher Education* that identities are "produced through participation in discourse" and "are the result of the dynamic interplay between discursive processes that are internal (to the individual) and external (involving everyone else)" (11).

In this section, I noticed how GTAs face a variety of types of liminality that are unique to each individual. For instance, many teachers undergo multiple GTA preparation experiences, further complicating the concept of liminality. GTAs may have taught at a different level, subject area, or institution prior to their current employment. They may also have differing undergraduate experiences, in addition to the experiences of teaching as GTAs. All of these factors influence how they face their own liminality as a GTA. However, Lambrecht suggested that liminality and impostor syndrome can serve as a source of agency and solidarity among GTAs rather than as a sign of lacking institutional expertise (135). Additionally, experiencing liminality in academic expertise provides GTAs with a unique form of knowledge: they have firsthand insight into the student experience, including the challenges and successes, the progress and setbacks, and the continuous cycle of learning and growth. I also observed how individuals' perceptions of their environment relate to their motivation in their roles as GTAs. Role expectations are shaped by individual histories and positionality within a given context, influencing how expectations develop. These expectations are specific to the environment and are also influenced by personal motivations, self-perception within the community, and the ways in which the community supports individuals in achieving their goals. For GTAs to be motivated to contribute their voices to academic scholarship, they must first feel a sense of belonging within practicum settings,

writing programs, their FYW classrooms, and the broader landscape of higher education. Fortunately, as will be explored in the next section, GTAs perspectives are starting to be considered more seriously in the realm of scholarship and not just as participants in studies.

GTAs Positioning Themselves in Scholarship

Both new and experienced GTAs are likely to engage with scholarship that excludes their perspectives, does not reflect their experiences, or fails to represent their work (Macauley, "Introduction: The Space Between" 21). Many scholars argue that GTAs should have the opportunity to share their own voices and lived experiences, including the use of position titles that accurately represent their roles. Anglesey, Edwards, Lambrecht, and Lovas emphasize that GTAs should play a more prominent role in these discussions, as their insights offer valuable knowledge that could benefit a wide range of audiences (4). Most scholarship writes *about* GTAs and there is very little opportunity for the more engaged "writing with" or "writing for" kind of research (Deans; Macauley. "Introduction: The Space Between" 4).

Macauley argues that this issue is not a flaw in the research or scholarship itself but rather a reflection of the academic culture in which the work takes place-one that enforces norms and practices that limit the roles of graduate students, GTAs, and new teachers in scholarly conversations and research ("Introduction: The Space Between" 11). However, during his own research, multiple colleagues cautioned him that involving graduate students would make the process more challenging. When he inquired why, no clear explanation was provided (11). This presents a concerning implication-that GTAs may not be viewed as qualified to contribute meaningfully to scholarship on a professional level as equals.

However, Macauley stresses that his own experience working with graduate students in research has not supported this assumption.

Research and scholarship on this topic remain limited, and there is a need for a deeper understanding of GTAs' lived experiences (Warwick 356-57). It is essential to explore what GTAships mean both for those who hold these positions and for those who engage with them. Furthermore, gaining insight into existing structures allows for the identification of ineffective aspects of GTAships and writing programs, enabling improvements based on what is already working (Macauley, "Conclusion: Mapping the Space Between" 24). Linda Alcoff, in "The Problem of Speaking for Others," highlights the tension between advocating for others as a collective act and the risks of assuming the role of spokesperson for groups we do not personally represent (259). Lisa Blakenship suggests "[a]n approach such as rhetorical empathy involves giving up power in certain ways: that is, when we decide to listen to someone's stories and attempt to discern what is motivating them, we choose to be vulnerable" (121).

It is not meant to be suggested that GTAs have been misrepresented or deliberately excluded. There is plenty of documented research and scholarship, such as from Heidi Estrem and E. Shelly Reid, Rebecca Nowacek, Jessica Restaino, Tanya Rodrigue and Andrea Williams, and Mary Soliday, where GTAs are very present and well represented. The issue is not necessarily in how they are being represented, but in the fact that they are not speaking for themselves and participating as a researcher. Although GTAs have been represented in research, they have rarely been the ones conducting the studies, producing scholarship, or speaking with authority on GTA-related issues (Macauley, "Introduction: The Space Between" 6). It is essential to hear directly from rhetoric and composition GTAs, as they are

the only ones who can authentically convey their experiences from their own perspectives. This is why I am also conducting interviews in addition to observing the narrative-based Teaching Circles. I want to hear straight from the participants what their experiences and narratives are. It is essential to recognize their experiences to ensure that their training genuinely prepares them for both their graduate studies and future careers. Hearing their voices is crucial to understanding which aspects of their education are meaningful to them, and they need our response to prevent their liminality from feeling isolating and burdensome.

It is important to acknowledge that scholarship from the perspective of GTAs does exist. In 2000, Tina Good and Leanne B. Warshauer published *In Our Own Voice: Graduate Students Teach Writing*, a collection of thirty short essays, primarily written by graduate students, reflecting on their experiences as GTAs. Most of these essays focus on teaching practices, pedagogy, responding to student writing, grading, and similar topics. However, even at the time of its publication over two decades ago, the collection also addressed issues related to working conditions and the challenges GTAs face as they navigate unfamiliar academic environments.

Brian K. Bly's "Uneasy Transitions: The Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Composition Program" explores the difficult shift GTAs must navigate as they enter graduate programs while balancing the dual roles of student and teacher. Similarly, Patrick J. Bettencourt's "Voicing Experience" examines who holds authority in the field and highlights how GTA voices are often overshadowed or overlooked. Unfortunately, these issues persist today. Good and Warshauer's *In Our Own Voice: Graduate Students Teach Writing* serves as a valuable example of the insight GTAs bring when discussing and reflecting on their own experiences. While Good and Warshauer's collection emphasizes the pedagogy and practice of teaching

writing, Jessica Restaino's *First Semester: Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground* builds on this exploration by shifting the focus to GTAs themselves. It examines their experiences as they navigate teaching, adapt to their programs, and progress in their professional development. Studies like these provide valuable insights and opportunities that cannot be fully captured from other perspectives.

Despite differences in time, location, structure, and focus, Macauley found significant commonalities in their individual GTA experiences. For instance, imposter syndrome is a shared experience that continues to present itself. However, an important prevailing shared experience is the liminality of GTAs having a foot in two worlds and very little stability in either. Macauley emphasizes that "It wasn't just being 'between' that we shared; it was the sense of moving back and forth continually within and between two primary roles/identities of inhabiting and reinhabiting a threshold between teacher and student." ("Introduction: The Space Between" 4) There are also a number of significant changes that occur to the majority of GTAs. to us as GTAs. For instance, GTAs transition from solely consuming or receiving scholarship to actively producing it. Another significant shift is moving from a student's responsive learning approach to developing the independence and confidence required to work as a professional. Land et al. confirm that these changes are essential to moving forward.

In this section I discovered that GTAs more often than not read scholarship that either does not include them or does not represent their work from their perspective. This is not to suggest fault in the research done nor in the scholarship presented. Rather, the issue lies within the academic culture itself: the norms and practices that limit the roles of graduate students, GTAs, and new teachers in scholarly research and discourse. The issue is not

necessarily in how they are being represented, but in the fact that they are not speaking for themselves and participating as a researcher. Fortunately, this is starting to shift and GTAs and other graduate students are starting to step more fully into the role of researchers of published scholarship.

It is essential to hear directly from rhetoric and composition GTAs, as they are the only ones who can authentically convey their experiences from their own perspective. This is one of the reasons why I am conducting my study: I want to hear straight from the participants what their experiences and narratives are. They need us to recognize their experiences to ensure that their training genuinely prepares them for both their graduate studies and future careers. It is crucial to listen to their voices to understand what aspects of their education are meaningful to them, and they need our response to prevent their liminality from feeling isolating and overwhelming. One item that has popped up repeatedly in the scholarship surrounding GTAs is how they negotiate their differencing identities and find balance in this state of liminality.

GTAs Negotiating Identities

While it is evident that WPE must go beyond merely teaching procedural skills to support GTAs in their transition to becoming educators, Dylan Dryer describes the treatment of GTA identity as "skittish" (424). Navigating the liminality of their identity is a complex process for GTAs, largely due to the fact that they are often beginners in multiple roles simultaneously. Melissa Nicolas explains that:

> On the one hand, graduate students are most definitely students, people who are learning about and becoming initiated into a field or discipline. On the other hand, these same students are often given institutional roles, like teaching their own classes, or tutoring, or

> running a writing program, which gives them a greater level of institutional authority and responsibility than undergraduate students and even some of their graduate peers. Graduate students, in many ways, are betwixt and between. (1)

Although GTAs are granted institutional authority by being assigned classrooms of first-year students to teach, they are simultaneously disempowered in various ways, including their status as underpaid labor and their lack of experience as scholars in the field. In the following section, I will analyze how GTAs transfer from one identity to another and how they might find balance between their differing roles.

GTAs enter practicum courses with numerous external factors influencing their experience—they are often new to graduate school, sometimes new to teaching, and just beginning to engage with scholarship as creators rather than consumers. Additionally, for many GTAs, the practicum course is their first introduction to composition theory (Lugg 70-71). Some scholars have started examining how GTAs navigate these complex intersections within the practicum setting. After analyzing the journals of new GTAs and how they describe their transition into teaching, Jackie Grutsch McKinney and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater conclude that while GTAs often grapple with navigating their evolving and sometimes conflicting identities, the goal of the practicum course should not be to immediately shape them into fixed teaching identities rooted solely in composition theory. Instead, "what seems far more important is for TAs to have an opportunity to invent, try out, and perform their new identities as writing teachers" (Grutsch McKinney and Chiseri-Strater 73). Within the study of this dissertation, participants were split on their opinion on the challenging versus opportunistic state of being in a liminal position, with many discussing the challenges that come with the dual nature of being both student and teacher. However, there were several

who also saw their liminality as an opportunity to widen their identities and expand their understanding of the academic world around them.

For new GTAs, authenticity is often viewed as something attainable only after they have secured a sense of authority. This conditional nature of authenticity contrasts with the idea of authority, which is often seen as an inherent quality gained through external factors such as titles or credentials (Lugg 72). It is worth noting that there are layers to this. For example, many unstable positions like term appointments or GTAships have little to no insurance compared to a tenured fully appointed professor. Their position is on unsteady ground, and they have to be careful in what they say or do lest they be removed from that position. No matter how supportive and open-minded the WPA is, there will always be a barrier between GTA/Adjunct and administrator that prevents full transparency. This barrier is denser or thinner depending on the WPA, department, and institution. However, it remains all the same. In "safe spaces" for lack of a better term, such as GTA run TCs, this anxiety is largely removed. As previously discussed, despite the extensive scholarship in the field, a significant gap remains: the lack of research on the lived experiences of GTAs teaching in writing programs. The narrative-based Teaching Circles of this study seek to learn about these lived experiences and how they influence GTAs developing their professional identities.

Unsurprisingly, research on graduate teacher education frequently explores issues of identity, particularly how graduate instructors reconcile their previous identities while adapting to their new role as writing teachers. It is often assumed that incoming graduate instructors begin their first semester of teaching with a range of literacy and educational experiences that influence their perceptions of the kind of teachers they should become. In their study of graduate instructors at George Mason and Boise State, E. Shelley Reid, Heidi

Estrem, and Marcia Belcheir found that "TAs were influenced more strongly by prior personal experiences and beliefs […] than by their formal pedagogy education." (33-34) Although this pattern is frequently observed, few studies on graduate instructor education have attempted to explicitly define "identity" or the "prior personal experiences and beliefs" that shape teaching, despite acknowledging their impact. Brewer asserts that graduate instructors' perspectives on language and literacy (deeply connected to and expressed through their identities) serve as a crucial foundation for how they conceptualize the teaching of composition during their first year (4).

Elizabeth Rankin discusses graduate instructors who aim to engage with personal writing and help students develop an authentic "voice" (30-31). Wendy Bishop and Jessica Restaino, on the other hand, describe participants who primarily perceive writing as grammar or a set of neutral skills. Much of this research highlights the significance of these perspectives in shaping how new graduate instructors approach teaching. For instance, Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir explain that their participants' teaching "principles" are influenced by their identities as poets and writers (47). Similarly, in Brewer's study, graduate instructors view literacy as serving various purposes, such as self-expression, critical engagement, or textual knowledge.

In this section, I noticed how GTAs often struggle to find a balance between their duties as a graduate student and a (often new) teacher. Further complicating this, GTAs are also often new to graduate studies as well, resulting in them having to take on several new roles at once and being expected to adapt fairly seamlessly. This puts immense pressure on them and often results in GTAs refraining from asking for support or help in fear of being criticized for not knowing even when they are still new to these roles. Correlating tightly with this balance of identities is GTA survival in their new positions, which is a lesser discussed aspect of

scholarship pertaining to GTAs compared to the theories and practices behind the curriculum of GTA preparation.

GTA Survival

While the training and preparation of GTAs to teach FYC has been well established in scholarship, a lesser discussed area is the real, harsher reality of GTAs adjustment to their positions which often involves a sense of survival. In this section, I will analyze how WPAs balance how much to include in the training without overwhelming them with all the nuanced aspects that fall within writing studies. I will also discuss how new GTAs often struggle adjusting to their new responsibilities in addition to balancing their duties as graduate students.

There is a realistic, functional aspect that needs to be considered and unfortunately, this does not always allow space and time for new educators to become immersed in the theory and scholarship of this field. A practical approach to GTA preparation prioritizes immediate survival, often postponing deeper reflection, growth, and professional development until later stages of training (Anglesey 174). In Kali A. Mobley Finn's study, she observed that while five participants were modifying standardized course materials, there was no clear indication that they fully grasped the theoretical foundations of the course design, particularly the scaffolding and intent behind each unit. Most participants expressed a level of uncertainty regarding the curriculum. For instance, one stated, "I did not change the assignments and all the other stuff just because I didn't know. I mean, it's the first semester. There's no way I'm changing anything." Another stated, "Since I'm still learning the way it is here, I felt like if I'm going to use the standard syllabus, it makes sense to use the standard assignment sheets at least for this first semester until I get more comfortable with the textbooks and the

curriculum and stuff." (104) These participants acknowledged that, despite their previous teaching experience, they still needed to familiarize themselves with the new curriculum by engaging with it firsthand. They all had confidence in the effectiveness of the FYC program's design. Relying on this trust, they embraced the pedagogical tools provided to help them navigate and adapt to teaching in an unfamiliar setting. As I mentioned, there is little to no space for immersion into literature in the typical orientation in addition to the basics/essentials. However, this is where TCs can assist in creating consistent spaces for the items that are being delayed for survival's sake.

Helping graduate students to teach writing courses is a difficult charge for many WPAs. Wooten presents a very effective comparison, equating teaching WPE to "attempting to teach a child how to tie their shoes while also explaining the history of shoe-tying, theories of shoe-tying (making two rabbit's ears to fold over each other, making crisscrosses over a bridge, making a bow), different materials needed in shoe-tying, and ways to mentally and emotionally approach shoe-tying." (289) Works like Betty P. Pytlik and Sarah Liggett's *Preparing College Teachers of Writing* (which offers a comprehensive overview of the histories, theories, programs, and practices related to teaching rhetoric and composition GTAs) and Sidney I. Dobrin's collection *Don't Call It That* (which explores composition practicum) provide instructors with valuable insights on how to support rhetoric and composition GTAs while encouraging them to engage in critical reflections on their teaching practices.

Recent research has expanded on WPE by focusing on the structure and content of GTA training, exploring what its format and curriculum should entail (see Duffelmeyer; Dryer; Latterell; Reid; and Stancliff and Goggin). Other studies investigate specific challenges that

GTAs find difficult to articulate or address (see Smagorinsky, Wilson and Moore; Taggart and Lowry). Many scholars emphasize the significance of reflection in GTA education, particularly as GTAs prepare to teach and develop their instructional identities (see Brewer; Hesse, "Teachers as Students, Reflecting Resistance"; Estrem and Reid; McKinney and Chiseri-Strater; Reid; and Welch). Collectively, these studies highlight the complexity involved in designing effective WPE programs.

Jessica Restaino argues that "New teachers, charged with the task of getting students to write and navigating new graduate programs themselves, are largely untrained, unsure of their responsibilities, and equipped with a syllabus that they did not design and perhaps a list of pedagogical procedures they do not understand." While scholars have made significant efforts to theorize writing instruction and establish best practices for training composition instructors, the majority of writing courses are taught by graduate students and adjuncts who have minimal formal training in pedagogy. Many of these instructors do not consider themselves readers or contributors to composition theory. Part of the reason for this is no practical time to formally train them, with most WPE initially taking place in the week-long orientation before the semester starts. Now, that does not mean that there is no professional development after this initial training. Many WPAs hold reoccurring workshops, check-ins, observations, and meetings to help new teachers continue in their development. However, this "learning as you go" method tends to be extraordinarily stressful for new teachers and leads to quite a bit of trial and error as they stumble their way through their first semester of teaching. This is also why so many new writing teachers (particularly GTAs) focus so heavily on survival rather than the intricacies of literature and theory; they are still learning the basics, let alone the advanced material.

This discussion in addition to my observations during the narrative-based Teaching Circles have made it clear that GTA training is a complex task and often results in a "sink or swim" approach with the WPA providing floaties to buoy the GTAs as they adjust to their positions. This is not due to lack of effort or thought on the WPAs part. There simply is very limited time and space to prepare GTAs *before* they enter into their roles as NWTs. There are counterbalances to this, such as reoccurring bi-monthly meetings, such as the ones held by the WPA at UMKC, the site of this study. The WPA regularly asks GTAs what they would like to discuss in these meetings, providing materials, guest speakers, and workshops depending on the current needs of GTAs. These Teacher Circles have emphasized this practice by allowing GTAs to explore their peer mentorship more extensively. While these steps do not fully rid GTAs of the stress and anxiety of adjustment and learning their roles, it does provide them with a strong support system to help them through it. In the following section, the conversation will turn to MFA students, specifically. In this study, majority of participants are MFA students, and they have to adapt even further than their composition counterparts as they enter into a different realm of writing comparted to what they are used to.

MFA Students Teaching FYC

MFA GTAs occupy a complex and often precarious position within academia, balancing the demands of being both students and instructors. Their positionality is shaped by the pressures of graduate school, institutional constraints, and the challenges of developing a professional teaching identity. Many MFA GTAs accept teaching assistantships not because they aspire to teach first-year composition (FYC) but because these positions provide financial support for their studies. As a result, they often enter the classroom with little

preparation or formal training in composition pedagogy. At the same time, they are expected to navigate the demands of graduate coursework, research, and their own writing, all while assuming the role of educators in an unfamiliar discipline. In this section, I will examine the realities of GTAship not always being a long-term career choice, how WPE might evolve to accommodate MFA students, how FYC is structured for GTAs, and how MFA GTAs generally view FYC.

For most students who are graduating with MAs, MFAs, or PhDs in English, regardless of whether teaching is a long-term career goal, teaching will be their primary responsibility at some point, given the common choice for GTA appointment to help fund graduate school. Though many programs have required teacher-training courses, few of them extend beyond the first semester or year, and even fewer spend significant time helping students understand pedagogical theory and working with diverse students (Hassel and Phillips). With these appointments comes the concern of whether GTAs, who often enter their assistantships with little to no teaching experience, are prepared to assume their roles as educators, with particular concern for GTAs with MFA backgrounds who, among the specializations, are thought to have the least exposure to composition among the groups. Within this dissertation's study, only two of the seven GTAs are working towards their Mas and only one of them with a specialization in rhetoric and composition. The other five GTAs are all working towards their MFAs.

During their interviews (which will be explored in further detail in later chapters), they were asked about how they felt about the transition to teaching in a field of writing outside their specialization. Most of them found that the transition was not as difficult as they feared, as many of the skills they already held were transferrable into this new environment. Ann

Ruggles Gere et al. in their 2017 *College English* article "Mutual Adjustments: Learning from and Responding to Transfer Student Writers" discussed the importance of looking closely at, and listening to, students who experience that transition as a data source for program, curricular, and instructional development. Such developments were important components to "understanding how transfer student writers adjust to the university environment and considering the kinds of institutional adjustments we might make in turn" (336). However, research does not seem to support the confidence the MFA GTAs in my study have presented. According to Mara Lee Grayson, though creative writing experience offers some useful tools for helping students get through FYC, many new GTAs are not able to recognize them. If they do employ such tools, they do so intuitively rather than strategically. In other words, they lack the fundamental reflexivity to providing effective learning opportunities for college learners (48-49).

A possible solution is that graduate programs in all areas of English studies work towards doing a better job of preparing their graduates for the profession of teaching English. This assumes, however, that teaching is the purpose of an English degree. This assumption is particularly problematic when considered that, nationally, more than three-quarters of university faculty are employed on a contingent basis (CCCSE). For many, teaching remains a job, and this is a reality that needs to be acknowledged. A 2014 *Chronical of Higher Education* article reported that "[t]here-quarters of master's-degree recipients graduate with debt, with an average of $40,000 according to Debra W. Stewart, president of the Council of Graduate Schools. About two-thirds of PhD recipients accumulate debt, with an average of $60,000" (Patel). For many who take on the roles of GTAs, it is a position to help them

afford to make it through school, as has been confirmed by several MFA GTA participants within this dissertation's study.

A major challenge for MFA GTAs is their relationship to composition and rhetoric as a field of study. Many come from creative writing backgrounds and have little exposure to composition theory, leading to a reliance on personal writing experiences when teaching. Unlike graduate students in rhetoric and composition, MFA GTAs may not be as familiar with key pedagogical concepts such as transfer theory, genre awareness, or process-based writing instruction. This gap in knowledge can make it difficult for them to move beyond the misconception that FYC is simply about grammar, syntax, and remediation rather than a foundational course in academic writing and rhetorical engagement. However, this is not to say that those who are not looking at education as a long-term career choice or whose backgrounds are not in rhetoric and composition do not take their positions seriously. I have experienced first-hand in working with GTAs with MFA backgrounds that they are the ones who ask the most questions and work the hardest to make sure they are meeting the standards of the FYC courses they teach.

Holly Hassel and Cassandra Phillips argue that

> The power of first-year writing instruction, either to uplift or to obstruct students, should be rooted in the experiences of students and teachers. Instead, writing programs and writing studies knowledge is often disconnected from those experiences, and (especially at research-intensive institutions with graduate programs) prioritizes staffing practices, opportunities for graduate students, and theorizing knowledge that is often imposed from above rather than emerging from the daily realities of college writing classrooms (Hassel and Phillips).

That is part of what makes narrative inquiry so essential as a research method. It offers space for the experiences of those whose perspectives are not typically considered seriously to be heard. Even within this dissertation's study, the MFA participants have countered much of what scholarship is presenting regarding their preparation to teach FYC. Preparing GTAs to step into the role of educators in undergraduate composition classrooms is particularly crucial due to their unique position within writing programs and universities. Susan Miller-Cochran, Rochelle Rodrigo, Veronica Pantoja, and Duane Roen argue that GTA training should be "conceptualized more broadly as an early foundation for professional development" to ensure its relevance and usefulness for new FYC instructors (82). The way GTAs perceive both teaching in general and the teaching of writing specifically is largely influenced by their experiences in these training programs.

GTA preparation programs not only shape how GTAs perceive and implement writing instruction but also influence the ways in which composing, learning, and teaching processes are both explicitly and implicitly conveyed to their students (Cicchino 2-3). A study performed by Casie Fedukovich and Megan Hall at the University of North Carolina State explored the state of its first-year writing program and how its GTAs are trained. North Carolina State University is a sizable, state-funded land-grant institution that educates around 25,000 undergraduate students. North. According to the study, North Carolina State University's first-year writing program's (FYWP) writing in the disciplines curriculum challenges both new and experienced teachers. While assistantships are offered to doctoral students, most GTAs within the department are seeking either an MA or MFA (Fedukovich and Hall 2). At the time of the study, the FYW program employed twenty-nine lecturers and

forty-five GTAs, teaching on average 4,000 students per academic year (Fedukovich and Hall 3).

Like so many programs, North Carolina State University required coursework as a part of GTA preparation for teaching FYC. In this study, GTAs were to complete a class called English 511: Theory and Research in Composition. Fedukovich and Hall noted that since most GTAs arrive with little to no training in rhetoric and composition, English 511 serves as a foundational course where they can critically examine their assumptions about writing before stepping into the classroom (4). Additionally, GTAs are paired with a faculty mentor to support them during this transition. In their second and third semesters, GTAs continue their training through English 624, a course that integrates teaching practicum with a balance of theory and practice (Fedukovich and Hall 6).

First-Year Composition is uniquely qualified to provide this experience for several reasons. FYC is often one of the few courses that a student can expect to be small, with it consisting of usually around twenty-five students or less. In the FYC courses I teach at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and Kansas State University, there is a cap of twenty-two students in my in-person classes and eighteen in the online classes, respectively. It was a similar structure when I was a GTA at Emporia State University. This, compared to the massive lecture halls, allows students in FYC to receive one-on-one guidance and support that they are not likely to get in other classes and disciplines. FYC instructors build strong connections with their students by learning their names, facilitating discussions, overseeing their progress on writing projects, and offering essential support both in the classroom and through individual conferences.

Literacy assumptions have had a lasting impact on the broad field of English studies largely because of literary studies' devotion to "close reading" (Carillo and Elbow). Although it may be assumed that all subspecialties within English studies (particularly composition, literature, and creative writing) follow the same teaching and learning approaches, there are notable differences among them. According to Shari Stenberg, "The feature that most distinguishes composition from its disciplinary siblings is its primary focus on pedagogy, and, more specifically, its conception of pedagogy as a mode of knowledge production, not merely a vehicle for knowledge transmission" (130). Due to these differences, some English GTAs face greater challenges than others in adjusting to and applying the disciplinary practices of composition.

As Micciche notes, "Teaching, learning, and administration are not simply intellectual activities that one masters, but a complex blend of emotional and professional issues that involve the whole person" (454). The intellectual work of teaching-curricular and pedagogical development, administrative tasks, research, assessment, and emotional labor are all important elements in the FYC classroom. The reality is that on some level all of these skills are needed for effective teaching. GTA training serves not only as an introduction to teaching writing but also as a way to immerse new GTAs in composition theory and practice. However, since these disciplinary theories and models may differ from what they have previously encountered, new composition GTAs may experience cognitive dissonance as they navigate the liminal space between two academic disciplines. Wendy Bishop and Christine Farris highlight that developing a teaching identity is a complex process, as it involves balancing the pre-existing views on teaching that students bring into graduate school

with the new theories and pedagogical approaches they encounter throughout their coursework and their journey toward becoming educators (Johnson 61).

Additionally, it is important to consider GTA training in a holistic way, taking into account their various backgrounds, interests, and career prospects. Many MFA and MA GTAs who pursue a teaching career go on to teach at two-year institutions and community colleges (Hassel and Phillips). Clearly, the priorities and needs of two-year-college writing programs are different from those at comprehensive or research-intensive campuses, especially when considering the differences in workload and focus on first-year writing. However, in practically every institution, first-year writing is the foundation on which curriculum, budgets, and hiring are built. FYC funds minors, majors, and graduate programs; they serve as "apprenticeships" and labs within which new teachers learn the craft of writing instruction (Hassel and Phillips).

Sidney Dobrin conceptualizes the GTA practicum as a significant site for enculturation. He argues that the practicum is not just a space for training or professionalization but a setting where new instructors are immersed in the cultural ideologies of composition. This process, according to Dobrin, positions the practicum as one of the most influential and essential spaces within composition studies (21). Stenberg also examines the role of enculturation in GTA training, highlighting the "teacher-as-trainee" model, which frames GTAs as passive learners or "empty vessels." As a result, this approach to teacher preparation often excludes opportunities for reflection or critique, disregarding the idea that GTAs might contribute valuable insights that could engage with or even reshape existing pedagogical concepts (64, 65). Roen, Goggin, and Clary-Lemon's conversation model of GTA preparation closely aligns with this perspective.

Because many new graduate instructors have spent a great deal of time studying literature and learning close reading, they feel more comfortable with devoting class time to reading than with teaching writing. In Brewer's study, her graduate instructor participants also struggled with whether or not this focus was appropriate in a composition classroom. While the participants attributed great value to the close study of texts, both literary and nonliterary, they "wondered whether and how these practices would help their students become better writers" (64). In Brewer's study, she calls attention to two participating MFA graduate instructors teaching FYC. According to Brewer, their positionality as MFA students teaching FYC speaks to the issue of disciplinarity in that often there is an assumption that it is the graduate students in composition and rhetoric programs who are automatically better teachers of writing (98).

Brewer notes that there has become a trend among scholars (see Brewer; Goldblatt; and Hesse, "The Place of Creative Writing in Composition Studies") that MFA students do not necessarily think of writing in individual terms, and this is significant because a substantial portion of the FYWP graduate instructors are creative writers. At Public (the setting of Brewer's study), the overall makeup of the practicum course was over half (ten out of eighteen) creative writing MFAs. This ratio extends beyond a single study as well. The 2012 National Writing Census reveals that graduate students outside of composition programs are more likely to teach First-Year Composition (FYC) courses than those from composition programs (De Piero and Johnson 210). Whereas rhetoric and composition graduate students will have continued opportunities to revisit their teaching in light of future study in composition theory, this opportunity may not emerge for creating writing MFAs unless they actively seek it out. Nevertheless, understanding how to support graduate students (and

faculty) in creative writing is an ever-present issue for many WPAs and the participants of Brewer's study experiences reveal ways of engaging creative writing MFAs in composition theory.

Ultimately, MFA GTAs occupy a tenuous and often challenging position within composition studies. Their professional identities are shaped by their liminality, lack of formal training, and institutional constraints. While they may struggle initially with the theoretical foundations of composition pedagogy, they gradually develop strategies to integrate their creative writing backgrounds into their teaching. However, without systemic changes to GTA training and labor conditions, many will continue to focus on mere survival rather than meaningful professional development. The growing inclusion of GTA voices in composition scholarship represents a step toward addressing these issues, but further efforts are needed to ensure that their contributions are recognized and valued.

Quite a few obstacles and issues have been addressed in the prior few sections, including GTA liminality, representation, and preparation. However, there also exists several supports systems. A vital one comes in the form of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Largely, these communities consist of "[a] group of people who work together with a shared purpose which entails some collaborative attempt to explore issues or answer questions and hence potentially create new knowledge or understanding in a given domain for anyone seeking to establish a collaborative community of enquiry in the context of educational research." (Cristie et al. 264) In the following section, I will discuss the support systems that help combat the issues and challenges GTAs, particularly in the form of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

Professional Learning Communities

A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is defined by a collective commitment to student learning, joint decision-making, collaborative efforts, and mutual support. In a PLC, teachers have control over curriculum development, fostering a sense of ownership over the curriculum while also supporting the growth of their professional identities (Louis, Kruse, and Marks; Song 82). There are two expectations of PLCs: "1) knowledge is situated in the day-to-day lived experiences and best understood through critical reflection with others who share the same experience and 2) active engagement by teaching staff in PLCs increases their professional knowledge and enhances student learning" (Ball and Forzani). Researchers (such as Lee, Zhang, and Yin) propose that when educators engage in a PLC, they tend to show increased confidence and dedication to improving their practices, along with a readiness to explore educational innovations. In other words, PLCs create a sense of belonging and provide space for educators and administrators to work collaboratively and constructively. In the following section, I will examine how teachers as still learners, no matter their experience and how constructivism, specifically experiential learning, plays a large role in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The stages of experiential learning involve active experimentation, concrete experiences, reflective observation, and abstract conceptualization. I will also analyze how PLCs serve as a place for collaboration among educators who share a common goal, what it means to participate in a PLC, how PLCs are built and rebuilt just like identities and stories do the same, and how PLCs promote professional identity development.

Although composition and rhetoric scholars (such as T. Miller, Yancey, S. Miller et al.) have concurred that the objectives of the GTAship should extend beyond preparing writing

instructors for the classroom, the focus on identity development has mostly been overlooked until recently (Dryer and Grouling). GTAs step into a complex, interconnected environment made up of various communities of practice. They require opportunities to interact with different practices and cross boundaries, to shape an understanding of the landscape and their evolving role within it, and to explore how their work can hold significance.

Stenberg's *Professing and Pedagogy* examines and evaluates four key teaching models within English studies: "teacher as scholar," "teacher as owner," "teacher as trainee," and "teacher as learner." The "teacher as trainee" model is presented as representative of the conversion approach to GTA preparation, while the "teacher as owner" metaphor is worth considering because it highlights the belief that "professors are expected to develop in isolation, or based on the scholarship they engage with, rather than through collaboration with other educators" (xxii). This model, therefore, overlooks the collaborative aspect of teacher development, framing the process as one rooted solely in discipline-specific norms and ideologies. Sosnoski and Burmester also view this approach as problematic because it mirrors the "master-apprentice tradition in education," rather than fostering a more collaborative dynamic. Stenberg further contends that "no metaphor has had a greater influence on the professorial role than that of 'teacher as scholar,'" where teaching is seen as a by-product of scholarly work, and teacher development is assumed to occur naturally and implicitly as one matures as a scholar. This perspective suggests that "effective teaching is more about one's relationship with knowledge than with students" (33, 12).

"Teaching as such, they did not consider at all as an art which could itself be taught, but rather took it for granted that anyone who was himself proficient in a science ought to be able to teach others" (Nicksen 6). The idea that teaching is inherently tied to one's scholarly work

is prevalent in English studies and academia in general, as many graduate students receive minimal, if any, pedagogical training within their field. However, Stenberg's "teacher as learner" metaphor promotes a learning-centered teaching model where educators continue to grow and develop throughout their careers, rather than reaching a point of "mastery" in teaching and then ceasing to evolve: stopping searching for ways to improve, stopping learning new theories and practices, and stopping reflecting on their own practices. PLCs are one potential way teachers can not only maintain the position of "teacher as learner," but also keep each other accountable and prevent others from falling into stagnation.

Researchers (such as Edgington and Taylor, Dryer, Restaino) have found that new GTAs often face challenges in balancing their roles as novices in their graduate courses while also being viewed as experts in their writing classrooms or as graduate administrators. Additionally, many GTAs view their disciplinary background as distinct from the writing courses they teach (Grouling). To address these issues, it is recommended that WPE recognize the impact of a GTA's previous experiences and affiliations on their teaching practices (Pawlowski and Jacobson 188). Something that might aid in GTAs acclimating to their dual (and sometimes dichotic) positions are PLCs. According to Donnor et al., "a learning community is a group that act on an ongoing basis to develop their knowledge of a common interest or passion by sharing individual resources and by engaging in critical dialogue." (565).

Therefore, if relationships among members are based on trust, open communication, questions, and constructive feedback (elements crucial for intellectual growth) a productive dynamic can be fostered for ongoing interaction and development. According to Wenger's *Communities of Practice*, involvement with the members and activities of a community

transforms us by “shaping our ability to participate, belong, and navigate the world” (226). In other words, learning to participate is a process of developing one's identity, both professionally and personally. People do not enter learning situations as blank slates (a point highlighted by Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak), nor do they discard their previous identity to adopt a new one through practice (as traditional pedagogy suggests). Instead, prior experiences join current ones to create new ideas, mindsets, and experiences (aligning with a more constructivist mindset).

Prior experiences are linked closely with the concept of experiential learning, which is rooted in the theories of constructivism and sociocultural experiences. It highlights the interactive aspect of learning, where learners engage with their sociocultural surroundings to gain new knowledge, building on their existing beliefs and understanding (Vygotsky, Kolb and Kolb, Levine). The Association for Experiential Education (AEE) defines experiential learning as “an instructional approach that facilitates knowledge and skill acquisition through reflective processes, enabling learners to develop new knowledge, skills, and values that aid in their integration into society.” (AEE). Experiential learning theory highlights the significance of active participation in the transformative learning process (Kolb). It is comprehensive, characterizing learning as a fundamental process of human adaptation that encompasses the entirety of an individual. The active participation of teachers in professional development programs (such as Professional Learning Communities and Teaching Circles) is emphasized as a means for them to acquire knowledge meaningfully and apply it effectively to their teaching methods. There are four primary stages in the experiential learning theory model.

The first stage, “active experimentation,” involves learners actively engaging with new concepts or experiences. In this phase, learners play an active role in shaping their learning experiences. This transitions into the second stage, “concrete experiences,” where newly acquired knowledge is applied actively. Learning experiences encompass a wide range of abstract concepts, which requires learners to construct new knowledge, engage in problem-solving, and/or participate in role-playing activities. The third stage, “reflective observation,” is when learners show a deep understanding of concepts by linking current and past learning experiences and sharing their insights and reflections with others. The fourth and final state, “abstract conceptualization,” involves learners actively engaging in discussions and applying their newfound knowledge to connect with various situations. The learning process can commence at any stage, but optimal outcomes require progressing through all four cycles (Ajani 134). Experiential learning offers teachers the chance to consistently engage in reflection regarding their pedagogical practices and learning resources within the classroom. Professional development opportunities that follow the experiential learning model offer teachers the opportunity to tailor their instructional approaches to align with the unique context of their individual classrooms while also benefiting from input and suggestions from their peers. The development of lesson plans and the careful selection of teaching resources play a crucial role in the effective delivery of instruction (Ajani 144-45).

According to McLaughlin and Talbert, the development of PLCs involves the collaborative efforts of a group of educators united by a shared mission or commitment to enhancing their teaching practices. Christie et al. propose that the key factors for creating a PLC that encourages innovation include: 1) dialogue and participation, 2) relationships, 3) perspectives and assumptions that shape the relationships within the community and provide

insights into its dynamics, 4) structure and context, 5) climate (such as tone, environment, and conflict), 6) purpose, and 7) control (referring to who has access to the community, resources, constraints, and power within it). Now, it is inevitable that a person's position in multiple communities may conflict or produce tensions (Pawlowski and Jacobson 189). However, despite these obstacles, learning to coexist with multiple communities has the potential to lead to more fulfilling professional development as well as create a stronger rapport in the PLC. Wenger has recognized the importance of learning communities actively supporting identity development through intentional educational design. Specifically, learners should have access to three forms of identification: engagement, imagination, and alignment. These elements help learners understand the community and their role within it. To create opportunities for learners to access these forms, the focus should be on "1) places of engagement, 2) materials and experiences that help construct an image of the world and themselves, and 3) ways to influence the world and make their actions meaningful" (Wenger 270-271).

Engagement involves actively participating in community activities, often alongside more experienced members (Lave and Wenger; Wenger). Composition and Rhetoric GTAs engage in community practices when they create lesson plans, grade papers, serve on committees, develop curriculum materials, have hallway conversations, and participate in other similar activities. However, engagement should involve more than just allowing or encouraging GTAs to take part in ongoing activities. As Wenger points out, individuals begin to develop their sense of self through practice when they invest in their work and relationships with others. By fostering collaboration in the WPE practicum, GTAs can also connect with peers who are facing similar challenges. For instance, as GTAs carry out the various tasks expected

of them as new writing instructors in a program or institution, they may engage in these activities without reflecting on their professional identities as writing teachers. Encouraging experienced GTAs to reflect on their teaching identities and share their insights could help less experienced instructors develop a stronger connection with their practices.

While engagement offers a way to participate in a community, designing for imagination helps learners develop a reflective practice about these activities and their boundaries. Imagination enables learners to visualize the broader landscape of practice and understand their place within it. A teacher becomes aware of other teachers working in different schools and institutions, and imagining this network of individuals helps the teacher better understand their position and interpret experiences in relation to other communities within the landscape (Wenger 21). Ingenuity also aids GTAs in developing a sense of identity and belonging, and it helps them make sense of where they have been, where they are, and where they are heading (Pawlowski and Jacobson 193-94).

"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." (Pawlowski and Jacobson 197). Alignment occurs when participants share a common commitment to a goal or engage in similar practices to achieve an objective. Examples of alignment include using a syllabus template or collaborating with a colleague to design an assignment. It can also involve creating a shared discourse that enables communication across disciplines and specialties. Viewing moments of tension as learning opportunities, rather than challenges or obstacles, can also provide members of a PLC with an opportunity for growth and strengthening rapport. For example, as has occurred at the site of this study, UMKC GTAs

that took part in end of the semester department assessment discussed differences regarding what standards were (not) met and why, as well as what objectives needed to be prioritized.

"Innovations are acts of meaning, but there is no reason to imagine that the meanings are stable across individual lives." (Garcia 135) Therefore, with the collaboration of members within a PLC, meanings must be built and rebuilt, just as our identities go through the same process over time and experience. According to Leonor Margalef Garcia, innovation consists of two primary aspects: "those who incite transformative action and the recipients of said action." (135) Professional Development (PD), which occurs often in PLCs, serves as a controlled environment for innovation, where experiences, ideas, frustrations, failures, and exposure to multiple perspectives/ways of thinking take place. Of course, these things do occur on their own. Structured PD, whether that comes in the form of faculty meetings, workshops, Teaching Circles, or seminars, allows for more consistent development and growth. The concept of empowerment involves not just giving teachers more authority but also enhancing their skills. However, many scholars argue that under the traditional teacher development model, it is challenging for teachers to grow professionally (Goodman). As a result, the teacher development model must evolve to focus on creating a teachers' PLC (Sparks and Hirsh).

The focus of teacher professional development in the twenty-first century has shifted towards constructivist models that emphasize teacher leadership, sustainability, collaboration, inquiry-based learning, and a connection to practice and school contexts. PLCs are seen as a key element of these models. The success of PLCs in schools largely depends on the level of professional development provided. Several studies (see Peppers; Pratt; Restivo; Brooks; Fulle; Camburn; and Bleach) have demonstrated that participating in PLCs enhances

teachers' professional knowledge and improves their teaching practices. Furthermore, there is evidence suggesting that PLCs positively impact students' academic achievement. These studies indicate that reflective practice, through a social and collaborative approach, helps participants enhance their understanding of themselves and their teaching.

According to York-Barr et al., reflective practice is an intentional thinking process designed to assess, comprehend, and adjust practices in a deliberate and ongoing way. There are primarily two types of practitioners' reflection: "1) reflection-in-action, which occurs when practitioners make decisions during professional situations based on information derived from their implicit knowledge, and 2) reflection-on-action, which means reflecting on professional situations after they occur and deciding what can be done differently in future practice." (York-Barr et al.) Researchers affirm the beneficial effect of reflective practice on teachers' professional development (see Bleach; Dervent; Lakshmi; Mohammad; and Waronker). Teachers' ongoing learning can be fostered by encouraging discussions about their professional practices.

To support reflective practice, some scholars have created models rooted in Dewey's concepts of reflective thinking, inquiry, and experiential learning (Dewey). For instance, Rodgers developed a framework for reflective inquiry in practice that engages teachers in a discussion process starting with experience, followed by description, analysis, and praxis. York-Barr et al. propose a cycle that begins with team meetings where members listen and learn from one another around a clear goal, then progress to asking critical questions, analyzing data, and making connections from various perspectives. They then develop new insights, work on them, and assess the outcomes. Becoming a teacher while being part of a community involves a mix of personal motivations, community practices, and role

expectations. Through the intersection and experience of all three, GTAs transform and gain a sense of belonging within the community, while the community itself starts to feel like it belongs to them. One form that PLCs may take is Teaching Circles, specifically narrative-based ones. Both build a sense of community among teachers as well as grant autonomy and power to participants to speak freely as well as collaborate towards change and improvement. Additionally, when participants are given power to make choices and their voices validated, they are more liable to be invested in the larger community (such as the department or institution) and its goals.

Teaching Circles

Teaching Circles (TCs) are a type of PLC designed to encourage dialogue and scholarly discussion about teaching, improve pedagogical practices, and create an environment for professional development, while also fostering connections among educators (Ashton; Powell and Harrington). There are three main objectives of a Teaching Circle: 1) To give educators the opportunity to discuss methods for improving students' learning experiences with their peers (such as providing specific and quality feedback, instructional techniques, LMS usage, etc.). 2) To create a space for educators to talk about current events and their impact on the classroom. 3) To offer a reliable point of contact for educators to seek assistance, guidance, or instructional resources (Ashton 12). Other common objectives of Teaching Circles include fostering a sense of community, creating a shared understanding of pedagogical goals among participating teachers, encouraging individual teachers to engage in critical reflection, and stimulating intellectual interest in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Fassinger et al. describe how their experiences in writing circles have helped them adopt new teaching strategies, become more empathetic toward students as writers, and

improve their ability to engage students at various stages of intellectual development (53). For instance, their writing circle involvement has made them more effective readers who offer constructive feedback and create a supportive environment, which has led them to apply the same approach when responding to students' writing. In the following section I will consider the successes and struggles of documented studies that used Teaching Circles. I will also examine how TCs are typically used and the different forms they take, the general goals of Teaching Circles, how TCs can serve as a vehicle for transfer, and how Teaching Circles can help fill in the gaps in GTAs formal education of pedagogical and content knowledge.

Teaching Circles can focus on various aspects. For instance, some TCs function as portfolio reading groups, where instructors exchange end-of-term portfolios to provide students with additional feedback and allow teachers to discuss evaluation and grading using shared, concrete examples. Margarat Marshall indicates that “almost every term there’s a circle that concentrates on sharing lesson plans, developing new assignments, or piloting new course material.” (427) Teaching Circles can also focus on specific projects that benefit the entire program, such as developing grading rubrics or proposing new theme-based courses. Some TCs operate as writing groups, where each member shares drafts of scholarly papers or creative work for peer feedback. It's important to note that while this evolution is natural, a writing group differs from a TC unless all members are writing about teaching. Once the focus shifts to creative projects, the connections to the first-year required composition course become less relevant (Marshall 428).

The field of composition and rhetoric has studied Teaching Circles before, with varying applications, successes, and challenges. Margaret Marshall conducted a study within the University of Miami's English Composition Program, where she examines the formation and

development of informal structures like Teaching Circles (TCs) and looks at the opportunities and challenges these structures present (414). TCs foster a sense of shared purpose, encourage collegiality, and support the pedagogical growth of both novice and experienced teachers. Like many large research universities, the University of Miami (UM) offers multiple sections of first-year composition courses and requires most incoming students to take these courses as part of their general education curriculum. Moore et al. describe a group's year-long involvement in a Teaching Circle at a large, urban research university in the South, highlighting how several members developed strategies to foster more inclusive and equitable learning environments for students in their classrooms (14). Powell and Harrington use Teaching Circles as an innovative approach to support faculty and enhance student learning. In their article, they discuss the application of instructor Teaching Circles to assist math-anxious students at a mid-sized urban university, including the objectives, formation, and occasionally

unexpected results of using this approach (24). The case study presented in the article demonstrates how circles can be utilized to address various instructional challenges.

Over the past few decades, faculty study circles have emerged on university campuses as a particular type of Teaching Circle designed to meet the needs of educators who seek to reflect on their pedagogical methods and challenge their values, assumptions, and biases. Typically, faculty study circles are structured to assist instructors in critically analyzing and identifying learning gaps among students, while exploring strategies that foster greater equity and social justice in teaching and pedagogy (Moore, Wallace, Schack, Thomas, Lewis, Wilson, Miller, and Antoni 14-15). Although Teaching Circles have received increased attention in higher education over the past two decades, they are more frequently used to

address shared scholarly concerns rather than to focus on teaching interests and pedagogical practices (Marshall 413). TCs are more commonly employed by post-secondary educators to hold one another accountable for the depth of intellectual arguments rather than for classroom teaching methods. Despite the lack of focus on pedagogy, TCs are credited with being safe places for learning, exploration, change, and accomplishment (see Marshall, Moore et al.; Powell and Harrington; Ashton; Fassinger and Gililand). Of course, there are exceptions for every common practice and TCs have been used adjunct and GTA support. However, it does not occur enough to be considered a common practice. Through my own professional experiences as an educator (both GTA and non) and working with GTAs, it has become apparent that peer educators are some of the greatest resources for GTAs of all experience levels. The TCs in this study will allow space for composition GTAs at UMKC to learn, grow, and support one another regarding their professional and pedagogical development. Part of this support comes from recognizing the narratives each GTA brings into the conversation.

In Marshall's study, she explains how Teaching Circles were initiated alongside a major curriculum redesign, and these curriculum changes created both an opportunity and a need for discussions that might not have otherwise been so apparent (Marshall 414). Like many large research universities, the University of Miami offers multiple sections of first-year composition courses and requires most incoming students to take these courses as part of their general education. As with many other institutions, particularly those without tenure-track faculty in rhetoric/composition, these classes are taught by a combination of full-time lecturers, graduate students, and adjuncts. Most of these instructors hold degrees in literature,

creative writing, or other related fields rather than in composition and rhetoric. UMKC has a similar mix of educators teaching FYC.

Additionally, the composition program at the University of Miami (UM) serves as the main site for graduate student assistantships within the English department, meaning that the responsibility for preparing graduate students for teaching typically falls on the composition program, as it does in departments across the country. UM's master's and creative writing students teach in the program for just one year (Marshall 415). These circumstances are not exclusive to composition programs. Required courses inevitably create the need for multiple sections, leading to staffing challenges regardless of the department involved. It is common across higher education to assign graduate students to teach introductory courses. Similarly, the frequent issue of inconsistency across multiple sections of required courses is not restricted to the English department or first-year courses. While these inconsistencies may be worsened when instructors are inexperienced or lack strong commitment to the institution or its objectives, the emphasis on academic freedom and faculty autonomy can make it challenging to maintain consistency at any level. This is where the concept of transfer becomes a vital skill for students. Inconsistency is probable both within and without academia and students have to be able take the core skills they learn and apply it to new rhetorical situations. However, transfer does not come naturally to students, and it is not something commonly taught to educators on how to teach. TCs offer an environment for discussions on how GTAs may approach teaching transfer as well as scaffolding material.

In 1998, the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) introduced Teaching Circles. UNO, a midsized land-grant university in the Midwest, places student-centered education at the core of its mission (Powell and Harrington 25). Since then, these circles have remained an

effective method for fostering faculty development, with hundreds of UNO faculty members taking part over the past decade. Initially, faculty members who participated by meeting at least seven times in an academic year received a stipend of $300. As state budgets became more constrained, the Center for Faculty Development was temporarily abolished and later restructured. Stipends were reduced to fifty dollars and, at one point, were not funded at all. Despite these budget cuts, Teaching Circles persisted without faculty compensation during this challenging period, demonstrating the high value that faculty place on the process (25-26).

Moore et al. describe how, in 2006, the College of Arts and Sciences Office of Diversity and Outreach at the University of Louisville invited faculty and staff to join a variation of faculty study circles, called Inclusive Teaching Circles (ITCs) (15). The ITCs were established to promote and expand professional development for faculty and staff. At that time, the university had about 22,000 undergraduate and graduate/professional students, with a student body consisting of forty-six percent male and fifty-three percent female, and approximately sixteen percent students of color (15). The ITCs had three main goals: 1) to support continuous faculty development in inclusive teaching practices; 2) to create a safe space for open discussions about successes and challenges in pedagogy; and 3) to build a community of knowledgeable multicultural educators among faculty and staff who could serve as role models and resources for others. The ITCs were organized as small, consistent groups of faculty and staff who met monthly throughout the academic year to discuss readings on inclusive education, share ideas and teaching strategies, and offer mutual support for the challenging work of teaching.

Moore et al. found that eighteen individuals participated in ITCs during the 2006-2007 academic year, with the eight authors attending more regularly. The participants consisted of faculty, staff, and graduate students at different stages of their careers. The faculty members included full-time assistant, associate, and full professors, as well as adjunct and part-time instructors from the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Education and Human Development, and the Schools of Dentistry and Social Work. The staff members held full-time administrative and professional roles. Each participant taught undergraduate, graduate, and professional students across a range of fields and disciplines, including teacher preparation, dental hygiene, social work, political science, and first-year writing. All participants stated that their main motivation for joining the ITC was to improve their ability to meet their students' needs by engaging in critical self-reflection of their classroom teaching (15-16). Teaching Circles support professional development, as ITCs were created with the goal of broadening faculty and staff professional growth, emphasizing inclusive teaching methods. This suggests that Teaching Circles can be effective in fostering pedagogical improvement among educators. Additionally, ITCs were explicitly designed to support discussions on inclusive teaching, indicating that teaching circles can serve as a useful platform for faculty to critically engage with diversity and inclusion in their classrooms.

Another important aspect of TCs is that they provide a safe space for open dialogue. One of the primary objectives of ITCs in Moore et al.'s study was to create a supportive environment for educators to discuss both their successes and challenges. This highlights how Teaching Circles can be instrumental in developing a community of practice where faculty feel comfortable sharing their experiences and learning from one another. Furthermore, ITCs aimed to build a network of knowledgeable multicultural educators who

could serve as resources for others, suggesting that Teaching Circles foster collaboration and mentorship among faculty and staff.

The ITCs also demonstrated the benefits of cross-disciplinary participation. Participants came from various academic disciplines and professional backgrounds, indicating that Teaching Circles can promote interdisciplinary discussions and perspectives on teaching. Another notable observation was the varied levels of engagement among participants. While some attended consistently, others engaged sporadically, suggesting that Teaching Circles can accommodate different levels of commitment and still be beneficial. Finally, reflection emerged as a key component of the ITC experience. Participants primarily joined to engage in critical self-reflection about their teaching, underscoring that Teaching Circles provide a structured space for educators to critically assess and refine their instructional methods.

Jennifer Ashton also performed a study concerning TCs at Grand Canyon University (GCU). In her study, participants scheduled to teach EDU230 Cultural Diversity during the designated two-month period were invited to participate in the online Teaching Circle pilot program. Based on the number of EDU230 course sections scheduled during that time, sixteen faculty members were invited to join. Among the participants, four were male and twelve were female. Of those who chose to participate, the Teaching Circle consisted of two males and eight females, all of whom worked as 100 percent online adjuncts for GCU. Eight participants held master's degrees, one had a doctorate, and another was currently enrolled in a doctoral program. Most of the participants had teaching experience at the elementary level, ranging from three to twenty-five years. Their experience in higher education and employment with GCU varied from beginner to eight years. Additionally, 55.6 percent had

participated in a Teaching Circle-type format in their professional experience, while 44.4 percent had not (Ashton 12).

Although this was a pilot study with a small number of participants, the results offer valuable insights that can help guide the implementation of larger, more widespread Teaching Circles. Feedback revealed that online adjuncts were interested in sharing best practices to enhance their facilitation skills and foster a stronger connection with the university (13). Seventy-five percent of the final respondents agreed that they gained knowledge of new teaching strategies through their participation in the Teaching Circle. All four participants expressed a desire for an instant chat feature to be added to the Teaching Circle, as well as the need for a navigation video to help introduce the TC, show where to find information, and explain how to post content. Each of these findings provides valuable insights for designing future Teaching Circles for online adjuncts. After completing the pilot study, Ashton concluded that future TCs should include clear instructions to guide participants on how to navigate the site. Additionally, an instant chat feature should be incorporated to enable synchronous discussions among participants. Moreover, establishing a timeline for participation would encourage timely engagement from participants (Ashton 13).

Powell and Harrington conducted a study on Faculty Teaching Circles, which involved discussions focused on teaching-related topics. These circles consisted of faculty groups, typically ranging from three to ten participants, who met regularly over time to address issues and concerns related to their teaching and students' learning. Powell and Harrington emphasize that Teaching Circles offer educators a space to engage with colleagues from various disciplines, share ideas about teaching in an informal setting, develop a teaching portfolio, and foster a more positive attitude toward teaching. In their study, at the start of

each academic year, all faculty members were invited to an organizational session for Teaching Circles, where various topics were proposed, and faculty members could also create their own groups based on topics of interest. Some example topics included active/collaborative learning, case study approaches to learning, teaching experience, online teaching, service learning, assessment issues, and alleviating anxiety in math-related courses (26).

In Powell and Harrington's study, meetings were held at different times and locations, often on campus during the day. They acknowledged that coordinating meeting times for faculty members from various departments was difficult, but after some adjustments, the participants were able to reach a compromise. Following the initial phase of sharing classroom experiences with math-anxious students, the focus shifted to gathering as many different strategies as possible. At each meeting, the remaining four members (after one professor dropped out) shared and discussed various strategies (27). Despite the successes in the presented studies, Teaching Circles do not take place on a consistent enough basis to be considered a common practice among educators. Despite the lack of steady application, what has been documented has suggested that this peer resource practice is successful. This success gives confidence to the idea that GTA narrative-based Teaching Circles serving as a kind of peer mentorship will become a resource for them to be able to rely on as they transition into an unfamiliar position as well as become a space to further comprehend literacy conception and identity development.

Teaching Circles also counter a common solution to the lack of formal education GTAs receive regarding pedagogical and content knowledge. This solution involves implementing a fixed curriculum with a standardized syllabus and program-wide textbook

adoption. However, such rigidity 1) encourages secrecy when individual teachers are unable or unwilling to follow the prescribed plan, 2) limits the pedagogical decisions teachers must make to meet their students' needs, 3) reduces teaching to a mechanical task and treats students as products that only need identical lessons in the same sequence to learn, and 4) such inflexible structures contradict what we know about learning, language, and the human interactions that promote both (Marshall 416-17). While a common text and standardized curriculum may be suitable in some fields, teaching college-level writing is too complex and reliant on the interactions between students and teachers to be structured beyond the broadest guidelines by those outside the classroom.

The TCs in this study for UMKCs composition GTAs, especially when applied ad hoc, are more fluid in nature and are dictated by the participants rather than an authority figure, like the WPA. TCs of this quality maximize the resource in the form of experience from peers, which can in turn, serve as a trickle effect where GTAs pass on a trained viewpoint onto their students who then pass it on to their peers and the larger society. There is the added benefit of conversing with differing levels of experience, but all existing within the general realm of novice creates a sense of solidarity and comfortability among GTAs. This in turn forms a low-stakes space for open and honest discussion without the pressure of administrators or expert teachers. No matter how supporting and trustworthy a WPA or highly experienced educator are, new teachers still feel that they have to meet them at that level or else they will be considered “failures.” This is a specific kind of impostor syndrome that I have witnessed from GTAs over the years and felt myself when I was a newly minted teacher. TCs take away this pressure and expectation and allow space for real talk and brutal honesty about struggles, issues, and ideas.

In this section it was made apparent how successful Teaching Circles can be, but that they also do come with their own challenges and failures, as is the case with so many things in education. While there are general goals of Teaching Circles, they are largely flexible to fit the needs of each community and group. One primary ability of an educator is to adapt plans as the situation shifts and Teaching Circles parallel this skillset through their fluid nature. For instance, the TCs in this study have functioned to help fill in the gaps in GTA preparation as well as serve as a vehicle for participants developing their professional identities. In the interest of maintaining the ad hoc nature of my study, there were no overt goals of TCs other than for the GTAs to utilize them as space to further their peer mentorship. However, the TCs still ended up aligning with several commonly used goals. For example, they offered GTAs the chance to discuss various methods with their peers for enhancing students' learning experiences (such as providing specific and quality feedback, instructional techniques, and using Canvas). They also created a reliable point of contact for GTAs to seek support, guidance, or teaching resources from one another. While not overtly addressed, I observed a budding sense of community and rapport among participants as they became more familiar and comfortable interacting and relying on one another. These Teaching Circles have also fostered a common understanding of pedagogical goals among participants, including various teaching methods, recommended materials, and best practices. However, despite these successes, no practice is without its challenges and Teaching Circles are no exception. In the following section, several concerns to consider when designing and implementing TCs will be discussed.

Challenges of Teaching Circles

In this section, I will break down the potential challenges and obstacles that may crop up in Teaching Circles. These include self-reflection, structure, participation, and large-scale application. Reflecting on teaching methods and practices can be challenging, particularly when it involves evaluations, as some teaching approaches to writing are being questioned. In structured spaces like TCs, participants have to be willing to be open to reflecting on themselves, which is not easy in typical circumstances, let alone with other participants. At their best, Teaching Circles acted as a form of peer review for teaching practices. However, structuring them can present its own challenges. The structures alone do not foster cooperative activities among participants; they simply offer a framework for exploring the topic. However, the participants themselves determine how the activities and discussions develop, not only in terms of topic choice, but rapport among colleagues. This is especially true in this study given its ad hoc nature. The challenge with this is that some individuals do not meld well together which can stunt productivity and growth. It can also be difficult to let go of control and allow a program to take shape naturally, especially when the form it takes is not what was initially imagined. However, this is simultaneously the appeal to many educators participating in TCs: freedom to change the structure as the situation calls for.

Another challenge with participation is that not everyone will necessarily take part in the TCs. Ultimately, Teaching Circles can only provide an opportunity for those who choose to participate. The ad hoc nature of peer mentoring TCs requires that participation be voluntary, which may mean that sometimes there is less than desired attendance and involvement. Finally, there are several challenges when orchestrating a larger community, such as the clashing of personalities, interests, and motivations. Coordinators who prioritize

development and collaboration over evaluation and basic competence often find themselves caught in the tension of balancing these conflicting responsibilities.

Self-Reflection

As has been discussed periodically throughout this literature review, reflection is an integral aspect of professional development. However, reflecting on teaching methods and practices can be challenging, particularly when it comes to evaluations, as certain approaches to teaching writing are being questioned. As educators, we are accustomed to working independently, with colleagues often positioned just next to us, down the hall, or on another floor. Engaging in discussions about teaching with actual colleagues is a new process for many, and some resist it, preferring to stick with their familiar and comfortable methods (Marshall 418; Fassinger, Gilliland, and Johnson 53).

At their best, Teaching Circles functioned as a form of peer review for teaching practices. It requires a great deal of self-awareness and humility to present one's methods to peers and be open to their feedback. It also demands determination for members of Teaching Circles to critique each other's practices and hold fellow educators, many of whom are just starting out, to high standards. The goal is not to evaluate other teachers or pedagogical approaches, but to assist instructors in improving and teaching more effectively (Marshall 420). While this is still a difficulty to overcome, the causal nature of peer TCs helps mitigate the pressure of self-reflection and admittance to struggles or failings.

Structure

The structures themselves do not create cooperative activities among participants; they simply offer a framework for exploring the topic. It can be easy to assume that because professionals are participating with one another, that the cohesion will self-generate.

However, the participants themselves determine how the activities and discussions develop, not only in terms of topic choice, but rapport among colleagues. Just as we see in groups of students from one course to another, some groups and individuals do not meld well together which can stunt productivity and growth. The importance when making the realization that something does not work is to 1) recognize and admit that it does not work and 2) make adjustments accordingly to further evolve the practice.

Marshall admits to the adjustments needed to be made as TCs were implemented over the years, putting in practice how curriculum design and pedagogical practices develop and evolve over time. She explained how they evaluated which aspects of their Teaching Circles had been effective and which had not, making adjustments as needed (Marshall 421-22). For instance, they rearranged the schedule to allow all TCs to meet during lunch on Tuesdays or Thursdays. They also added Wednesday circles to accommodate those with a Monday, Wednesday, Friday teaching schedule. These revisions helped foster a sense of ownership among the participants.

Participation

Although not everyone participates, most people who are interested in their profession and improving their teaching tend to attend. Ultimately, Teaching Circles can only provide an opportunity for those who want to participate; any attempt at enforcement could be counterproductive (Marshall 421). The ad hoc nature of peer mentoring TCs requires that participation be voluntary, which may mean that sometimes there is less than desired attendance and involvement. A concern for this study might be how the consistency of (ir)regular participation might impact the results of this study. A further consideration would be whether to solely include regular participants or all kinds of participants. Obligated

participation would make the results of the study less secure, and I do not want to force participation because this goes against the ad hoc nature of the TCs. Additionally, participants may feel more inclined to take part if they are not forced to attend (whereas if it was a required obligation, it is likely to turn into another item on a "to-do" list). I am including all participants but dedicating a section to the fact that some were regular participants, others not (see chapter four). Additionally, this approach might even open the door for a new line of inquiry looking into the different perceptions from regular participants vs none.

Large Scale Teaching Circles

When operating TCs on a large scale, additional coordinators are necessary to make things run smoothly and reduce the workload of directing administrators. One challenge that Marhsall pointed out when orchestrating a larger community is the clashing of personalities, interests, and motivations. Marshall initially aimed to balance the workload for coordinators by assigning individuals to Teaching Circles, ensuring that coordinators' responsibilities for adjuncts and graduate students remained relatively consistent. However, by the second year, they switched to a self-selection approach. This change made individual teachers more satisfied but required some adjustment of responsibilities to maintain a similar workload for all coordinators (422). Coordinators who prioritized development and collaboration over evaluation and basic competence occasionally found themselves caught in the tension of balancing these conflicting responsibilities.

While it can be challenging to assign administrative tasks to coordinators, one advantage for those in this role is that they begin to view both the classroom and the program's objectives from a different perspective once they take on the responsibility of representing someone else's teaching in classroom observation reports. Those who serve as TC

coordinators gain administrative experience that helps them secure more permanent positions both within the institution and beyond, making the TCs a valuable form of faculty development and support for individual careers (414-15). The tension within the relationship between the coordinators and the director is also complex. Coordinators often hold the position of senior and likely the most skilled teachers in the program. However, if they are perceived as mere "assistants" to the director, their effectiveness as peer coaches is significantly diminished.

Too Much Structure

Marshall states that from the beginning, teachers expressed a strong interest in using these meetings for focused study, collaboration on projects, and expanding their knowledge of pedagogy or composition scholarship. They also had many ideas about what they wanted to learn. As a result, Marshall and those coordinating the sessions abandoned the plan to keep groups on the same topic or to pre-select topics (427). It can be difficult to let go of control and allow a program to take shape naturally, especially when the form it takes is not what was initially imagined. However, this is simultaneously the appeal to many educators participating in TCs: freedom to change the structure as the situation calls for. There is an art to finding a balance between freedom and structure, chaos and rigidity. One approach to achieving this balance is to define the “rules of engagement” and have the group involved in TCs determine them. Once the conversation expectations are set, there should be no need to rely on a model framework.

The discussion within this section has made it apparent that Teaching Circles, no matter their potential, have several potential challenges that need to be considered and addressed in order for them to be successful. My study does not have the challenge of large structuring

given its smaller size and duration. However, I did not have every GTA participate. Only seven of the fifteen agreed and even among those seven, not everyone came to every Teaching Circle. Granted, this is part of the ad hoc nature-it is done as needed. Participants are allowed to make the choice to not attend, come late, or leave early. To do otherwise would make it just like any other professional development meeting held by the WPA. Self-reflection was not much of an issue for these participants. However, I imagine this is largely due to the general trusting atmosphere already established by the WPA. They were more open to self- and peer critiques because they have already been exposed to it and understand that no one is ostracized for admitting to struggles or failures. There was a small challenge with structuring at the very beginning of the first Teaching Circle. Given that none of the participants had ever taken part in a Teaching Circle nor one of this casual nature, they stumbled a bit on where to begin. Fortunately, a few of the more experienced GTAs took the lead and started the conversation. As the Teaching Circles progressed, the conversation became more fluid and less stunted. Despite the various challenges that can come with Teaching Circles, there are also several benefits to consider, as will be detailed in the next section.

Benefits of Teaching Circles

While there are many benefits to consider, I would like to focus on a few in particular in this section. Specifically, I will be examining how Teaching Circles can serve as safe spaces for self-reflection and inquiry, function as a means for developing rapport among participants, and be a place for ongoing professional identity development. These benefits have been observed in the narrative-based Teaching Circles in this study, which will be detailed towards the end of this section.

One advantage of TCs is the chance to openly reflect on past “mistakes” or “areas of discomfort” in the classroom and discuss them with others in a safe space (Moore et al. 21). At first, sharing a moment of failure with colleagues may feel risky, as we may worry about how our peers will perceive us if we admit to failure or uncertainty. However, as the group becomes more unified by discussing and sharing each other's challenges and experiences, members start to feel freer to address issues and concerns without guilt or fear. Another benefit of TCs is that they offer an engaging and supportive platform for tackling challenges and fostering change. Participants push themselves and each other to reconsider their classroom practices, including how to teach, what to teach, and who they teach (Moore et al. 21). By transforming how educators think, speak, act, and teach, the classroom itself can become a place of transformation. Additionally, TCs encourage small group discussions as a means to acquire new knowledge and explore different viewpoints and experiences. Teaching Circles are effective because they bring together diverse individuals with common concerns and foster an environment that allows for constructive, safe, and respectful dialogue.

More importantly, participants in TCs learn to build trust among one another and develop a shared understanding of educational issues. Teachers understand the significance of professional development to their classroom practices but prefer appropriate activities. In a study conducted by O.A. Ajani, the participants expressed that their primary motivation for attending professional development programs was to enhance their classroom teaching. According to Ajani, the primary objective of removing teachers from schools should be to provide them with knowledge and skills that will improve their teaching effectiveness and support learning within educational institutions (141).

It is essential to provide teachers with ongoing professional development opportunities to effectively engage their learners in contemporary educational practices (Ajoku, Ayeni and Sadiqu, Helate, Metaferia, and Gezahegn). Not only does professional development allow space for educators to collaborate and build on pedagogical practices, but professional development is lifelong. So, experiential learning-based seminars and training for teachers should be regular and tailored to each teacher every term, if possible. The use of one-size-fits-all should be discouraged in developing teachers' classroom practices (Ajani 150). This is in part why the narrative-based Teaching Circles have such loose direction for the participating GTAs. It is intended to be adaptable from moment to moment to fit the needs of the participating educators.

Within the TCs of this study, there was evidence of several of these benefits. For instance, the participants detailed on several occasions how they may have approached a situation differently, that they felt they were not living up to the expectations of their roles as GTAs, or what they plan to change when they teach their courses again. This showed a great deal of trust to be open and vulnerable with one another. They were a bit hesitant at first to admit to these struggles, but the other participants responded well with support and advice which created a stronger rapport and further willingness for open discussion. The participants also offered advice and resources (links, PowerPoints, screenshots, etc.) to each other at several instances. Fortunately, participants were quite open to considering alternative ideas from each other, debating the pros and cons of various choices and promoting a "constructive, safe, and respectable" conversation. One way these conversations took the form of was participants telling their narratives of their experiences, both prior and current, as well as looking to potential new experiences. In the following section, I will discuss the

primary research method for this study: narrative inquiry, which is integral to GTAs developing their professional identities.

Narrative Inquiry

A foundational aspect of Teaching Circles is personal experience. A common form we see this take shape of is "narrative inquiry." One theory in educational research suggests that humans are inherently storytelling beings who, both individually and collectively, live lives filled with stories. Therefore, studying narrative involves exploring how humans experience the world (Clandinin and Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry* 2; Phelan and Rabinowitz 3; Connelly and Clandinin, *Teachers' Professional Knowledge Landscapes*; Pinnegar, Pinnegar, and Lay 55; Goodson). This broad idea is further developed into the notion that education and educational research involve creating and reshaping personal and social narratives; learners, teachers, and researchers act as both storytellers and characters in their own and others' stories (Clandinin and Connelly, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research" 2). Narratives are a representation of a kind of prior knowledge and are viewed by researchers as the closest thing to experience as possible. People use narratives to create meaning from life events. Stories help us identify what is significant about our experiences. As Adler-Kassner et al. observe, "[Stories] encompass much more than knowledge: experience, attitudes, and beliefs—along with knowledge—form part of a broader construct of the prior" (37). For instance, we could examine how the concept of disciplinarity might shape how GTA educators perceive and connect with other GTAs, including their knowledge, experiences, and perceptions. In this section, I will analyze what narrative inquiry is, its benefits and challenges as a research method, and how narrative inquiry fits within general GTA education as well as specifically injection curriculum.

There are also some practical aspects to consider when employing narrative inquiry in primary research. “Negotiating entry is commonly seen as an ethical matter framed in terms of principles that establish responsibilities for both researchers and practitioners. However, another way of understanding the process as an ethical matter is to see it as a negotiation of a shared narrative unity” (Clandinin and Connelly, “Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research” 3). This view of negotiating entry emphasizes how narrative inquiry takes place within the relationships between researchers and participants, forming a caring community. When both researchers and participants share stories about their research relationship, these stories have the potential to be empowering. A sense of equality among participants is especially crucial in narrative inquiry.

However, in researcher-practitioner relationships where practitioners have often been silenced and treated as subjects of study, a problem arises. GTAs have experienced their roles without having a voice in the research process, and they may struggle to feel empowered to share their stories. They have been made to feel unequal due to social factors, mistreatment by superiors, and stereotypes. GTAs are very self-aware that they are on the “bottom of the totem pole” and are given some of the least credibility among the rhetoric and composition field. This notion formed in response to the wider view that general education courses are “beneath” experts and other professionals in the field, and they resist teaching them as a result. Now, it is worth noting that this comes with exceptions. UMKC is one such example as many of its faculty and staff regularly take up teaching introductory composition courses with enthusiasm. It is also a very close-knit community, unlike many other larger institutions, and the relationships have proved to be much kinder and productive. When starting the process of narrative inquiry, it is crucial that all participants have a voice in the relationship.

This involves engaging in the "believing game" (a thought exercise introduced by Peter Elbow), which helps build trust between the parties involved. The believing game also requires placing oneself within the other's story to better understand it and give the other person a voice (Clandinin and Connelly, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research" 4).

One challenge in writing narrative is figuring out how to understand and represent the complexity of the ongoing stories that are shared and reshared throughout the inquiry process (Clandinin and Connelly, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research" 9). As researchers and teachers, we continue to tell our own evolving life stories through our practices. Clandinin has described teaching as "images in action." (*Personal Practical Knowledge: A Study of Teachers' Classroom Images*) Through a reflective research process, we revisit past experiences as we consider later ones, causing the stories and their meanings to evolve over time. What is often overlooked is that, as individuals whose beliefs and values are influenced by previous experiences and interactions, teachers enter the field of teaching with strong opinions about certain aspects of it, commonly referred to as "biases" (Chan 170; Pinnegar, Pinnegar, and Lay 55).

Connelly and Clandinin expanded on Dewey's experience and education and suggested that curriculum should be seen as an experience, with teaching being influenced by the personal and professional experiences that teachers bring to their interactions with students. Given the significance of experience in shaping teachers' work, it is reasonable to assume that teachers' practices and beliefs about incorporating culture into the curriculum would be shaped by their past experiences working with students and colleagues. Teachers, who are expected to work with increasingly diverse student populations, may have had limited

personal experience with diverse school communities or interactions with individuals of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Essentially, they are learning to create and implement culturally sensitive curricula without the advantage of their own experiences to guide them (Chan and Ross 160).

In a study by Nicole Warwick, she highlighted the words, stories, and experiences of graduate students learning to teach writing in a GTA program. Warwick's research emphasizes the significant role stories play in our lives, shaping our perceptions and aiding in our learning. She argues that by inviting graduate students to share their stories about learning, writing, and teaching, we foster a deeper understanding of them, the ways we interact with them, and what we achieve together (340). This approach helps us better support graduate students in applying the knowledge gained from GTA programs to other aspects of their lives. The knowledge that preservice teachers bring is experiential, rooted in the stories they have lived and shared. In teacher education, particularly in Writing Pedagogy Education (WPE), focusing on experience as conveyed through story can lead to the development of more innovative, grounded, and continuously evolving educators. Since narratives present experience in unique ways, they are valuable for the process of learning to teach. However, it is important to recognize that narratives have the ability to weave together multiple plots, distort yet represent aspects of time, and capture characters like students, administrators, parents, and other teachers without fully defining them (Pinnegar, Pinnegar, and Lay 55). Because of these qualities, narrative both enhances and challenges teacher knowledge.

When using narrative to educate preservice teachers, their stories can both support and challenge the process. The experiences they have had, as learners and/or teachers in various

roles and contexts, shape their personal practical knowledge for teaching, influencing their teaching pedagogy in both positive and negative ways. Early life and teaching experiences play a significant role in shaping how teachers learn to teach. At times, these stories act as moral and ethical filters. When shared and revisited, these stories push teachers into new relationships with teacher education and professional development (Pinnegar et al. 56). Reliving narratives refers to how retelling can change our understanding of experiences, ourselves, and the meanings we attach to concepts like teaching and learning (Pinnegar et al. 56). By distinguishing different forms of narrative, we can explore how we have used storytelling in the process of learning to teach. We turn to narrative because we have gone through the process of living, telling, retelling, and reliving these stories. The stories educators share in learning to teach help us examine what we know about teaching, drawing from the stories we've told and the insights that arise when we reflect on them.

One aspect of storying that is important to consider is the possibility of shaping the story in the telling as a performative act in recognition of the purpose and audience (i.e., rhetorical situation) for the story. Those are important factors to consider and Connely and Clandinin have mentioned the importance of recognizing the bias, audience, purpose, characters, and plot of storytelling. Additionally, it is important to recognize how these change as stories are retold. Pinnegar et al. suggest that the idea that remaining stagnant in a singular perspective and telling is detrimental to teacher education. Like anything, there is a balance to be had. We should not forget or dismiss the specifics of that point in time and that particular telling, but we should also be willing to reshape it to fit a new narrative.

In her analysis of student teachers' experiences, Lay argues that teacher preparation is successfully accomplished through a particular process. She suggests that the stories revealed

a pattern, showing that preservice teachers initially viewed themselves as students, interpreting their supervisors' advice in a way that mirrored the master-apprentice model (57). As they transitioned from being students to student-teachers, they began to shift their perspective, seeing their interactions with both students and supervisors in a new light. By the end of student teaching, successful preservice teachers see themselves as teachers. They have a vision of the type of teacher they aspire to be and what they need to learn to achieve that, which both challenges and shapes their learning (Pinnegar et al. 57). GTA stories are valuable for what they reveal, as they can help teacher educators develop stronger teachers. Using narratives enables educators to challenge, support, and gain deeper insights into the learning process of becoming a teacher.

One way to conceptualize the curriculum in teacher education is as an “injection” curriculum. For instance, student teachers enter their teacher education programs with years of life experience. They begin their education after having lived for two decades or more. Additionally, they continue to live, create stories, and revise their narratives of experience as they engage in the teacher education program (Connelly and Clandinin, *Teacher Education: The Core Issues* 148-49). However, the curriculum in teacher education often overlooks the personal lives of prospective teachers. Instead, it tends to follow a metaphor where teacher education is seen as an injection. The first “injection” involves placing knowledge and skills into the teachers as they take foundational courses in the arts, sciences, and curriculum at the university. They are then sent to schools for a practicum experience, which often feels like a separate “injection”-an integration of their teaching experiences in the practicum with the veteran teachers’ experiences. In relation to curriculum serving as a conduit, teacher curriculum/coursework is the starting line for teacher education. It sets the foundation and the

expectations, but the "real" learning and application does not begin until they're in the classroom. This is a classic example of "theory to praxis."

Following this, Connelly and Clandinin explain that teachers continue to practice, receiving occasional "booster shots" of in-service or professional development training to reinforce the initial "injection" given during preservice teacher education (*Teacher Education: The Core Issues* 149). This description parallels a traditionalist teaching approach where the student is a recipient of knowledge with little to no acknowledgement of prior experiences and knowledge. While there will always be a certain level of master-apprentice model where an expert "injects" new information to a learner, it has evolved into a more constructivist mindset where other outside factors and experiences are taken into account.

When viewing teacher education from a narrative perspective, we find that reconstruction offers a more accurate representation. This approach challenges the notion that education progresses in a linear fashion, step by step. Instead, education is seen as recursive (a process of rethinking and reworking the past). Reconstruction enables us to view the lives of teachers and student teachers as central to the curriculum in teacher education. From this viewpoint, we recognize that teachers carry with them their life stories: stories they have lived but rarely expressed in the form of narrative texts that provide an account of their lives. This perspective enables us to collaborate with them to understand their teaching and learning as expressions of their personal practical knowledge, the experiential knowledge that is embodied in them as individuals and manifested in their classroom practices and lives. This narrative approach emphasizes the importance of giving voice to their experiences. Central to this process is the act of telling and retelling their stories.

As will be detailed in a later chapter, the participants in this study have told their narratives both within the Teaching Circles and in the individual interviews. I will be breaking these narratives into their past, present, and future stories and analyzing how these play into the participants developing their professional identities. When both researchers and participants share stories about their research relationship, these stories have the potential to be empowering. However, it is essential that all participants have voice within the dynamic and that their narratives are "believed" rather than retold by others who did not experience them. This plays into a difficulty with narrative inquiry: proper representation of these ongoing stories. As stories are shared and revisited, they push teachers into new connections with teacher education and professional development (Pinnegar et al. 56). For example, the participants in this study came to their positions as GTAs with a lifetime of experiences that influence the ongoing development of their professional identity. One specific aspect of narrative inquiry is storying, which has been touched on briefly in this section. However, it is worth delving into more deeply as will be done in the following section.

Storying

Storying refers to "the use of personal stories and narratives" as part of identity development, specifically in this study, the development of the professional identities of GTAs (Goodson). It is a continuous process that involves reflection and a narrative understanding of experience. While interpreting our stories can be challenging due to their implicit nature, methods such as journaling, storytelling, and guided reflection can help make the understanding of stories more explicit and tangible. Storying, which includes sharing, revisiting, and reliving our stories, helps deepen our understanding of ourselves and others. This process provides the opportunity to develop new insights into who we are, who others

are, and how we are evolving (Connelly and Clandinin, “Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research”). The process of meaning-making can be understood as involving our experiences, which evolve and develop over time, and the way we "interpret situations, events, objects, or discourses" based on those experiences (Ignelzi 12, Zittoun and Brinkmann). This meaning-making process is often described as narrative and has been examined in qualitative research (Bernhard, Gravett 1, Manning and Kunkel, McLean, Singer). I will further explore this form of meaning-making (i.e., narrative inquiry) in the methodology section of this dissertation, as it is the primary methodology used in this study.

Storying has been studied not only as an individual process of meaning-making but also as a component of collective, influential meaning-making (Craig, “Parallel Stories: A Way of Contextualizing Teacher Knowledge”; Lindholm; Stapleton and Wilson). This process of meaning-making is connected to identity, as shared narratives shape how members of a community interpret meaning. The larger systems of meaning we are part of “offer us both an orientation to the world and guidance for living in that world” (Stapleton and Wilson; Lindholm 11). Identity development and learning typically occur within a community, as new members take on their roles and make sense of their positions within the shared narrative of that community (Lave and Wenger). Having been a GTA for five years and an adjunct for four, my own understanding of my story within my academic community has grown, changed, and evolved as I have taken on new roles within that community. It was through others in my community that I came to be more fully situated in my position; other members are part of our stories and shape how it is told and develops. In the following section, I’ll examine how storying is tied closely with self-authorship which involves how we come to define our own stories, beliefs, identities, and relationships.

Self-Authorship

Another key concept in research on stories and storying is self-authorship, which refers to "the internal capacity to define one's belief system, identity, and relationships" (Magolda 69). Self-authorship is an ongoing process that evolves throughout a person's life, especially when they take on new roles and enter new contexts (Gunersel et al.). In the context of this study, self-authorship has been found to predict graduate student success, as academic institutions serve as liminal spaces where graduate students often begin with a lack of confidence, not only about whether they belong, but also about where they fit in. They are uncertain as to their capacities as new members and often wait for that moment where they, like a switch being flipped, suddenly belong (Magolda and King; King and Siddiqui; Pizzolato; Strayhorn). Liminal periods refer to times of transition and novelty, such as when educators are new to an institution (e.g., UMKC), a role (e.g., GTA), or a particular context (e.g., NWT). In this study, narrative-based Teaching Circles offer space and opportunity for participating GTAs to not only find solidarity with each other, but to communally build their professional identities.

It is important to understand that a high level of self-authorship does not automatically mean a fully secure identity. "Development itself does not conclude with self-authorship; instead, self-authorship allows individuals to grow as they adapt to unfamiliar ideas or challenging experiences" (Gunersel et al. 41). However, there are several factors to consider regarding how narrative identity unfolds. In most people's experiences of identity development, they have lived multiple "selves" or facets of self that are interconnected within one core identity. While some of these selves may conflict with one another, they can all be true at the same time. The three main dichotomous areas related to narrative identity

are 1) unity vs. multiplicity, 2) self vs. society, and 3) stability vs. growth (Kraus; McAdams et al.; Salgado and Hermans). The first area concerns whether our narrative identities are coherent and unified. For instance, do individuals have a single, primary identity, or do they possess multiple identities that sometimes align and other times conflict? Elbaz-Luwisch argued that identity can consist of multiple voices or selves, as the self "is constantly re-envisioned as we go through life" (*Teachers' Voices: Storytelling and Possibility* 16).

The second area explores whether our narrative identities are shaped internally or influenced by society, communities, and other external factors. In other words, do our narrative identities develop through nature or nurture? Identity has been described as socially constructed, as seen in how student teachers' conflicts and interactions with others contribute to the co-construction of their sense of self (Villegas, et al.). However, we also have "ready-made" identities that shift and evolve with new experiences. Ultimately, it is a combination of internal reflection and outside interaction. Writing theorists have characterized the process of identity as involving both the individual and society, since writing is a social and rhetorical act that "involves becoming a particular kind of person and developing a sense of who we are" (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 50).

The third area raises the question of whether our identities are fixed or capable of change. Stories "depict change, development, and growth"; however, there may be recurring plot elements or themes that suggest "a person has indeed remained the same over time" (McAdams et al. 8). Identity can be understood as an ongoing, adaptable process, even though certain aspects may remain constant (Elbaz-Luwisch, *Teachers' Voices: Storytelling and Possibility*). Each of the three areas of self-authorship that can (and sometime do) contradict each other suggest that the participants of this study could fall onto either side

depending on their understanding of their own identity development and their experiences and narratives.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have summarized and analyzed relevant literature on narrative inquiry, storying, and GTA development, along with a discussion of the conceptual framework for my study. The research presented shows that for universities to support GTAs in fully developing their professional identities and enhancing their pedagogical practices, they should consider the perspectives of GTAs throughout this process. Ultimately, narrative-based Teaching Circles are the foundation of this project in their role of being the vehicle for GTA peer mentorship and the space for GTAs to give voice to their narratives. The proposed GTA peer-mentor Teaching Circles will create a space for GTAs to utilize on a consistent basis their biggest resource: each other. TCs can take pressure off of the WPA(s) while still meeting the issue of lack of preparation and assistance that GTAs are missing.

In this literature review, a foundational understanding of what FYC is, rhetoric and composition's place in FYC, as well as the divide between creative and technical writing has been established. In laying this foundation, the issues and gaps present within GTA preparation and support within the field of rhetoric and composition have been made evident as well as why Teaching Circles serve as a means to fill these empty spaces.

There are several aspects of GTA identity development and literacy conception, the firs of which relates to their liminal position within academia. GTAs occupy an in-between space where they are simultaneously students and teachers, which creates instability in their professional identities. The transition from being a student to an educator is not seamless, and many GTAs struggle with imposter syndrome and a lack of authority in the classroom. Their

prior experiences and literacy conceptions heavily influence how they approach teaching, as many GTAs come from fields outside composition and rhetoric, such as creative writing or literature, which can create challenges in adapting to writing pedagogy. One of the key issues in GTA literacy conception is the misconception that first-year composition (FYC) is a remedial course focused on grammar correction rather than a foundational course in academic writing. Like their students, GTAs often initially view writing as a skill to be acquired rather than an evolving practice that requires ongoing instruction and adaptation. They must also confront the challenge of transfer, where students struggle to apply writing knowledge across different contexts. However, many GTAs themselves face difficulties in understanding and teaching for transfer due to the way they were trained.

To help address these challenges, Teaching Circles (TCs) have been introduced as a supportive space where GTAs can engage in professional learning and mentorship. These peer-based communities allow GTAs to share their experiences, discuss pedagogy, and provide guidance to one another. Through TCs, GTAs gain confidence in their roles, develop their professional identities, and transition from survival mode to active engagement with writing pedagogy. Despite these efforts, Writing Program Education (WPE) for GTAs remains a complex issue. Many training programs must balance theoretical instruction with the practical demands of teaching, often prioritizing immediate survival over deep engagement with composition theory. This results in GTAs relying on standardized materials without fully understanding their pedagogical underpinnings. Furthermore, GTAs' voices are often missing from scholarship about their own roles, as they are typically positioned as subjects of research rather than active contributors to academic conversations. While there is

a growing movement toward recognizing GTAs as scholarly participants, institutional and cultural barriers still limit their influence.

The struggle for survival is a prevailing theme in GTA identity development. Many GTAs must navigate the demands of teaching while managing graduate coursework and research, leading them to prioritize immediate classroom management over long-term pedagogical growth. Financial insecurity and lack of institutional recognition further reinforce their precarious status within academia. Ultimately, the document emphasizes that GTA identity development is shaped by their liminal status, prior literacy experiences, the constraints of WPE programs, and the support structures available to them. By fostering environments like narrative-based Teaching Circles, institutions can help GTAs move beyond survival mode and develop a deeper understanding of composition pedagogy, thereby strengthening their professional identities and effectiveness as educators. Therefore, this study explores how GTAs shape their professional teaching identities through their experiences and narratives. The next chapter will outline the methodological approach used for this investigation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

Within this project, I conducted ethnographic research by observing three narrative-based Teaching Circles (TCs) within the University of Missouri-Kansas City's English department. These TCs have a loose design as the goal was to have this be space used by GTAs as they dictate. If I had too rigid of structure, then these TCs become just like the bi-monthly meetings held by the WPA for GTAs. While these meetings are useful in their own way, a goal of this project is to create space for GTAs for ad hoc support from peers. In this chapter, I provide the rationale behind this study using narrative inquiry as the chosen qualitative research method. Following this justification, I will outline the study's design, including details about the setting, participants, sampling and data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. Lastly, I will discuss the study's limitations, validity and reliability, as well as the ethical considerations.

New GTAs are typically responsible for managing their own professional development, and some may enter their teaching roles without receiving formal training in teaching prior to their appointment. Most GTAs' level of training does not extend much beyond graduate coursework, which in itself seldom does more than create vague, hypothetical images of teaching. What additional training they do receive often comes in the form of obligatory reoccurring meetings (often on a bi-monthly or monthly basis), classroom observation by administration or experienced faculty, and collaboration with each other in the regular day-to-day hustle (e.g., chatting in the hallway between classes, working in the GTA office, text messages, etc.). The ad hoc interactions between GTAs appear to be where the

bulk of their professional development takes place. However, it is largely inconsistent which leads to staggered and stress-filled development.

As presented in Chapter 1, this study applies the following research questions, which include one fundamental question and three secondary questions:

- "What are the experiences of GTAs with participation in Teaching Circles in relation to their teacher/teaching development?" More specifically:
    - What stories do GTAs share about their own professional growth?
    - Do GTAs recognize their identities and experiences as having shaped their professional growth as teachers? If so, how?
    - Do GTAs recognize the narrative process affecting how they develop as individuals? If so, how?

These questions are significant because both new and experienced GTAs are often engaging with scholarship that overlooks them, does not reflect their perspectives, or fail to represent their work (Macauley, "Introduction: The Space Between" 21). A key argument put forward by many scholars is that GTAs should have the opportunity to speak from their own lived experiences. Anglesey, Edwards, Lambrecht, and Lovas emphasize that the voices of GTAs should be more prominently included in these discussions, as they possess valuable insights that could benefit various audiences in this field (4). Much of the existing scholarship focuses on GTAs, leaving little room for more participatory forms of research, such as "writing with" or "writing for" (Deans; Macauley, "Introduction: The Space Between" 4). Macauley argues that this is not a fault of the research or scholarship itself, but rather reflects the cultural norms and practices that limit the involvement of graduate students, GTAs, and new teachers in scholarship and research (11).

The research and scholarship in this area remain insufficient, and there is a need for a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of GTAs (Warwick 356-57). It is essential to learn more about the significance of GTAships for both participants and those who engage with them. Furthermore, understanding the current state of GTAships enables us to address what is ineffective in these roles and writing programs, while building upon the aspects that are successful (Macauley, "Introduction: The Space Between" 24). Linda Alcoff's "The Problem of Speaking for Others," discusses the tension between *speaking for others* as an act of collectivists and that activists must be well aware of the dangers in appointing ourselves spokespeople for groups we do not represent (259). This is why I posed several questions to myself (see the Validity, Reliability, and Limitations section later in this chapter) during data collection and analysis, to remain conscious of potential researcher bias and ensure that I accurately represent the participants' narratives.

It is not meant to be suggested that GTAs have been misrepresented or deliberately excluded. There is plenty of documented research and scholarship, such as from Heidi Estrem and E. Shelly Reid, Rebecca Nowacek, Jessica Restaino, Tanya Rodrigue and Andrea Williams, and Mary Soliday, where GTAs are very present and well represented. The issue is not necessarily in how they are being represented, but in the fact that they are not speaking for themselves and participating as a researcher. Although GTAs have been represented in research, they have rarely been the researchers, scholars, or authoritative voices on issues related to GTA roles (Macauley, "Introduction: The Space Between" 6). It is essential that we hear directly from rhetoric and composition GTAs, as they are the only ones who can authentically convey these experiences from their own perspectives. This is why I also conducted interviews in addition to my observations of the Teaching Circles. I want to hear

straight from the participants what their experiences and narratives are. It is important for us to be aware of their perceptions and experiences to ensure that their current experiences are truly preparing them for their work during graduate school and beyond. We need to listen to their voices to understand what information is meaningful to them, and they need us to engage with them so that their sense of liminality does not feel so isolating and oppressive.

Another reason these research questions are important is that they confront a reality: GTAs, through their lived experiences, struggle with feelings of shame, navigate their roles within academic communities, and redefine the idea of failure. By acknowledging these experiences, GTAs highlight the potential for both personal and professional growth. This awareness can help them develop a stronger sense of their capabilities as new teachers and better navigate the challenges unique to their roles as composition instructors, both in the classroom and within the broader university context.

The purpose of this study is to investigate what the experiences of GTAs with participation in narrative-based Teaching Circles are in relation to the development of their professional development as educators. An additional purpose of this study is to create consistent opportunities for these peer mentor interactions as well as to investigate how First Year Writing GTAs serve as resources for each other regarding pedagogical approaches and content understanding and application through the usage of Teaching Circles. Teaching Circles allow colleagues from the same department or across disciplines to enhance and improve their teaching. They are credited with being safe places for learning, exploration, change, and accomplishment. These peer meetings are intended to give insight into how to teach composition from a practical perspective of those “on the ground” as well as to give awareness to the broader field of Rhetoric and Composition regarding how GTAs are trained

and grow into their positions. In addition to this attempt at creating a steady means of training and development, the primary research method guiding this study focuses on the experiences, narratives, and voices of participating GTAs. This focus allows for the participants to express not only whether these Teaching Circles are successful in the goal of creating consistent peer mentorship opportunities, but to convey what their experiences are like as new educators. This awareness from the perspective of those who are told what to do, think, and act, provides invaluable insight from of what GTA FYC training, scholarship, and curriculum is doing in praxis. Who better to indicate what works well and what needs to change than those who are experiencing it in the moment?

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Narrative Inquiry and Narratology

This study focuses on the experiences of GTAs teaching First-Year Composition (FYC). Using narrative inquiry as its primary methodology, the study centers on the exploration of experiences. It will delve into the stories and experiences of GTA participants, examining their personal experiences, motivations, practices, and ideas, while situating these (re)stories within the broader context of past, present, and future, as well as their specific role in teaching FYC. The study employs qualitative research, particularly narrative inquiry, which prioritizes participants' experiences over quantitative aspects. This study used narrative and educational theory as frameworks for data analysis. The process of meaning-making can be understood as involving experiences, specifically how our experiences evolve over time and how we interpret situations, events, objects, or discourses in relation to those experiences (Ignelzi 12; Zittoun and Brinkmann). This meaning-making process has been characterized

as narrative in nature and has been examined within the context of qualitative research (Bernhard, Gravett 1; Manning and Kunkel; McLean; Singer).

From a broad perspective, qualitative research emphasizes data analysis as an interpretative, meaning-making process. A key aim of qualitative research is to identify meaningful patterns and themes (Patton). In narrative inquiry, the goal is to understand experiences in significant ways. Narrative inquiry and analysis involve "the art of storytelling," where the researcher aims to capture experiences, share participants' stories, identify patterns in the data, and explore the implications of those patterns (Patton 8). In this study, my goal was to understand and present participants' experiences and perspectives through the stories they shared about their professional development as composition GTAs teaching FYC.

Narrative inquiry centers on analyzing the stories shared by participants, drawing from field data such as documents, interviews, observations, life experiences, and personal notes (Creswell and Poth 67). In essence, narrative inquiry is focused on collecting information for research through the process of storytelling. In a study conducted by Nicole Warwick, she was able to present the stories and experiences of GTAs learning to teach FYC. According to Warwick's study, stories play a crucial role in our lives, influencing our perceptions and fostering learning and growth. She argues that by encouraging graduate students to share their stories about learning, writing, and teaching, we develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of graduate students, our interactions with them, and what we achieve together (340). This approach helps us more effectively support graduate students in applying knowledge gained from GTA programs to other aspects of their lives.

The knowledge that preservice teachers (in this study, GTAs) bring is rooted in their personal experiences and the stories they have lived and shared. Therefore, in WPE, focusing on experience as conveyed through storytelling could contribute to the development of more innovative, grounded, and ever-evolving GTAs. Narratives are valuable for the learning-to-teach process because they present experience in a unique way. However, it is important to recognize that narratives have the ability to weave together multiple storylines, distort but still reflect aspects of time, and capture "characters" like GTAs, WPAs, and students without fully defining them (Pinnegar, Pinnegar, and Lay 55). Due to these features, narrative both enhances and challenges traditional teacher knowledge.

In using narrative to educate GTAs, their stories can serve as both sources of support and disruption in the process. The experiences they have had, both as learners and teachers in various roles and settings, shape their personal practical knowledge for teaching, influencing their pedagogy in both positive and negative ways. Early life and teaching experiences play a significant role in shaping how they learn to teach. For instance, one participant spoke of how her background as a mother played into how she approached classroom management and showing students "tough love." At times, these stories also act as moral and ethical filters. As they are told and retold, they compel teachers to reevaluate their relationship with teacher education and professional development (Pinnegar et al. 56). The process of reliving narratives involves how retelling reshapes our understanding of experiences, ourselves, and the meanings we attach to concepts like teaching and learning (Pinnegar et al. 56). As Adler-Kassner et al. suggest, "[Stories] encompass much more than just knowledge: experience, attitudes, and beliefs—along with knowledge—form part of a broader construct of the prior"

(37). For instance, we might consider how the concept of disciplinarity influences how GTA educators perceive and engage with GTAs, their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives.

Storytelling has been examined not only as a process of individual meaning-making but also as a part of collective, impactful meaning-making (Craig, "Parallel Stories: A Way of Contextualizing Teacher Knowledge"; Lindholm; Stapleton, and Wilson). This meaning-making is closely linked to identity, as shared narratives influence how community members interpret meaning, and the broader systems of meaning we engage with "offer both an orientation to the world and guidance for living within it" (Stapleton and Wilson; Lindholm 11). Identity development and learning often occur within a community, where new members take on roles and make sense of their positions within the shared narrative of that community (Lave and Wenger). Connelly and Clandinin suggest that curriculum should be seen as experience, with teaching shaped by the personal and professional experiences teachers bring to their interactions with students. Given the role of experience in shaping teachers' work, it is reasonable to expect that their practices and beliefs about incorporating culture into the curriculum would be influenced by their prior experiences with students and colleagues.

GTAs, who are expected to work with increasingly diverse student populations, may have limited prior experience with diverse school communities or interactions with individuals from ethnic and racial backgrounds different from their own. Essentially, they are learning to design and implement culturally sensitive curricula without the benefit of personal experiences to guide them (Chan and Ross 160). What is often overlooked is that, as individuals whose beliefs and values have been shaped by previous experiences and interactions, teachers bring strong perspectives on certain aspects of teaching, otherwise known as "biases" (Chan 170, Pinnegar, Pinnegar, and Lay 55). Educators have to be aware

of their own biases when developing curriculum, interacting with students, and developing their pedagogy. While bias is inherent to a certain degree, it can also cloud perception if not controlled.

Narratology, a term associated with narrative inquiry, refers to "the collection of theories concerning narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events—cultural artifacts that convey a story" (Bal 3). Employing narratology involves using specific elements to structure data into a narrative:

> 1) The events are arranged in a sequence that can differ from the chronological sequence. 2) The amount of time allotted in the story to the various elements of the sequence of events is determined with respect to the amount of time these elements take up in the sequence. 3) The actors are provided with distinct traits. Thus, they are individualized and transformed into characters. 4) The locations where events occur are also given distinct characteristics and are thereby transformed into specific places. 5) Other relationships—symbolic, allusive, traditional—may exist among the various elements. 6. A choice is made from among the various points of view from which the elements can be presented (Ball 7).

While both fields involve the study of narratives, narratology focuses primarily on the structural elements and mechanics of a story, analyzing how narratives are constructed, while narrative inquiry uses people's personal stories to understand their lived experiences and meaning-making processes, often drawing from various sources like interviews and personal journals. Essentially, narratology looks at the "how" of storytelling, while narrative inquiry investigates the "what" that is being told through stories. For this study the "how" comes in the form of narrative-based Teaching Circles and interviews, whereas the "what" are the

experiences and perspectives of participants regarding their professional identity development.

Furthermore, narrative serves as a way to highlight the local and particular aspects of experience, placing them within their social and cultural contexts. Narratives are standardized methods of representing disciplinary knowledge. Early groundwork (around the 1960s-early 1970s) for the famous "social turn" can be seen in the development of "new rhetoric" which examined language use in social contexts and the work of scholars like Kenneth Burke who emphasized the social and cultural dimensions of language. Terms like "discourse community" and "social constructionism" became prominent in the mid to late 1970s and highlighted the idea that writing is shaped by the specific social groups and conventions writers participate in (Slater, Jarron, and Jeremy Rosselot-Merritt).

In the 1980s, as compositionists began to make the "social turn," composition research began to focus more on the social contexts and personal histories from which writing emerges, while also incorporating narrative more directly into research genres (Vandenberg, Hum, and Clary-Lemon 3; Journet 14). During this period, a new form of academic inquiry gained traction, with emerging publications highlighting life stories and personal narratives. "Narrative research, in all its various forms, is deeply involved in contemporary debates over theory, methodology, and politics in scholarly investigation" (Casey 211). New designs emerge while earlier concepts endure, with different versions deconstructing and recombining, reflecting the nature of composition. In the 1990s, composition research further reinforced the social turn and began to focus more on how specific stories are shaped within genres, and how they are constructed based on the shared theoretical, methodological, and rhetorical commitments of the community (Journet 14-15).

As Kelly Kinney, Thomas Girshin, and Barrett Bowlin noted in a 2010 issue of *Composition Forum*, the social turn could be viewed as a sequence of three distinct turns:

> The first [...] emphasizes teaching writing and learning how to write as collaborative, interactive processes. The second shift grows out of the first, but, rather than focusing primarily on instructional practice, as James Berlin writes in *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, it examines and critiques the signifying practices that shape subject formation—and, by extension, the discipline—'within the framework of economic, social, and political conditions' (83). While scholarship represented by the third social turn does not ignore classroom pedagogy or critical theory, it also does something quite more: it takes as its starting point embodied activism.

The "social turn" significantly influenced contemporary composition pedagogy, leading to a greater focus on collaborative writing, awareness of audience and social context, and teaching students how to navigate different discourse communities. By embracing these new perspectives, composition has continued to evolve into the twenty-first century, fostering a deeper understanding that narrative is essential to how individuals organize and make sense of their lives. Pursuing this type of research method aligns with this study's goal of gaining information from the perspective of local composition GTAs and WPA paralleling theory with their experiences.

Narrative inquiry involves presenting multiple, varied perspectives at once, with the intention to be read and analyzed together. Subjectivity is a fundamental and necessary aspect of narrative research, as stories convey lived experiences, which are often distinct and nuanced (Clandinin and Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: A Methodology for Studying Lived Experience*). Phelan and Rabinowitz define narrative as a rhetorical act, explaining that

"narrative is somebody telling somebody else, on some occasion, and for some purposes, that something happened to someone or somebody" (3). When sharing another's story, it is crucial to ask open-ended questions and approach the research contextually. Patton emphasizes that "sensitivity to context is central in qualitative inquiry and analysis" (9). As a result, I designed my interviews to be open-ended and semi-structured, allowing me to tailor the interview process to the unique experiences of each participant.

Qualitative researchers must focus on understanding the contextual factors that influence their data and research, as this is crucial for creating a comprehensive narrative. While anecdotes are often dismissed as lacking the necessary qualities to be considered evidence, they can serve as a more complete form of evidence when the researcher knows "how to listen, systematically collect, and rigorously analyze anecdotes" (Patton 33). It is vital to examine the anecdotes and stories shared by participants, as narrative, qualitative data has the ability to incorporate emotion and context in ways that quantitative data cannot. Moreover, recording Teaching Circles and interviews allowed me to highlight participants' authentic words as part of co-constructing their stories, enabling me to revisit and review the details. This study involved listening to the narratives of seven GTAs and one WPA in UMKC's English Department, sharing their experiences with professional development as FYC instructors, and exploring their views on using narrative as a tool for fostering identity development.

This combination of observation, interaction, and textual analysis has been coined by John M. Swales as "textography." Textographic research allows for moving beyond linguistic analysis to examine the interpretations and practices of authors and audiences within their context, offering rich data with detailed descriptions. It also provides an opportunity for in-

depth theorizing by connecting text with context (Lillis). “In textographic research, text collection does not begin and end at academic texts, but instead explores a web of texts and routine writing within the context not only via institutional/procedural/contextual texts (e.g., documentation), but also through other texts such as participants’ diary of activities and curriculum vitae (Swales, 1998, 2018)” (Sizer 42). A key strength of textography as a method for academic writing research is its flexibility, allowing for the exploration of a wide range of texts, contexts, and practices through various research methods (e.g., observations, interviews, and textual analysis). Tied closely with narrative inquiry is phenomenology, which explores a communal experience of one or more participants and seeking to understand their individual meanings. In the following sections, I present an overview of the design, methodology, and formulation of research questions, drawing connections between narrative inquiry and phenomenology.

Phenomenology

A phenomenological study is “one or more individuals’ consciousness and experience of a phenomenon and a view into the participants’ life-worlds and to understand their personal meanings” (Johnson and Christensen 364). Phenomenology also acknowledges that “perceptions provide us with evidence of the world—not as it is believed to be, but as it is lived,” making a phenomenological approach essential for understanding the meaning and structure of GTAs’ lived educational experiences within higher education FYC (Morse and Richards 45). Data gathered and analyzed through a phenomenological approach is typically divided into three stages: 1) segmenting the original data into sections, 2) grouping these sections into clusters of meaning, and 3) creating a general description of the experience (Creswell 55).

In recent decades, there has been significant research focus on teaching, teachers, teacher education, and teacher learning in the United States (see Ball and Tyson; Cochran-Smith and Zeichner; Sikula, Buttery, and Guyton; Wittrock). However, that research contains little concerning the experiences, careers, and development of teacher educators from their perspectives. As Edward Ducharme and Mary Ducharme argued approximately twenty years ago, "the intense education reform agenda […] has promoted close scrutiny of American public education, including substantial criticism of the education of teachers and, implicitly, those who educate and help prepare them for teaching. Yet there continues to be a lack of knowledge [about] those who educate teachers and what they do." (58) However, this trend is beginning to change as narrative-based research becomes more prevalent, aiming to gather insights directly from the participants' perspectives rather than relying solely on the researcher's viewpoint.

In their study "'Everyone Wants You to Do Everything': Investigating the Professional Identity Development of Teacher Educators" Brad Olsen and Rebecca Buchanan answer the question of how and from where teacher educators develop their understandings of what it means to do their work. They chose sixteen teacher educators from four California universities as participants, interviewing them and collecting documents about their programs and teacher education in California more generally. In their analysis, they used teacher identity to consider the teacher educators as dynamic, whole persons who integrate past, present, and future into ongoing professional understandings, and used environmental systems design to examine the complex, situated contexts in which the teacher educators worked.

In their study "'Everyone Wants You to Do Everything': Investigating the Professional Identity Development of Teacher Educators," Brad Olsen and Rebecca Buchanan explore how and where teacher educators develop their understanding of their professional roles. They selected sixteen teacher educators from four universities in California as participants, conducting interviews and gathering documents related to their programs and teacher education in California more broadly. In their analysis, they applied the concept of teacher identity to view the educators as dynamic, whole individuals who integrate their past, present, and future into their ongoing professional understanding, and used environmental systems design to examine the complex, context-specific environments in which the educators worked. My study follows a similar structure to Olsen and Buchanan, looking to the GTA and WPA participants past, present, and future experiences and how they shape their narratives and professional identities. The narrative-based Teaching Circles allow for research observation of these differing selves in action, while the individual interviews allow space for participants to tell their stories from their perspectives.

In place of direct, explicit training for the work of teacher education, Olsen and Buchanan found that participants relied primarily on three sources of experience for their training as teacher educators: 1) teacher educator's biography (including personal and family histories as well as reasons for becoming an educator), 2) educational studies (undergraduate coursework in education and other fields, the teacher educator's own initial teacher preparation, and other graduate study), and 3) career history (participants professional paths varied to a minor degree and their entry into teacher education was shaped by personal and/or family commitments).

Instead of receiving direct, explicit training for their roles as teacher educators, Olsen and Buchanan found that participants mainly relied on three sources of experience for their training: 1) the teacher educator's biography, which includes personal and family histories as well as motivations for becoming an educator, 2) educational studies, such as undergraduate coursework in education and other fields, the educator's initial teacher preparation, and further graduate studies, and 3) career history, where participants' professional paths varied slightly, and their entry into teacher education was influenced by personal and/or family commitments. The three sources of experience collectively shaped the type of teacher educator each participant became, influencing how they interpreted and carried out their current work (Olsen and Buchanan 17-18). Olsen and Buchanan discovered that the teacher educators worked in an environment characterized by an ongoing, implicit struggle, where conflicting epistemologies, educational goals, and roles frequently pulled them in opposing directions (24). Similarly, participants in my study also faced a state of liminality, competing experiences, perceptions, knowledge, roles, and expectations often conflicting with one another.

Heuristics in particular is a type of phenomenological inquiry that is "a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis." (Moustakas 17) Heuristics necessitates that the researcher have personal experience with and interest in the phenomenon being studied, and that participants have a deep, intense connection to the phenomenon (Patton 107). My experiences as a GTA, NWT, and graduate student align with the scope of heuristic study on the educational experiences of FYC GTAs, as both I and the

participants share an interest in the narratives of GTAs and how these relate to the development of their professional identities.

A narrative, whether written or oral, can range from a brief, surface-level story about a specific event or experience to a more detailed account of a significant life aspect (such as graduate school), or even a comprehensive story of one's entire life. According to Chase, the analytical frameworks of narrative inquiry include: “analytic (retrospective meaning making), verbal action (voice of the narrator), range of social resources and circumstances (self and reality construction within the community), socially interactive performances (a joint production of narrator and listener), and researcher’s voice (researcher as narrator while interpreting the participants’ narratives)” (652-657). Within this study, I looked back not only on my own past experiences, but asked participants to do the same and make meaning retrospectively. This study was based in a specific community that represents many themes across other institutions (e.g., minimal GTA training, graduate liminality, representation, etc.). As part of narrative inquiry, this will also be a combination of researcher and participant experiences.

Creswell recommends using a “narrow criterion or criteria” sampling approach for phenomenological studies, where all participants have experienced the phenomenon being studied (118). Purposeful sampling is a strategy in which researchers intentionally select settings, participants, or activities that offer distinct opportunities for research (Maxwell 88). For this study, the focus is on composition GTAs within UMKC. While a wider collection of other individuals could be included (e.g., adjunct instructors, faculty, other administrators, etc.), it would take away from the focus which is specifically on GTA professional development and their experiences in their positions.

Role of Researcher

Positionality

Positionality refers to a researcher's worldview and the perspective they take regarding a specific research task, including its social and political context (Holmes). There are three main areas that define a researcher's positionality: 1) the subject being investigated, 2) the research participants, and 3) the research context and process. There are certain factors for a researcher's positionality that are generally considered to be set, such as race, gender, ethnicity, etc. However, there are other factors that are more fluid, subjective, and context-dependent, such as political beliefs, personal experiences, religion, and so on. Both types influence a researcher's identity and approach to a study, impacting how (s)he approaches, interprets, and understands his or her research topic and participants. In short, these aspects shape the researcher's "position" within the research process. It is crucial for the researcher to remain mindful of their own reflexivity and reflect on their position and biases, as this is not only essential for their growth and development as a researcher, but also because their positionality impacts how the research is carried out, its results, and the analysis.

My nine years of experience as an educator, including eight years teaching FYC as both a GTA and an adjunct professor, along with my involvement in GTA professional development across various contexts and institutions, inspired me to explore the stories and experiences of composition GTAs related to their professional identity development. "Connecting positionality to epistemology simultaneously empowers and disempowers individual expertise in the classroom. Knowledge does not arrive unmediated from the world; rather, knowledge gets constructed by interaction between the questioner and the world." (Takacs 31). This stance parallels a constructivist mindset which within education suggests

that students enter into a classroom with prior ideas, experiences, and knowledge that needs to be considered and built upon (this is contrary to a traditionalist mindset which treats students like “empty sponges” that are there to absorb information from the expert teaching the course). Instead of trying to persuade others that your viewpoint is inevitable, listening to their perspectives can help you challenge your assumptions and reduce barriers, making it easier to reach a consensus. I have my own perspective and thoughts about GTAs position in FYC. However, there are others to consider which may aid in enriching my mindset.

Educator research is continuously changing and evolving, encompassing a wide range of studies that vary in audience, purpose, and occasion. These can range from informal, instructor-created surveys about students' experiences with specific assignments to formal, published ethnographic studies of a particular classroom community (Nickoson 106). In Nickoson’s study, he employed descriptive, observational methods to “tell the story” of the classroom community, interpreting it as both a teacher and a researcher (106). I too take on dual roles as both an educator and researcher using observational and interview methods in the goal of “telling the story” of participating GTAs and WPA within the context of a larger scholarly conversation.

I feel it important to address my own background as an educator which influences my own growth and interaction with other educators, speaking to narrative inquiry theory. Our past experiences and stories influence who we are and who we become. My experiences are also the drive behind this study. I have seen the issue of GTA training and acclimation and aim to take steps to correct this. I attended Emporia State University for my Bachelor of Science in Education (BSE) with a concentration in English as well as for my Master of Arts (MA) in English with a specialization in Composition and Rhetoric. While working towards

my BSE I also received my teaching license for grades six-twelve in English and language arts (at the time ESU's teaching program was ranked fourth in the United States, which speaks to its abilities to train competent teachers). Afterwards, I taught composition as a GTA at Emporia State University for two years while working towards my MA. After graduating, I was employed by Kansas State University as an adjunct professor and have been teaching composition there for going on five years. I served as a composition GTA at UMKC for three years, starting in 2021, before transitioning to the role of Graduate Instructor (my current position at the site of this study). As a result, I personally and professionally know the participants and profoundly understand their positionality.

I share many common characteristics with this demographic of educators. Like them, I remember what it was like just starting out teaching and needing guidance and support of a more experienced educator. I have also been exposed to the struggles that come with this position, both my own and that of my colleagues, over the nine years I have been teaching. Additionally, I am able to recognize how kind of training makes a difference in not only professional development (e.g., lesson planning, classroom management, course design, etc.), but also in the personal feeling of being adequately prepared to take on this new role. However, my training was extensive compared to the experiences of most GTAs. While working towards my BSE, I spent the first three years studying various theories, laws, and pedagogical techniques before I even began my teaching internship in my final year. While I did not share the exact same experiences as most of the participants, I am still able to empathize with them, having still experienced the anxiety and fear with being a new teacher as well as having been exposed to their struggles and working with many through them.

I am going to detail the internship I participated in while I was becoming licensed to teach to further emphasize my own perception of teacher education and how different it is to many of the participants of this study. Only one of the participants shared a similar experienced of professional teacher training, the rest having their first exposure to teacher education in the week-long orientation before the semester began. My internship was also far more intensive and long-lasting. It started out with the licensed teacher being in the room for the entirety of the school day. We also collaborated on lesson plans together using his as a foundation and using mine to expand it. Gradually he would leave me on my own for longer intervals while periodically checking in. He and I would take notes independently on how we each thought the day went, noting various strengths and weaknesses. At the end of each week, we would meet and discuss our findings. He would then send a weekly report to ESU, where I was attending and who directed the student teaching programs, indicating my progress. I also had several observations by university faculty throughout the semester and they would make their own reports. I additionally participated in the Kansas Performance Teaching Portfolio (KPTP) as well as took two different Praxis exams (one designated towards content knowledge and the other classroom management), which were the final requirements to earn my teaching license.

The degree I was working towards was a (BSE) with a concentration in English. Many GTAs entering to teach composition have creative writing or non-social science backgrounds and so do not have the same kind of preparation for teaching technical writing. All of this is to emphasize the point of how much stronger of a foundation I had to rely on when I started teaching composition. I was by no means a seasoned educator, but I felt like I had an established enough background to take on this new role with minimal anxiety and

confusion. Others who have not had the same preparation have described their first experiences teaching composition as "sink or swim" and "feeling around in the dark." Not only is this new content for most, but they are also new to teaching in general, which is its own task.

My past experiences with GTA professional development as a new teacher helped me connect with and relate to aspects of the participants' experiences. Although my own experiences are significant, as a researcher, I serve merely as a tool for inquiry. Despite having similar experiences, by listening to the stories of the GTA and WPA participants and focusing on their perspectives while co-constructing their narratives, I was able to distinguish my own experiences and viewpoints from theirs, noting both the similarities and the differences.

Bias

My own biases and perspective became more apparent as I interacted with other teachers who had different experiences from mine. These contrasts are realized in normal colleague interactions (department meetings, assessment, chatting in the office, etc.). However, the distinctions and similarities are made especially apparent when presented as individual stories of professional identity development. These stories bring forth specific context, histories, emotions, and experiences that color and add depth to the singular layer others view in daily interactions. While bias is inherent, in order to combat it, I was open to listening to alternative suggestions from participants and how they would like to see this develop (this is part of the interview process). For example, several liked the open nature of the Teaching Circles, but wanted a bit more direction, such as having a theme for each session or having an assigned "leader" for each session to guide the conversation. This in

particular highlighted how the less experienced GTA participants sought direction whereas the more practiced ones had less of an issue keeping the conversation going and directing it themselves.

There were several who wanted the Teaching Circles to have break-out rooms on Zoom for each topic of discussion, while others preferred everyone together so as to not miss important information. One also suggested adopting a similar approach to how the WPA conducts regular GTA meetings and having the Teaching Circles in person with the option for Zoom during it to allow space for both modalities for each person's preference. These are but a few examples of rich feedback that can help the Teaching Circles develop and evolve. There is the slight issue of having warring opinions and deciding which one to adhere to or if there is a middle ground to be found. While it may seem problematic to have differing and potentially contrasting perspectives, either between participants or participants and researcher, as Clandinin and Connelly indicate, the researcher and participants actively co-create narratives. They are essentially "two sides of the same coin"- a dichotomy of one not being able to exist without the other and both bringing unique perspectives to this study. The focus of this study was not on my own story, but rather on the (re)stories of the participants.

Researchers who use qualitative methodology not only organize and manage data collection but also recognize that they are an integral part of the process, deeply connected to the data. In ethnographic research, this involvement is referred to as being a "participant observer." While the bias and potential for "unreliable narrator" are legitimate concerns, there are benefits to this approach that, if implemented effectively, outweigh these apprehensions. For instance, the participant observer develops a thorough understanding through interactions and genuine experiences that come from being immersed in the research

environment (Johnson, Avernarius, and Weatherford; Kawulich). In a similar way, researchers employ narrative inquiry to gain a well-rounded perspective through a dialogic process that provides detailed descriptions of the subject being studied, partly because of the close relationship between the researcher and participant. I invited colleagues (GTAs) and superiors (WPA) to participate in my study because I had already established relationships with them, having worked alongside many for several years. Given the nature of our relationship, I was confident that I could both learn from and collaborate with them on their professional development as NWTs.

Throughout this study, I collaborated with GTA and WPA participants to co-construct their stories, providing them with the opportunity to share their narratives while also striving to integrate their accounts accurately into the research. While doing this, I was gathering data through field note observations of the narrative-based Teaching Circles and interviews. Through field observations, GTA participants contributed in storied NWT professional development and reflected upon those experiences. When conducting the individual interviews after the field observations of the Teaching Circles, I had to be cognizant that "what the informant says is always influenced by the interviewer and the interview situation" (Maxwell 125). To address this, it was crucial for me to recognize how my own preconceptions might have influenced the participants and to actively make efforts to minimize the impact of my bias.

To prevent researcher bias, I consistently reflected on my own voice and position. Since everyone (whether researcher, participant, or reader) has their own voice and perspective, complete objectivity is unattainable, but pure subjectivity would undermine credibility (Patton 41). Throughout my study, I adhered to the three guidelines Patton

recommends: self-reflexivity, reflexivity about those being studied, and reflexivity about the audience. I examined the knowledge I already possessed and made an effort to be aware of any personal knowledge that could shape my perspectives and influence my data selection. I also considered how the participants came to know what they knew and what influenced their worldview. Additionally, I questioned how my readers would interpret the information I presented and how their perceptions might impact what I report and to whom (these questions are detailed in the Validity, Reliability, and Limitations section later in this chapter). Having described my positionality and potential areas of bias, I indicated how I have attempted to mitigate my bias through the process, from interviews to analysis and writing the research study. In the following section, I describe the design of the current study.

Design of Study

This study was designed to explore ad hoc peer-mentorship for GTA professional development, using narrative theory to support the professional identity development of the participating GTAs. Specifically, it examines the stories of seven GTAs and one WPA from diverse contexts and backgrounds. Clandinin and Connelly note that "people live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others" (*Narrative Inquiry: A Methodology for Studying Lived Experience* xxvi). As such, narrative inquiry serves as the primary research method for this study, as it captures the (re)told experiences of participants that can influence future retellings.

In-depth interviews are one of the most widely used methods for collecting stories in narrative inquiry research. The interviews in this study were structured more like "conversations with a purpose" (Patton 149). Phenomenological, in-depth interviewing was

used as a data collection method for this study. Marshall and Rossman define phenomenological interviewing as the exploration of lived experiences and how we interpret those experiences to form a worldview. The goal of this approach is to describe the shared meaning of a concept or phenomenon experienced by multiple individuals (104). In the case of this study, GTA participants all share the experience of being new to teaching and developing their professional identities. The participating WPA has a similar, but slightly separated experience of still teaching FYC and being involved in GTA PD, but from a different positionality.

Through semi-structured conversational interviews, I asked participants to share stories about their experiences before becoming GTAs and their current views on their roles. I also asked the participating WPA what her professional experiences (both general and specific to FYC) were as well as her position on GTA professional development. I asked follow-up questions to explore in more detail the strategies, tactics, and specific approaches used in working with colleagues, superiors, and community members. In this study, I was able to not only view the participants' stories in action through the Teaching Circles, but learn from an individual standpoint (i.e., interviews) what their experiences and perceptions of their professional development are. A narrative inquiry study considers the participants as experts (Josselson 546). As discussed in Chapter 2, in this study, participating GTAs are trusted in their voices rather than being told what to think or how they should be thinking.

Setting

The University of Missouri-Kansas City, the site of this study, is a public mid-sized research university that is part of the University of Missouri system. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, as of the fall in 2022, UMKC had a total enrollment

of 15,703 students, with 10,179 comprising of undergraduates (846 of them having transferred in) and 5,524 graduates. Among the undergraduates, forty-five percent were part-time and fifty-five percent were full-time students, whereas thirty-six percent of graduate students were part-time and sixty-four percent were full-time. Fifty-nine percent of the total undergraduates were female, while forty-one percent were male. Within the undergraduate populus the racial/ethnic ratio consists of eight percent Asian, twelve percent Black or African American, twelve percent Hispanic or Latino, fifty-seven percent white, five percent consisting of two or more races, two percent of an unknown race or ethnicity, and three percent being a U.S. nonresident. Undergraduate student ages ranged from eighty-eight percent being twenty-four years and younger and twelve percent being twenty-five years and older. Sixty-nine percent of undergraduates were in-state residents, twenty-seven percent were out-of-state, and four percent were from foreign countries. Finally, one percent of undergraduates were exclusively enrolled in distant education courses, thirty-one percent were enrolled in some, but not all, distant education courses, and sixty-eight percent were not enrolled in any distant education courses. In relation, among graduate students, fourteen percent were enrolled exclusively in distant education courses, fifteen percent were enrolled in some, but not all, distant education, and seventy-two percent not enrolled in any long distant courses (NCES).

UMKC offers a wide variety of undergraduate and graduate programs and majors. GTAs teach two sections of English 110: Introduction to Academic Prose or 225: Intermediate Academic Prose and receive a small stipend and are only responsible for paying student fees, including wellness services, university library access, facility access, maintenance and operational support of campus facilities, access to campus transportation

shuttles, access to intercollegiate athletics, access to campus recreation, access to special events and entertainment, and access to student clubs and organizations. The contracts for a GTA position only last for about 2/3 of the duration of the M.A., M.F.A., and PhD/iPhD programs. For example, M.A. and M.F.A. students can only serve as GTAs for two of the three years of their programs. Similarly, PhD/iPhD students can only serve as a GTA for three of the five years of their program.

Sample Procedure and Participants

Using purposeful sampling, I sought a group of new and experienced FYC educators who could provide valuable insights related to the research questions. Purposeful sampling involves the researcher intentionally selecting participants based on specific characteristics or experiences that are most relevant to the study. For this research, it meant selecting participants who could offer contributions to the topic of narrative-focused NWT professional identity development.

Coordinating with the Director of Composition at UMKC (hereby referred to as "participating WPA"), we created two schedules for composition GTAs (one for those participating in this study and one for those choosing to participate in the standard GTA professional development). Prior to this study, the participating WPA held meetings for GTA professional development twice a month. She covers a wide variety of material, ranging from sample grading sessions, visiting speakers, review of course content, university policies, Q&A sessions, among other things. However, neither I nor the participating WPA wanted to ask the GTAs to offer more of their limited time and attention than they already were prepared to give. At the time of this study, the participating WPA wanted to ensure that if participants chose not to participate in this study, that they were attending all of the regular

GTA meetings. Participants of this study still would attend some GTA meetings, just not all of them. We decided to split it up evenly and have one of the meetings per month be dedicated for Teaching Circles and the other for standard GTA meetings. The participating WPA did not attend the Teaching Circles other than to quickly provide announcements. Listed are the two different schedules for participating and non GTAs:

Participating in Teaching Circles Schedule:

- September 13: Teaching Circle
- September 20: GTA Meeting
- October 4: Teaching Circle
- October 18: GTA Meeting
- November 1: Teaching Circle
- November 15: GTA Meeting
- December 6: GTA Meeting

Not Participating in Teaching Circles & Only Attending GTA Meetings:

- September 13: GTA Meeting
- September 20: GTA Meeting
- October 4: GTA Meeting
- October 18: GTA Meeting
- November 1: GTA Meeting
- November 15: GTA Meeting
- December 6: GTA Meeting

I conducted individual interviews among GTA participants and the WPA to gain dual perspectives on this activity as well as on GTA professional identity development.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited via email, where the study and its intentions were described again, and consent forms were attached. The actual research (i.e., observation and interviews) took place via Zoom, where they were recorded and transcribed. To protect participant privacy, the collection of sensitive information has been restricted to only what is necessary to meet the objectives of the research (e.g., academic backgrounds, professional backgrounds, etc.). Likewise, participants had the choice not to answer any question which made him/her uncomfortable. Similarly, because any internet-based communication, such as Zoom, is not guaranteed to be secure/confidential, both participant(s) and I minimized security risks by ensuring that communication was taking place in a private room over a secure internet connection.

GTAs and the WPA within the University of Missouri-Kansas City's English Department were recruited via email during the Summer and Fall of 2024 to take part in this study. Prospective participants were contacted at four different instances to participate in the study. I sent out initial emails explaining the study and asking for volunteers approximately a month in advance of the semester orientation. I then met with the GTAs in person during orientation, not only putting out an additional request for participation, but also to help the WPA with the topic for the afternoon session, which was giving advice for "what I wish I would have known." The WPA and I ended up having to change the date of the first Teaching Circle due to a graduate student event taking place at the same time and moved it to the following Friday. I sent out an email the week of the original date explaining the changes with an additional reminder that there was still time to join of GTAs were interested (I had recruited around five participants at this point). Finally, I then sent out with a reminder email

the week of the new date for the first Teaching Circle and recruited two more participants. I also sent out a reminder requesting individual interviews after the Teaching Circles and the interviews were scheduled based on participants' availability.

Participants read and signed a consent form that was emailed to them, within which it detailed the study, the risks and benefits, confidentiality, and storage of materials and results. This form also specified how participation is on a voluntary basis and that there are no negative consequences (financial, professional, academic, or personal) to not participating. Participants were also allowed to quit at any point and had the right to refuse to answer any question with no negative consequence to them. In any written or verbal communication pertaining to this study (including but not limited to in-person conversations, telephone calls, email, mail, articles, etc.), no identifying information about individual participants were disclosed (including, but not limited to, participant names or specific information about participants that might reveal their identity). Further, data has been de-identified before analysis. Participant data was only available to the principal investigator (Dr. Antonio Byrd) and the student researcher (Kristin Schmidtlein). Data were stored on a locked, no-access file box in One Drive to safeguard against unauthorized access. Identifiers recorded include the names, faces, and academic and teaching backgrounds of participating GTAs and WPAs (these identifiers have been removed in this dissertation). In place of these identifiers, there are pseudonyms (e.g., GTA 1, participating WPA) to separate individual responses. While I did not seek teaching materials or plans outright, I did ask during the interviews for descriptions of examples of how GTAs feel they have more (or less) evolved their professional identities.

Data Collection and Sources

After identifying the eight participants, I began the data collection process. Data were gathered during a five-month field phase of the study, which took place from August 2024 to December 2024. There were two primary forms of data collection: individual interviews with each participant, within which participants asked to (re)tell their stories and opinions and field observation, specifically Teaching Circles where participants participated in the storying process. Using these various data sources allowed me to draw connections and compare them, with the goal of determining whether the results were consistent across participants and uncovering new insights.

The Teaching Circles were completed first and were held once a month for three months from August to November. Interviews were conducted last, in the months of November and December, providing opportunity for questions to be asked and feedback given concerning the successes, challenges, and limitations of not only the Teaching Circles, but to give individual insight from each participant rather than in a group setting. Each type of data was essential for constructing accurate narratives of the participants' experiences with storytelling and the development of their GTA professional identities. These narrative-based Teaching Circles, as well as the individual interviews, were held via Zoom, where they were recorded and transcribed (participants were made aware of this fact before agreeing to take part in this study as it was detailed in the consent forms they signed). As detailed in the consent forms (see appendix A1), participants were assured that their names will remain anonymous. Anonymity helps minimize negative consequences (e.g., embarrassment, names attached to potentially conflicting opinions, publicizing themselves, etc.) and allows further freedom and comfortability for honesty and transparency.

The subject population consists of local GTAs and WPA in the English department at UMKC. There are eleven total GTAs of varying backgrounds and degrees within the English department, as well as one WPA. Of the seven GTAs who chose to participate, two are working towards their Master of Arts (MA) and five towards their Master of Fine Arts (MFA), with their degree focuses/specialties/concentrations ranging from technical writing to literature to creative writing. Julian and Mason are the only two working towards their MA degrees, Julian having a specialization in rhetoric and composition and Mason having an emphasis in literature, though he does not know what specific area he wants to pursue yet. Hannah, Diana, Sasha, Owen, and Heidi are all working towards their MFA degrees in creative writing with an emphasis in poetry. GTAs also have a range of experiences in teaching, some having taught in secondary and post-secondary education for a number of years and others being in their first year of teaching. Julian, Diana, and Owen were in their very first semester of teaching while this study was taking place. GTAs Hannah, Sasha, Heidi, and Mason had some prior experience to the study. Hannah has taught as a GTA for about two and a half years and having taught in a STEM summer camp for middle schoolers and Upward Bound for around five years. Sasha has been a GTA about a year and half but prior to that briefly taught dance at a non-profit organization to elementary students, has lead bible studies, and managed at a coffee shop for a few years. Heidi has also been a GTA for about a year and a half. Prior to this they taught environmental science to kindergartners for a summer when they were in high school. Mason has been a GTA for about a year and is currently doing administration work for a separate community college. Prior to his GTAship he taught high school while getting his teaching license before teaching middle school for a year.

The WPA has been teaching at UMKC for thirteen years and holds the official title of Associate Teaching Professor. She got her undergraduate degrees in English and Philosophy before she attained her master's degree in English with an emphasis in Literary Theory. She achieved her PhD with a focus on American Literature. The participating WPA started teaching composition as a GTA during her PhD. After completing PhD coursework, she returned to Missouri and worked as an adjunct instructor, teaching composition classes. Later, the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC, the site of this study) offered a full-time lecturer position to her. In addition to her duties as Writing Director and Writing Program Administrator, part of which involves sitting on several committees (i.e., University Writing and Review Board, UMKC Executive Essentials Committee, the UMKC Essentials Faculty Team, assisting with UMKC Summer Essentials Assessment, and a course reviewer for the Missouri Department of Higher Education for the transfer library), she also teaches English 126: Popular Literature, English 242: Women Reading, Women Writing, English 360: The Modern Novel, CDV 206: Culture and Diversity-Intersectionality, and GRT AH 108: Critical Thinking in the Arts and Humanities.

Participants benefited from this study in the following ways: 1) based from the narrative inquiry research approach, their voices and opinions were considered seriously within the larger context of scholarship, 2) they had the opportunity to gather advice from and collaborate with each other on a consistent basis, and 3) the director at UMKC has expressed a desire to start applying some of the methods described in our prior conversations, so there is a chance for real change and application.

Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic research, grounded in cultural theories and inquiry practices from anthropology or sociology dating back to the late nineteenth century (Sheridan 80; Guillén-Galve and Bocanegra-Valle 1), is well-suited for this study. By using interviews and observations of GTA participants and the WPA, this approach is appropriate because, like all research, ethnography is highly adaptable to the specific situation, applying particular methods to address specific issues or problems (e.g., lack of resources and support for GTAs). What makes ethnographic research distinctive is its focus towards understanding the (in)visible networks and systems influencing the participants in the study (Sheridan 73). Ethnographic research explores perspectives that are often overlooked, underexplored, or hindered, thus providing valuable insights for policies and policymakers that impact the participants and the larger systems and structures in which they are situated. J. Green and David Bloome argue that adopting an ethnographic perspective allows for a more targeted approach to studying specific aspects of daily life and cultural practices within a particular group, such as composition GTAs. In the case of this study, that focus is on the specific experiences of participants in relation to their professional development for teaching FYC.

The center of ethnographic research lies in participant observation in as natural of settings as possible (in the instance of this study, observing GTAs in Teaching Circles). In their observations of participants' events and interactions, researchers are not merely "shadowing" the participants but are also acknowledging their own presence within the research report. Similarly, this research approach is valuable because it fully acknowledges the roles of both the researcher and the participants in the research process-how they come to understand the research context and how their own background, experiences, and

preconceived notions influence the research journey (Guillén-Galve and Bocanegra-Valle 7). It is important to acknowledge that conducting ethnographic research involves significant challenges (such as long hours, personal involvement, disorganized data collection, and field notes, etc.). Nevertheless, the benefits are substantial, particularly in gaining perspectives that either support, challenge, or complicate existing theories and pedagogies. This methodology can provide valuable insights into the people and literacy practices we aim to engage with within our field.

Teaching Circles

The narrative-based Teaching Circles were held once a month via Zoom, offering flexibility for the interviewees and the convenience of automated transcription. This was done in collaboration with the participating WPAs professional development meetings already in place for GTAs. Instead of the meetings being held twice a month, the first meeting of the month was reserved for Teaching Circles and the second for standard GTA meetings with the WPA. Not all GTAs within the English department elected to participate in the TCs (four of the eleven total not participating). As a result, the WPA and I adjusted the scheduling slightly. Non-participating GTAs would attend both GTA meetings as normal and participating GTAs would continue with the original plan of TC meetings at the beginning of the month and the PD with the WPA at the end of the month as indicated in the date schedule in a prior section. Before starting to record I reiterated to the participants that I was not only going to begin recording, but that I was going to mute and turn off my camera to give them space to take control of the meeting. I told them I would still be there if anyone had questions or wanted my input, but I would not be inserting myself unless requested. I also reiterated

that these meetings are meant to be ***for*** them and ***by*** them; they could utilize them as they see fit, listing several options, such as grading, collaboration, asking for advice, etc.

During observation of the TCs, participants were asked to act normally as they would when collaborating with each other in the workplace. There were three Teaching Circles, and each lasted approximately one hour. Participants given the simple directions that they are to utilize these narrative-based Teaching Circles as they deem necessary, whether that be for advice on handling a situation with a student, discussions about pedagogical practices being used, technical issues using the LMS, collaborating on lesson planning, grading, venting about the stresses and frustrations of their positions, etc. I elected to mute myself and turn off my camera to help participants feel more comfortable and less like they were being watched constantly. It also helped emphasize the organic nature of these interactions by allowing participants space to act as they normally would with minimal interference from me.

In narrative studies, the emphasis should be on how the Teaching Circles can be framed as narratives that recount the participants' experiences: past, present, and potential future (Clandinin and Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: A Methodology for Studying Lived Experience*). The Teaching Circles in this study were conducted in a semi-structured format, with general directions that participating GTAs should utilize them towards their professional development needs, but nothing so specific as to have a set agenda (as is the case for the standard GTA meetings with the WPA). Participants are also allowed to enter late, leave early, or stop participating at any point. The open-ended format of these narrative-based Teaching Circles allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of each participant's perspectives and experiences, enabling me to recount and analyze their stories accurately and thoroughly.

Interviews

Individual interviews took place only once among the participating subject population after the Teaching Circles concluded. In the individual interviews, I asked participants about their experience and training pertaining to Composition and Rhetoric as well as being a GTA, their motivations for taking this position, what their backgrounds are, as well as what they would like to see these Teaching Circles take the shape of. Similarly, when interviewing the WPA, I asked her about her responsibilities, her system of support, and the challenges she faces when training GTAs. In interviewing her, I was able to gain insight on what GTA professional development looks like "from the other side" from an administrator's educator's perspective. As a seasoned educator with over a decade of varied experiences, she also offered valuable insight to her experiences and how she has come to approach her position as a WPA who trains, supports, and guides composition GTAs.

"We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe and to understand what we've observed" (Patton 426). While field observation and the analysis of scholarship are essential useful methods of data collection, interviews are offer additional understanding the individual perspectives of each participant and providing insight into how to accurately convey their stories. The interviews also gave me the opportunity to engage with my participants' stories in a more conversational manner, allowing for a deeper exploration of their experiences from an individual perspective, rather than a group one. In qualitative interviews, the participant engages in a dialogue with the researcher. However, as a general guideline, the interviewer should speak less than the participant, ensuring the conversation remains focused primarily on the participant's own perspectives and stories (DeMarrais).

The interviews in this study were semi-structured, beginning with a set of structured questions to initiate the conversation, but allowing for flexibility and freedom to let the discussion evolve naturally rather than forcing it into a rigid, narrow scope. The interviews were organized around open-ended questions established beforehand (see appendix C), ensuring that all participants had the opportunity to respond to the same or similar questions, aligned with the study's research questions. However, the structure remained flexible, permitting both the researcher and participants to ask follow-up questions, skip questions, or rephrase them as needed. This approach reflects the nature of qualitative interviews as "guided conversations," rather than strictly formal discourse (Turner). The interviews were held virtually via Zoom, offering flexibility to the participants and the benefit of automated transcription. Each participant responded to the same set of general questions, with some questions omitted if they had already been addressed in prior answers, and additional questions introduced for further clarification based on the flow of the conversation. The adaptable nature of these interviews allowed me to gain valuable insights into each participant's perspectives and experiences, enabling me to analyze and present their stories accurately and in detail.

Data Analysis Procedures

Since narrative inquiry is the primary research method driving this study, the emphasis is on presenting the participants' stories from the collected data. Specifically, the data will be analyzed through the past, present, and future (re)stories, exploring how these narratives influence the participants' professional identity development. Consequently, the focus is on the personal experiences of participants (such as their positionality and liminality in interactions with students, coworkers, and the WPA) through the narrative structure of

their stories. Additionally, the college classroom, office space, and meetings are considered key settings in the participants' lives that shape these narratives.

Analysis of Interview Teaching Circles and Transcripts

In analyzing the Teaching Circle transcripts, I initially examined the frequency of various terms, ideas, responses, and concepts to make sense of the data. From this, I identified commonalities that evolved into themes (Grbich). Throughout this process, my focus was on pinpointing, extracting, and constructing key stories from the participants. To examine the interview transcripts, I used a similar methodology to the interviews. The primary differences between the two are that the Teaching Circles were stories in action, whereas the interviews were recollected accounts. Additionally, the Teaching Circles were based on my own observations rather than the interactive discussion of the interviews. Participants still told their stories in the moment, but it was less structured compared to the interviews (mirroring the ad hoc nature of peer mentorship). Both give unique perspectives and mirror the "the telling and retelling" of stories (Clandinin and Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: A Methodology for Studying Lived Experience*).

Synthesizing Data

After analyzing each form of data and identifying emerging themes, I represented and re-constructed the participants' stories. This process involved reshaping the data into a narrative structure, with each participant's story divided into past, present, and future segments. The past section recounted the participants' previous experiences, including how they became GTAs and how these experiences contributed to their current and future selves. The present related to participants' current identities, particularly in relation to liminality. The

future provided a prospective idea at how each participant anticipated their professional identity developing.

Validity, Reliability, and Limitations

No research design is flawless. The primary limitations of this study were the researcher-as-instrument and my position as both an insider and outsider. The reliability of qualitative research depends on the "accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data" (Bogdan and Biklen 40). By using multiple data sources (such as individual interviews and Teaching Circle field notes and transcripts) and the main research method (narrative inquiry), I was able to validate the truth and authenticity of the experienced phenomenon and the participants' interpretations, which also helped enhance the credibility of the study. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the "instrument of inquiry," so it is crucial to acknowledge their beliefs, experiences, and motivations to ensure that the results and analysis are valid, reliable, and minimized for bias (Patton 3).

Throughout the data collection and analysis, I asked myself five questions to remain conscious of any potential researcher bias toward the phenomenon being studied:

1. Did the interviewer influence the contents of the subjects' descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the subjects' actual experience?
2. Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?
3. In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives?

4. Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experiences?
5. Is the structural description situation specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations? (Zhou)

To prevent researcher bias, I consistently reflected on my own voice and position. During my inquiry, I adhered to the three guidelines suggested by Patton: self-reflexivity, reflexivity about the participants, and reflexivity about the audience. I examined my existing knowledge and became aware of personal insights that could shape my perspectives and influence my data selection. I also considered how the participants acquired their knowledge and what influenced their worldview. Lastly, I asked myself how my readers would interpret the information I presented and how their perceptions might influence what I report and to whom.

Limitations

This study had a variety of limitations, specifically the primary research method of this study: narrative inquiry. Stories, while vital and original modes of presenting perspectives, are biased in nature. While bias is inherent to a certain degree, personal recollections present the concern of a narrative bias. This is both a strength and weakness of narrative inquiry. One the one hand, stories are being told from the perspective of the participant. On the other hand, this has to be taken with the understanding that this perspective is colored by outside factors that are not intended to represent an entire culture. This study aimed to link participants' stories by (re)telling their past, present, and future experiences, offering insight into the professional identity development of GTAs and WPAs.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are crucial in any research project, particularly regarding anonymity, identity protection, and data security. This study focused on (re)telling the stories of GTA and WPA participants concerning their professional identity development. As the researcher, I was responsible for safeguarding the identities of the participants, so pseudonyms were used to protect their anonymity. I also completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) examination before conducting the study. Furthermore, the study received approval from the University of Missouri-Kansas City's (UMKC) Institutional Review Board (IRB). All IRB rules and regulations were followed throughout the study, and no ethical issues arose. All collected data was securely stored in a password-protected OneDrive folder on a protected computer.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology this study, which investigates the experiences GTAs within the English Department at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. The study aims to explore how GTAs' participation in TCs influences their professional identity development as educators. Utilizing qualitative research methods, specifically narrative inquiry and phenomenology, the study focuses on storytelling as a means of meaning-making and self-reflection. The research involves observations of TCs and semi-structured interviews with GTAs and a Writing Program Administrator (WPA). The study design involves a combination of observational field notes and narrative analysis, exploring past, present, and future aspects of GTA professional identity development. Ethical considerations such as anonymity and data security were upheld, ensuring participant confidentiality. Ultimately, the research seeks to elevate GTAs' voices, highlight their lived

experiences, and contribute to more effective professional development structures in composition pedagogy. Chapter 4 will present the findings of this study, utilizing the collected and analyzed data to share the stories of seven GTAs and one WPA from UMKC's English department. It will explore their experiences related to their professional identity development and present their stories from the past, present, and future. Additionally, Chapter 4 will offer the conclusions drawn from the data, highlighting connections between the stories and providing implications for the readers.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND OBSERVATIONS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of the study on the experiences of composition GTAs in relation to the development of their professional identities to answer the following research questions:

- "What are the experiences of GTAs with participation in Teaching Circles in relation to their teacher/teaching development?" More specifically:
    - What stories do GTAs share about their own professional growth?
    - Do GTAs recognize their identities and experiences as having shaped their professional growth as teachers? If so, how?
    - Do GTAs recognize the narrative process affecting how they develop as individuals? If so, how?

In this chapter, I present the data I collected from August to December in the fall 2024 semester from seven GTA and one WPA participants. As I present the stories of these eight participants, I several common narrative themes presented themselves across each story.

Several key themes emerged during the data analysis process and through the co-creation of participant stories: Teacher Modeling, Learning-Centeredness, Liminality, and Professional Identity Development. These themes will be highlighted throughout the presentation of participant stories and in the subsequent synthesis of the eight stories. In this chapter, I present the results of the co-constructed stories from seven GTAs and one WPA. The Teaching Circle observations and individual interviews contributed to the development

of each participant's story. The following section offers a brief overview of the methodology to help readers understand how the data was collected and analyzed.

Narrative inquiry is the exploration of how humans experience the world. This broad concept is refined to view education and educational research as the creation and re-creation of personal and social stories; learners, teachers, and researchers are both the storytellers and the characters in their own and others' narratives (Clandinin and Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: A Methodology for Studying Lived Experience* 2). Meaning-making can be understood through experience, examining how our experiences evolve over time and how we "interpret situations, events, objects, or discourses" based on those experiences (Ignelzi 12; Zittoun and Brinkmann). This process of meaning-making has been described as narrative and studied within the context of qualitative research (Bernhard; Gravett 1; Manning and Kunkel; McLean; Singer). In the end, narrative inquiry is focused on collecting data to conduct research through storytelling.

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of composition GTAs in relation to the development of their professional identities as educators. Each participant's story was divided into past, present, and future segments. The past recounted their previous experiences, including how they became GTAs and how these experiences contributed to shaping their current and future selves. The present related to participants' current identities, particularly in relation to liminality. The future provided a prospective idea at how each participant anticipated their professional identity developing. This study utilizes qualitative research, specifically narrative inquiry, which focuses participants' experiences rather than more quantitative components.

An additional purpose of this study is to create consistent opportunities for these peer mentor interactions as well as to investigate how First Year Writing GTAs serve as resources for each other regarding pedagogical approaches and content understanding and application through the usage of narrative-based Teaching Circles. Teaching Circles allow colleagues from the same department or across disciplines to enhance and improve their teaching. They are credited with being safe places for learning, exploration, change, and accomplishment. These peer meetings are intended to give insight into how to teach composition from a practical perspective of those "on the ground" as well as to give awareness to the broader field of Rhetoric and Composition regarding how GTAs are trained and grow into their positions.

In addition to this attempt at creating a steady means of training and development, the primary research method guiding this study focuses on the experiences, narratives, and voices of participating GTAs. This focus allows for the participants to express not only whether these Teaching Circles are successful in the goal of creating consistent peer mentorship opportunities, but to convey what their experiences are like as new educators. This awareness from the perspective of those who are told what to do, think, and act, provides invaluable insight from what GTA FYC training, scholarship, and curriculum is doing in praxis.

Review of Methodology

Through this research process, I was able to come to comprehend the GTAs' and WPA's stories and experiences. I observed the GTAs in three narrative-based Teaching Circles over the course of three months and interviewed each participant, including the WPA individually. The data analysis process focuses on (re)telling participants' stories through

their experiences in the Teaching Circles. Although these narratives were observed over a finite three-month period (representing participants' "present" selves), their current identities were shaped by past experiences and will continue to influence their future development. While the primary focus is on their "present" experiences within the narrative-based Teaching Circles, their past and future selves still serve as a framework for understanding their current identities and are summarized within this chapter (the full individual narratives are listed in appendix D).

Then I analyzed these stories for themes that addressed the above research questions. After analyzing each form of data and identifying emerging themes, I represented and re-constructed the participants' stories. This process involved transforming the data into a narrative format. Each participant's story was divided into past, present, and future segments. The past was framed under the theme of Teacher Modeling, where participants' previous experiences were explored, including how they became GTAs, the influences on their teaching approaches, and how these factors shaped their current and future selves. The present formed in the themes of Learning-Centeredness and Liminality, where the ways in which participants' journeys into teaching were linked to their present identities and their beliefs in the significant connections between the development and continuity of their dual roles. The future formed into a theme of Professional Identity Development and provided a prospective idea of how the participants anticipated their future selves developing. This study focuses on the stories of GTA participants involved in Teaching Circles, examining their experiences, practices, motivations, and ideas. While the participating WPA did not take part in the Teaching Circles, she contributed valuable insight from the administrative perspective on GTA professional identity development. This is explored within the context of both the

participants' personal backgrounds and experiences, as well as the GTAs' experiences teaching FYC in a college setting and the WPA's role in training GTAs.

Duration of Study

Data collection and analysis occurred between August and December of 2024, with considerable time dedicated to each data source, especially during the organization and analysis phases. This process allowed me to effectively communicate the stories and gain a deeper understanding of the identified themes. For the Teaching Circles, I recorded each session, transcribing the conversations and taking notes on initial impressions, interactions, and development of the session as they took place, adding new notes on how each Teaching Circle session compared as they progressed, noting any themes or patterns that arose. The WPA did not attend the Teaching Circles in order to maintain the ad hoc nature of the interactions as well as prevent it from replicating standard professional development GTA meetings that the WPA holds on a bi-monthly basis. After the Teaching Circles were completed in the beginning of November, I sent out emails to start coordinating individual interviews. Over the course of the rest of November and into the beginning of December, I interviewed each participant, each interview lasting approximately an hour and thirty minutes. I recorded the interview sessions, taking notes as each participant answered questions and throughout our conversation. I used the transcription software WhisperTranscribe to transcribe the interviews after their completion, going back afterwards to clean up the transcripts and verifying the information. After having the materials transcribed and gathered, I started the analysis process, focusing on the emerging themes, which was done over the span of a week. Properly representing participants' stories as they

have told them is crucial for conducting effective and accurate narrative analysis (Clandinin and Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: A Methodology for Studying Lived Experience*).

Sampling Overview

All participants--seven Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and one Writing Program Administrator (WPA)--teach at the site of this study, the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Each GTA teaches two sections of either English 110: Introduction to Academic Prose or English 225: Intermediate Academic Prose per semester, often alternating between each level each semester. The WPA regularly teaches English 126: Popular Literature, English 242: Women Reading, Women Writing, English 360: The Modern Novel, CDV 206: Culture and Diversity-Intersectionality, and GRT AH 108: Critical Thinking in the Arts and Humanities. By using purposeful sampling, a method where researchers intentionally select settings, participants, or activities to create unique opportunities for study, I was able to recruit participants from diverse backgrounds and experiences (Maxwell 88). For this study, the focus is on composition GTAs within UMKC. While a wider collection of other individuals could be included (e.g., adjunct instructors, faculty, other administrators, etc.), it would take away from the focus which is specifically on GTA professional development and their experiences in their positions. Across the eight participants, spanned different degree goals and specializations, ranging from M.A. to M.F.A to PhD degrees and specializations spanning from rhetoric and composition to literature to poetry. Demographically, of the participants one was a man, four were women, and three were non-binary. Among the participants, five identified as White, two as Black American, and one as biracial (Black and White). Despite the limitations in demographic diversity within the small sample size, a range of perspectives were collected, especially regarding teaching contracts and disciplinary

context. The next section presents the findings, introducing each participant and sharing their stories as told from their own perspectives.

Findings

The following table shows a brief summary of the participants names and positions, academic degrees (both completed and in progress), the duration of their teaching experiences across their careers, and the classes the they are currently teaching at UMKC (the site of this study).

Table 1: Summary of Participants' Academic Backgrounds

Name of Participant & Role	Academic Track	Duration of Teaching Experience	Classes Teaching
Julian (GTA)	• Bachelor of Arts in English (Completed) • Master of Arts in English (In-Progress)	1st Year	• English 110 • English 225
Hannah (GTA)	• Bachelor's in Creative Writing and Spanish (Completed) • Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing (In-Progress)	2 ½ Years	• English 110 • English 225
Diana (GTA)	• Bachelor of Liberal Arts (Completed) • Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing (In-Progress)	1st Year	• English 110 • English 225
Sasha (GTA)	• Bachelor's in English (Completed) • Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing (In-Progress)	1 ½ Years	• English 110 • English 225

Name of Participant & Role	Academic Track	Duration of Teaching Experience	Classes Teaching
Owen (GTA)	• Bachelor of Science in Creative Writing (Completed) • Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing (In-Progress)	1st Year	• English 110 • English 225
Heidi (GTA)	• Bachelor's of Arts in Language and Literature (Completed) • Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing (In-Progress)	1 ½ Years	• English 110 • English 225
Mason (GTA)	• Associate in Arts Teaching (Completed) • Bachelor of Science in Education (Completed) • Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing (In-Progress)	3 ½ Years	• English 110 • English 225
Rachael (WPA)	• Bachelors in English and Philosophy (Completed) • Master of Arts in English (Completed) • PhD in American Literature (Completed)	23 Years	• English 126 • English 242 • English 360 • CDV 206 GRT AH 108

Teaching Circles

The next section presents the findings from the narrative-based Teaching Circles and my observations. While minimal intervention was done on my part during these Teaching Circles to help maintain the organic ad hoc nature they were intended to emulate, this section

does somewhat contrast the following sections later on that address the individual interviews as it focuses on my own observations rather than the perspective of the participants. Both sections of participant and researcher point of views will come together in the next synthesis chapter. In the synthesis, I clearly connect the narratives and observations, using evidence from the interviews and observations to support the identified themes. These themes are also grounded in relevant literature that relates to each theme, which helps frame the participants' themed stories.ma

Within the narrative-based Teaching Circles, several subcategories emerged from the three of the four main themes of Teacher Modeling, Learning Centeredness, Liminality, and Professional Identity Development. Primarily the peer-mentor Teaching Circles ended up developing to focus on the participating GTAs current stories and how they would develop into the future. Within Learning Centeredness, the subcategories of Student Engagement and Pacing; Classroom Management and Student-Teacher Dynamics; and Teaching Strategies and Challenges emerged. Within Liminality, Time Management and Balancing Responsibilities materialized a sub-theme. Finally, within Professional Identity Development, the focus of Graduate School Aspirations and Career Goals arose from the discussions. A Teaching Circle serves three primary purposes: 1) It offers educators a platform to collaborate with peers on strategies for enhancing student learning, such as delivering effective feedback, refining teaching methods, and utilizing learning management systems; 2) It creates a space for educators to discuss current events and their influence on the classroom environment; 3) It provides a reliable support network where educators can seek guidance, resources, and instructional materials (Ashton 12). Teaching Circles are recognized as

essential for professional development, enabling GTAs to exchange experiences and strategies while fostering a supportive community.

Teaching Circle 1

Summary

The first Teaching Circle covered various challenges faced by teachers in online education, including student engagement, time management, and assignment clarity. The participating GTAs expressed frustration over conflicting student requests, pacing issues, and confusing assignments. The lack of hands-on interaction necessitates syllabus adjustments for better pacing. Time management is particularly problematic after mid-semester moves, prompting Hannah to hold office hours on non-teaching days. Structured schedules and emphasis on deadlines help freshmen adapt to college expectations. Julian shared discomfort with the title "professor" and frustrations with syllabus errors, stressing the need for flexibility and learning from mistakes.

The participating GTAs discussed how peer reviews in online settings often lack depth, requiring structured guidance for effective participation. They spoke of how, despite technical mishaps, a Socratic seminar on writing revisions proved beneficial. Managing peer review groups and assignment confusion are ongoing issues for the participating GTAs, and how when they acknowledge mistakes it helps foster student appreciation. The participating GTAs also discussed how class dynamics show that new high school students are stressed by expectations, emphasizing practical skills over grades and introducing a self-assessment grading model to encourage reflection. They also spoke of lesson planning difficulties, especially with navigating the *Canvas* platform, highlighting the need for more preparation

time and clear assignment expectations. Effort and thought processes are prioritized in grading, with collaboration among peers as a support mechanism.

Classroom dynamics and technology challenges are discussed, with peer review guidelines focusing on accountability and community building. Online management issues were also discussed and several GTAs with experience teaching online suggested using discussion boards and distinct due dates. Participants discussed the pros and cons of online teaching tools, noting the value of in-person interactions for effective communication and strategies for utilizing class time effectively. A structured approach to classes was encouraged to maintain student interest through various activities. In relation to this, it was stressed how follow-up questions are crucial for deeper thinking, and participants reflected on their growth in challenging students to engage critically.

Learning Centeredness

Student Engagement and Pacing

The first Teaching Circle discussion underscores the significance of learning-centeredness by emphasizing student engagement and pacing, as participating GTAs collaboratively navigate classroom challenges, foster personal connections, and implement teaching strategies to balance academic and real-world priorities. The discussion started with a casual question from Heidi asking, “So anybody got any students they want to talk about?” This created response of laughter, simultaneously displaying the casual camaraderie between participants and setting the tone for the rest of the meeting, easing some of the anxieties of the newer GTAs who did not have a pre-established relationship with the more experienced ones. This suggests that the participating GTAs actively discuss specific students, perhaps to share insights, address challenges, or brainstorm solutions for engagement. This highlights a collaborative approach to addressing individual student needs, ensuring that no one slips

through the cracks. Participating GTAs mentioned interactions that reflect the complexities of classroom management. Heidi said, “You said a controversial thing to my students, and I was like, you’re a freshman.” suggests moments when the GTAs navigate sensitive or challenging discussions. The willingness to acknowledge and address these dynamics points to an effort to create open, yet structured, environments where students feel heard but are also guided. Julian added to this by discussing his own frustrations about a student missing class for a career fair, which touches on balancing academic priorities with external opportunities, a key element in fostering engagement through practical, real-world relevance. This created a conversation about what is considered acceptable for students to miss, Sasha mentioning how it is dependent on how a student approaches the situation as to what the next steps and responses look like. Several GTAs nodded in agreement that tone and approach make a major difference in student interactions, both on the teacher and student side.

Participants in the discussion generally agreed that the first few weeks have been a significant learning experience, helping them understand what works and what does not. Many acknowledged that adapting to the structure and expectations of the course was a part of the learning process. A shared concern was the balance between daily assignments and major assignments, with Diana directly questioning how to manage this workload effectively. Several experienced GTAs, such as Heidi, Sasha, Mason, and Hannah gave suggestions on how they find this balance (Diana showing appreciation for direction on how to approach this challenge). Additionally, there was a consensus that engagement is not just about participating but about gaining meaningful understanding from the learning process. The importance of getting to know students on a personal level is highlighted by a comment made by Diana, “I mean, you don’t really have the opportunity to like get to know your students,

and kind of like who they are as students, which I think is kind of cool." This suggests that fostering engagement is not solely academic; it is about understanding students' personalities, goals, and learning styles. The participating GTAs value personal connection, which can enhance trust, motivation, and classroom morale.

However, disagreements emerged regarding pacing and assignments. Some participants expressed dissatisfaction with the current pacing, feeling that it was either too fast or ineffective in supporting engagement. Heidi noted that they did not particularly like the pacing or the assignments, suggesting frustration with the structure of the course. Sasha acknowledged that while the assignments were "fine," she did not necessarily find them engaging or beneficial. These mixed reactions indicate that there is no universal approach to pacing that works for all students. The discussion also revealed several complexities, particularly in relation to online learning. Mason highlighted the challenge of pacing within an online course, suggesting that the format itself might contribute to difficulties in structuring time and engagement. Most of the participants do not have experience teaching online, so they did not have much to contribute as for whether they agreed or not, but they did respond positively, indicating that they understood Mason's line of thinking. Recognizing the need for mental breaks and personal interaction, Mason reflected on the value of in-person teaching: "I do miss like the face-to-face interaction, like I did really like that." This reflects how in-person interaction can lead to higher engagement levels compared to remote or asynchronous learning. There was also mention of planning breaks for students, reinforcing the idea that engagement thrives when students are given moments to recharge and reflect. Additionally, Hannah said that online learning limits opportunities for students

and instructors to connect on a personal level, which could impact motivation and engagement.

Conceptually, the discussion underscored the importance of reflecting on learning outcomes rather than just completing tasks. Participating GTAs questioned what they were actually learning and how they were benefiting from the experience, suggesting that engagement should be tied to meaningful understanding rather than just assignment completion. Another critical aspect was the need for structural adjustments in course pacing to accommodate different learning styles. While some students may thrive in a fast-paced environment, others may struggle to keep up, indicating a need for more flexibility in learning structures. Lastly, the conversation implied that true engagement goes beyond pacing and assignments-it also involves connection, understanding, and personal relevance in learning. Overall, the discussion highlighted both the strengths and challenges of the learning process. While there was agreement that balancing assignments and engagement is crucial, there were differing opinions on pacing and assignments. The complexities of online learning, including the struggle with connection and retention, added further challenges to the discussion. Ultimately, the need for adaptive pacing and meaningful engagement emerged as key takeaways from the conversation.

Classroom Management and Student-Teacher Dynamics

Classroom management is presented within the discussion as a multifaceted approach that blends structure with empathy. The participants early on highlighted the necessity of establishing order early while maintaining flexibility to adapt to student needs. Sasha mentioned, “From day one, I make sure students know the three non-negotiables: respect, responsibility, and effort. Everything else branches out from these core principles.” Some

participants responded with agreement of setting clear expectations early on, however, Julian pointed out the necessity of balancing this with flexibility to fit the climate of each group of students. GTAs emphasized the importance of setting boundaries immediately, with some discussing how they involve students in rule creation to ensure buy-in. Julien commented, "I ask my students to come up with class agreements. This gives them ownership, and they tend to follow the rules they help create." Others saw benefit in this, though there were a few concerns about the unknown as to what rules students would create and potential issues it may produce. Additionally, routine was discussed in relation to managing a classroom. "Routine is the heartbeat of classroom management. When students know what to expect, it minimizes anxiety and maximizes engagement." Heidi pointed out a specific method they used for classroom management. "I play a specific song for clean-up time. By the third week, they start tidying before I even say a word. Pavlov's dog, but in a positive way." This created a round of laughter, but general agreement in the practice. Hannah responded by adding that visual schedules and countdown timers were frequently cited as tools to maintain flow and predictability: "I use a timer for everything. [Students] thrive when they can see how much time they have left on a task."

Discussions within the TC pointed out that positive reinforcement is a cornerstone of behavior management. Sasha, stating how she draws on her experiences as a mother, mentioned, "Catch them being good. A simple 'I like how you're focusing' goes a long way." Heidi added to this by mentioning the benefits of subtle, non-verbal methods: "A raised eyebrow or a finger to the lips can redirect without stopping the lesson." Hannah further added her two cents and discussed how addressing misbehavior privately was consistently advocated when non-verbal methods did not work. "I pull students aside after

class rather than call them out. It keeps their dignity intact and reduces classroom disruptions." Several participants also pointed out how physical space plays a significant role in fostering positive behavior. Heidi pointed out, "Flexible seating has changed the game. When students are comfortable, they're more likely to stay engaged." Heidi, Hannah, and Sasha mentioned how they have had to make requests to change rooms in order to foster a more conducive learning environment.

The discussion within the first TC also underscored the importance of nurturing strong, trusting relationships as the foundation for effective teaching and classroom harmony. Heidi pointed out, "Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." This phrase is repeated by multiple GTAs as a guiding principle. GTAs also discussed how small gestures build rapport, Sasha mentioning "I greet each student at the door by name. It sets a positive tone for the day." Heidi responded in kind with adding, "Lunch break check-ins with students who seem off-sometimes all they need is to feel seen." Phrasing was also discussed in relation to building strong rapport with students. Specifically, active listening and empathetic responses were highlighted. Heidi commented "If a student lashes out, I ask 'What happened?' instead of 'Why did you do that?' It shifts the focus to understanding rather than blame." This promoted some contemplative head nods as others took in how such a minor change can have such a major impact. A key theme of adapting lessons to meet diverse needs emerged from the conversation. Sasha mentioned, "Fair isn't always equal-it's about giving each student what they need to succeed." This tough, but fair mentality was met with agreement, though several mentioned how this is "easier said than done." Diana pointed out her struggles of being tough enough on students and Heidi mentioned how there is such a wide range of needs and types of students that it is difficult to meet all of them without some

slipping through the cracks. They also share methods for creating inclusive environments, Julian noting, “We celebrate holidays from different cultures. Students light up when their traditions are acknowledged.”

Participants generally agreed on several key points. There was a shared understanding that student attendance and prioritization of external activities, such as career fairs, pose challenges in maintaining engagement and consistency in coursework. Many participants expressed frustration with student expectations, particularly regarding how they should make up missed discussions and interactive activities. Additionally, the difficulty of balancing individual student needs with maintaining the integrity of the course structure was a common concern. However, there were also disagreements among participants. One area of divergence was how to handle missed classwork, such as peer reviews. While some believed in providing alternative ways for students to engage, others questioned the feasibility of such accommodations. Another point of contention was the importance of career fairs. While one participant expressed skepticism about students missing class for these events, others may view them as valuable opportunities for professional growth. There were also differing opinions on the extent to which instructors should accommodate student absences versus emphasizing student responsibility in managing their own schedules.

On a conceptual level, the discussion reflects broader questions about defining learning priorities. GTAs must consider what should take precedence: structured coursework or external learning opportunities. The conversation also touches on the need for pedagogical adaptation, as teaching methods may need to evolve to better address the changing needs of students while maintaining academic integrity. Furthermore, different models of student accountability were implicitly debated, with some favoring strict adherence to deadlines and

others advocating for more flexible approaches that recognize real-world conflicts. These discussions highlight the ongoing complexities of managing classroom dynamics in a way that supports both student success and effective teaching practices.

Teaching Strategies and Challenges

Teaching strategies in online and in-person FYC present unique challenges, requiring adaptability, resourcefulness, and ongoing self-assessment to balance engagement, workload, and student development. Balancing teaching with personal and academic responsibilities was a common theme. Heidi asked Mason about how their online teaching was progressing: "How's the online teaching going, [Mason]? It's going okay." The simplicity of the response hints at ongoing adaptation rather than full confidence in the method. "How are you finding balancing being in classes, teaching classes, and trying to have a life outside?" Sasha asked the group. The phrasing implies that maintaining this balance is challenging, reflecting a broader concern about workload and the competing demands faced by educators who are also students. One point in particular came up concerning teaching college freshmen, the participants discussing how it poses unique challenges beyond standard coursework. Heidi comments, "Yeah, that's the weird thing about teaching freshman is that you also have to like kind of teach." This emphasizes that teaching freshmen involves more than just conveying subject matter; it often includes helping students develop basic academic skills or adapt to university life.

Educators often employ interactive and student-centered strategies, such as debate and collaborative decision-making, to enhance engagement, though the effectiveness of these methods requires ongoing evaluation and adjustment. Julian discussed encouraging students to debate to find effective teaching strategies: "So I had them, you know, kind of talk and debate a little bit about which approach was best." Several other GTAs echoed this approach

in order to minimize student resistance and give them autonomy on the class structuring. This trial-and-error approach shows that educators experiment with interactive techniques to engage students, though the effectiveness of these methods may not always be clear. Sasha highlights this uncertainty, “We’re not going to keep using this method if it doesn’t work. It just didn’t go.”

Resourcefulness is key in lesson planning, as Amanda mentioned, “I literally, like, just copied and pasted from the teaching writing *Canvas* site.” This was in response to Diana’s concern about creating entire lesson plans from scratch as a first-time GTA. This reveals a practical approach to leveraging existing resources to save time, though it may not always foster original content creation. Relatedly, self-assessment was also discussed not only for students, but for the participants as well so that they can continue to adjust and improve their lesson plans. Using self-assessment techniques aligns with fostering student independence and engagement, suggesting that incorporating reflective models is a beneficial teaching strategy. Failure is reframed as part of the learning process, Heidi stating, “We were talking about, like, that idea, like, failure is not, like, a problem.” This eased some anxiety from first-time GTAs about not having “having it perfect the first time” as Diana expressed. This perspective indicates a shift from viewing mistakes as setbacks to recognizing them as growth opportunities, promoting resilience and adaptability among students. The participants also acknowledged that teaching styles vary widely, as reflected in this statement made by Hannah, “I think everyone has a method that works, and there’s not necessarily a wrong one.” The acknowledgment that diverse teaching methods can be effective emphasizes the importance of flexibility and personalization in education.

The participants in the discussion broadly agreed that teaching, especially in new formats such as online or hybrid learning, has been a significant learning experience. They acknowledged that some strategies work well while others prove ineffective, requiring constant adaptation. A shared challenge among GTAs was the difficulty students faced in understanding assignments and expectations, regardless of how instructions were delivered. Additionally, there was consensus that remote teaching or certain instructional settings made it harder to form personal connections with students. However, there were disagreements regarding the effectiveness of certain teaching methods. Some GTAs found specific strategies helpful in improving student comprehension, while others noted that their students remained confused despite multiple explanations and adjustments. Engagement strategies also sparked differing opinions; while some believed that providing students with breaks and flexibility enhanced participation, others maintained that structure and discipline were more effective in keeping students engaged.

Conceptually, the discussion reflected a strong theme of adaptive teaching, where GTAs continuously reassessed their methods based on student responses and learning outcomes. Reflective teaching emerged as a key approach, with educators analyzing what worked and what needed improvement in their instructional techniques. A notable tension existed between structure and flexibility-GTAs had to find a balance between providing clear, structured guidance while also allowing for adaptability to accommodate different learning styles. These conceptual challenges underscored the evolving nature of teaching, requiring GTAs to be both strategic and responsive to their students' needs.

Liminality

Time Management

Liminality often involves standing at the threshold between two states (whether it be novice to expert, student to professional, or subordinate to leader). Individuals in this transitional phase adopt new strategies to navigate uncertainty, reinforcing their evolving identity. Liminality underscores the transitional nature of teaching, where instructors continuously shift between preparation, delivery, and reflection. Time management tools, such as schedules, serve as vital anchors that help navigate these thresholds, reducing uncertainty and enhancing efficiency. Hannah presented her approach to managing responsibilities: “I’ve found that blocking out specific hours for different tasks makes the workload feel less overwhelming.” Others supported this approach, though Sasha pointed out that sometimes “you have to squeeze in work when you have a free moment” referencing her responsibilities as a student, teacher, mother, and spouse. This highlights the idea of creating structured spaces within unstructured time, a hallmark of navigating liminality. Heidi made a point, “It took me a while to realize I didn’t have to do everything myself. Asking for help, even from students, lightened the load.” Delegation reflects the transitional phase of leadership and responsibility-sharing, signifying movement from an individual-centered to a collective-focused approach. Heidi made a point in solidarity, “We’re all in this together, and relying on each other makes the process more manageable.” This prompted a general agreement, smiles and nods ensuing, further establishing the strong rapport in this group. This speaks to the communal aspect of liminality, where participants are collectively suspended in a phase of shared growth and responsibility.

Within the discussion, the participating GTAs showed how they are proactively reviewing their course outlines and making adjustments to the schedule. Diana stated, “I’m already like

kind of like looking at my syllabus and like tweaking the schedule." Heidi echoed this by pointing out that they made adjustments to the pilot lesson plans given to them by Rachel (the participating WPA) and that Rachel was fine with them doing this. This indicates awareness of the importance of planning ahead and refining the syllabus to better allocate time for different topics or activities. It also reflects adaptability in teaching strategies, ensures content is delivered within the available timeframe, and provides students with a structured path to follow. There was also mention of aligning the class or syllabus schedule with personal schedules, indicating that time management extends beyond just academic planning. It involves balancing personal and professional responsibilities. Hannah echoed Heidi's earlier point saying, "[Rachel's] schedule, like her syllabus, it works for, like, my schedule that I'm on now." This indicates a promotion of work-life balance, helps in avoiding burnout by aligning workload with personal commitments, and fosters consistency in class delivery.

When the GTAs review and tweak their syllabi, they exist in a liminal space between past experiences and future expectations. This process represents a transitional phase-reflecting on what worked previously while anticipating changes for upcoming classes. The act of syllabus refinement embodies a period of reflection and uncertainty, where instructors shape potential outcomes. This threshold phase allows for growth and adaptation, ensuring that courses evolve with new insights or feedback.

A structured daily schedule is highlighted as beneficial. This demonstrates the importance of predictability in teaching routines, reducing chaos, and enhancing productivity. Julian mentioned, "We had, like, a set schedule every day that we were going to follow." This indicates that the priority of creating a stable learning environment for students, facilitates

better preparation for both instructors and students, and reduces the likelihood of overlooked tasks or missed deadlines. Diana acknowledges the direct impact of a well-defined class schedule on their ability to manage time effectively. “Having, like, some sort of, like, schedule for my class really helped me.” Others agreed with this sentiment, indicating that having even a general plan in place helped them stay organized and on task. The alignment of personal and professional schedules highlights the blurred boundaries between different roles. GTAs often navigate a state of flux, balancing their identity as educators with personal responsibilities. This dichotomy creates a liminal space where they are neither fully immersed in one role nor the other. This promotes identity negotiation, pushing GTAs to reconsider and reconstruct their priorities. The tension of managing both realms creates opportunities for redefining routines and boundaries. Additionally, establishing a structured daily schedule represents a movement from a state of ambiguity to one of clarity and stability. The implementation of a fixed routine signifies the transition out of liminality, solidifying patterns that promote order. Initially, crafting a structured schedule requires navigating uncertainty and trial-and-error. Once established, this routine signals a shift out of the liminal phase, allowing GTAs to regain a sense of control and predictability.

Participants in the discussion broadly agreed that time management was a persistent challenge, particularly in hybrid and online environments. Many acknowledged struggling to balance schedules, with some admitting that a poor start to the semester led to falling behind later. There was a shared understanding that making scheduling adjustments, such as modifying syllabi, was necessary to maintain workflow. Some found that consolidating campus time into fewer days made their schedules more efficient, while others emphasized the importance of clear deadlines to help both instructors and students stay on track.

However, there were notable disagreements regarding work-life balance and scheduling strategies. Some participants believed that structuring work-from-home days helped them maintain productivity, while others found it difficult to prioritize tasks effectively. Another point of contention was the level of flexibility in deadlines-some preferred rigid structures like consistent Sunday deadlines, while others struggled to balance responsibilities dynamically. Additionally, there were mixed views on the efficiency of online versus in-person engagements, with some feeling that online formats complicated time management, while others found them more convenient.

Several complexities added to the difficulty of managing time effectively. Many participants juggled dual responsibilities, balancing teaching with other full-time roles, which compounded their time constraints. They also had to account for students' schedules, making it difficult to establish a system that worked for everyone. The conceptual thinking around time management reflected a balance between structure and flexibility. Some participants approached scheduling with a focus on trade-offs, weighing the benefits of maximizing productive campus time versus spreading tasks across multiple days. There was also a contrast between proactive and reactive time management-while some prioritized early planning, others found themselves constantly adjusting throughout the semester. Furthermore, time was viewed not just as a logistical concern but as an emotional factor, influencing energy levels, motivation, and overall well-being.

Professional Identity Development

Graduate School Aspirations and Career Goals

The structured approach to balancing current responsibilities with future aspirations demonstrates a deliberate effort to integrate professional growth into daily routines, highlighting the participants' commitment to shaping their academic and career trajectories.

A key moment reflecting this balance is when Heidi says: “Wednesdays, I’ve been mainly trying to focus on kind of a combination of grading and working on applying to Ph.D. programs.” This statement underscores the deliberate effort to integrate Ph.D. applications into their weekly schedule, signaling the importance placed on future academic advancement. By designating specific days for these tasks, they ensure that graduate school aspirations remain a consistent priority amid other responsibilities. Hannah, chimes in, explaining how different days of the week are assigned to distinct tasks: “Tuesday and Thursday are teaching and taking class days. Mondays and Fridays are a combination like submit to places or work on the thesis.” This structured approach reflects an awareness of the need to balance immediate duties (teaching and coursework) with forward-looking tasks (thesis work and applications). It highlights the dual focus characteristic of professional identity development-maintaining performance in current roles while actively pursuing growth and new opportunities. The participants’ choice to dedicate time to Ph.D. applications demonstrates a reflective process of aligning career goals with actions. It shows that pursuing a Ph.D. is not a passing thought but part of a deliberate, well-organized effort to shape their future. By mentioning the integration of application work into their schedule, the participants reveal a deeper narrative of transitioning from their current identity as a teacher or student toward the next phase of their professional journey. This aligns with common patterns in professional identity development, where individuals start actively constructing their future roles while still embedded in their present ones.

Participants broadly agreed on the challenges of balancing multiple responsibilities, including teaching, coursework, research, and personal life. Many found that structured schedules, such as setting designated days for specific tasks like grading and office hours,

helped manage their workload. Time management was recognized as a crucial skill, with some participants relying on dedicated work-from-home days to stay on top of their commitments. Additionally, there was a shared understanding that teaching freshman students was not only about delivering subject content but also about helping students navigate college life, reinforcing the idea that teaching plays a role in professional identity development.

However, disagreements emerged regarding the value of teaching in career goals. While some participants viewed teaching as a central aspect of their professional aspirations, others saw it as a temporary role while pursuing research or industry careers. There was also a division between those who aimed for academic careers, focusing on research and publications, and those considering industry positions, which emphasized practical skills. The necessity of working full-time while completing graduate studies was another point of contention. While some participants accepted this as a reality, others believed it could hinder academic progress and research quality. One individual even noted that quitting their day job might help, but they were unwilling to do so.

The complexities of professional identity development were evident throughout the discussion. Many participants found themselves balancing multiple identities as students, teachers, researchers, and workers, making it difficult to solidify a clear professional direction. Graduate students often face the challenge of making career-defining decisions early on, despite uncertainty about the job market and personal aspirations. A significant tension exists between prioritizing teaching versus research, as some questioned whether investing in research would be a better long-term strategy for securing an academic career. From a conceptual standpoint, participants seemed to view professional identity as fluid

rather than fixed. Many acknowledged that their aspirations might evolve based on experience and changing opportunities. Strategic career planning was a recurring theme, as participants discussed when to prioritize coursework over teaching, how to balance research with employment, and whether to focus on academic versus industry-oriented skills. Underlying the conversation was a deeper reflection on career purpose, with participants grappling with fundamental questions about their professional futures. They questioned whether they found fulfillment in teaching, research, or industry work and how their current efforts aligned with their long-term career goals. While participants generally agreed on the importance of time management and teaching as part of professional growth, they held differing views on the emphasis placed on teaching versus research, the choice between academia and industry, and the feasibility of balancing full-time work with graduate studies. The discussion highlighted the complexities of career decision-making, showing that professional aspirations are shaped by personal priorities, external pressures, and evolving experiences.

Teaching Circle 2

Summary

The conversation highlights various challenges and experiences related to teaching, especially during the first semester. Participants discussed difficulties in creating engaging lesson plans but found success with simple methods like using index cards. They acknowledged the acceptability of simpler lessons while adjusting to teaching demands. A positive moment is shared about a student's effort to catch up after absences due to COVID and a car accident. However, there was general dissatisfaction with the current unit on discourse and authority, particularly due to challenging readings and group dynamics. The

conversation also covered various aspects of teaching and managing workloads, highlighting the challenges educators face in generating creative lesson ideas, handling classroom dynamics, and engaging students. Participants discussed strategies for improving classroom environments, such as maintaining etiquette, encouraging critical thinking, and using tools like *Connect* to track attendance and engagement.

Humor enters the discussion with mentions of a grumpy cat that appeared during the meeting, lightening the mood. Challenges of working from home are discussed, including disruptions from pets and dealing with ADHD. The conversation shifted to classroom management, addressing a disruptive student who often speaks out of turn and shares personal trauma. Emphasis was placed on maintaining etiquette and boundaries to foster a respectful environment, considering a one-on-one discussion as a possible solution. Further challenges faced by a teaching assistant are explored, focusing on student engagement and attendance. The difficulty of remembering students' names was discussed, particularly without ID photos, prompting efforts to match names with faces based on seating arrangements. Hannah shared her method for taking attendance and tracking student participation. She also calls out names and use fun facts to engage students, employing a color-coded dot system for attendance. This method is cross-referenced with daily writing submissions. She utilizes online platforms like *Canvas* and *Connect* for digital attendance and assignments, incorporating a "question of the day" to reduce paperwork and enhance engagement. This prompted a question by Diana on how to navigate *Connect*, which Hannah explained to the group.

The discussion also addressed the complexities of research assignments, including the IRB regulations and the importance of early-defined research questions. Students'

experiences with assignments like annotated bibliographies and research proposals are explored, emphasizing the need to understand source reasoning. Participants reflected on their academic journeys, major changes, and the balance between financial concerns and educational aspirations. The dialogue extends to communication challenges with younger students and admiration for middle school teachers, with personal anecdotes about mentoring and STEM camp work. Concerns about class schedule changes and graduate school applications were expressed, with the Heidi showing interest in KU and Nebraska's creative nonfiction programs. They aspire to pursue a PhD in literature or library science, focusing on 18th-century crime literature, while being cautious about publishing pressures. The conversation concludes with a discussion on research universities' classification, distinguishing between tier one (more research-focused) and tier two (while still having high research activity, more teaching-oriented) institutions, and participants' preferences for teaching and research roles.

Learning Centeredness

Student Engagement and Pacing

The discussion touched on how class time can be optimized by potentially shifting discussions to the next session. Heidi stated, "[…] or maybe using the next class to have the discussion just to take up some space and time." There were mixed responses to this, with some seeing the benefit in this strategy, while newer GTAs were concerned with keeping all the information straight and organized. This suggests a strategy where educators use discussions as a flexible tool to fill instructional gaps or reinforce learning, ensuring that pacing aligns with overall course objectives. It highlights the importance of adaptability in lesson planning to maintain student engagement without overwhelming them. A recurring theme is the variability in how students approach their coursework, with some lacking

direction while others may become overly fixated on academic tasks. Julian pointed out, “I feel like so many of them get, they’re either, like, not focused at all on the fact that they have to finish a plan of coursework, or they’re, like, too focused on it.” Other experienced GTAs like Heidi and Sasha expressed agreement with this dilemma, offering strategies on how to get students back on track, such as gentle reminders via email or in office hours or uses the class discussions as a natural means of correcting this behavior. This emphasizes the dual challenge of motivating disengaged students while tempering the anxieties of those hyper-focused on their studies. It underscores the need for GTAs to cultivate balance, providing structured guidance to help students manage their workload effectively.

The participants generally agreed on the importance of using creative teaching approaches to engage students effectively. Many acknowledged the challenge of consistently generating fresh ideas but found success with simple techniques like using index cards. There was also consensus on the need to balance student engagement with classroom management. While they valued student participation and critical thinking, they recognized that some students tend to dominate discussions, making it difficult to maintain structured learning. Additionally, they shared experiences about accommodating students who missed classes due to illness, particularly COVID-19, and agreed on the necessity of flexibility while acknowledging the challenges of keeping up with pacing.

However, there were disagreements regarding how to handle overly talkative students. Some felt that students who monopolize discussions disrupt the lesson and require redirection, while others emphasized that fostering critical thinking should be prioritized, even if it means occasional disruptions. Another point of debate was the balance between pacing and depth of learning. Some instructors believed that maintaining a steady pace and

covering all planned material was essential, whereas others felt that slowing down to allow deeper discussions was more beneficial, even if it meant adjusting the syllabus.

Conceptually, the discussion revealed that student engagement should not be seen as a binary of participation versus non-participation but rather as a spectrum where students contribute in different ways. Teaching was also recognized as an adaptive process, requiring instructors to respond dynamically to students' needs rather than simply delivering content. Finally, the idea of pacing emerged as a fluid concept, where certain core objectives remain fixed, but flexibility is necessary to accommodate meaningful, student-driven discussions.

Classroom Management and Student-Teacher Dynamics

The participating GTAs discussed in the second Teaching Circle setting clear rules and expectations early in the school year to maintain order. Emphasis was placed on consistency and fairness in enforcing rules. Various methods to keep students engaged, such as interactive activities and relating lessons to real-life experiences, were highlighted. Managing disruptive behavior through calm, non-confrontational approaches was recommended. Techniques like proximity control (standing near disruptive students) and redirecting focus were mentioned.

The participating GTAs reflected on how classroom layout (seating arrangements, designated quiet areas) can influence behavior and focus. Heidi presented how they redirect focus: "I try not to call out a student in front of everyone. I walk closer to them or lightly tap their desk to bring attention back." Another method shared was redirecting focus, Sasha mentioning, "Instead of pointing out bad behavior, I highlight and praise those following instructions. Others catch on." Others took notes on these methods, expressing appreciation in getting guidance on how to handle more delicate situations.

GTAs emphasized the need for clear expectations early on. Julian mentioned, “I make it a point in the first week to go over class rules-not just tell them, but involve them in creating those rules. It gives them ownership.” Sasha added, “Consistency is key. If you let one thing slide, it sets a precedent.” Discussions highlighted interactive methods to keep students attentive. Hannah presented her method: “Sometimes, I break up the monotony with quick games tied to the lesson. It resets their focus.” Julian shared how real-life examples enhance learning: “If I can tie a math concept to something they experience-like calculating discounts at a store-they perk up.”

The role of classroom layout was also discussed. Sasha stated, “I rearrange desks in clusters for group work and in rows during exams. It signals to students what kind of day we’re having.” This prompted a discussion about the ability to rearrange desks depending on the size and orientation of the physical space of the classroom. The more experienced GTAs who teach in person, Heidi, Hannah, and Sasha, brought up that they have had to request room changes to accommodate their plans and class sizes. Hannah mentioned the importance of flexible spaces, “Having a quiet corner or reading nook allows students who feel overwhelmed to step away briefly.” Participants also stressed the value of knowing their students personally. For instance, Heidi mentioned “I always ask about their weekend or what they’re watching on TV. Small talk builds bridges.” Julian also shared, “I remember struggling in school myself, so I try to be that teacher I wish I had.” Understanding students’ personal lives was crucial. Sasha added to Julian’s point, “You never know what they’re dealing with at home. I had a student who never turned in homework-I found out he was babysitting siblings every night.” The participants emphasized the need to be flexible. Hannah jumped off Sasha’s line of thinking in stating, “Deadlines are important, but

compassion matters more. If they need an extra day, I give it." Additionally, the participants discussed the need for balancing authority and approachability. Sasha agreed with Hannah's point and brought this all together by saying, "I'm firm but fair. They know I won't tolerate disrespect, but they also know my door is open." Julian added to this by saying, "It's about mutual respect. If they see you care, they'll respect the rules more."

The participants in the discussion largely agreed that maintaining student engagement is a challenge, especially when dealing with students who are either disengaged or overly talkative. Many recognized the importance of balancing authority with open discussion, ensuring that students feel encouraged to think critically and express their opinions while maintaining classroom decorum. Handling student behavior was another common point of agreement, with participants acknowledging that some students exhibit behaviors that border on disrespect, making classroom management difficult. Additionally, building strong relationships with students was seen as essential, with some suggesting strategies such as using ID photos to remember names and create a more personalized learning environment. However, there were disagreements on the best way to handle disruptive students. While some advocated for strict rules and discipline to manage classroom interruptions, others preferred a more flexible approach, allowing students to express themselves while setting boundaries.

The conversation also revealed several complexities in classroom management and student-teacher dynamics. One major challenge is distinguishing between student respect and freedom of expression, as some students' strong opinions and frequent interruptions blur the line between critical thinking and disruptive behavior. Additionally, some teachers struggle with remembering students, making engagement and classroom connection more difficult,

though the use of ID photos was suggested as a potential solution. Another complexity arises from students facing external hardships, such as one student who had missed weeks of class due to COVID and a car accident, highlighting the need for teachers to provide support while maintaining academic expectations. Furthermore, adjusting to different teaching styles remains an ongoing process, as some teachers are still experimenting with methods to determine whether a structured or discussion-based approach works best for their students.

Conceptually, the discussion reflected an ongoing negotiation between authority and approachability. Teachers are learning how to assert their authority while remaining open and supportive of student participation. Additionally, they are working to adapt to the diverse personalities of their students, recognizing that some require stricter management while others thrive in an open-discussion setting. Many participants also acknowledged that their teaching strategies would likely evolve over time, with an initial focus on structured methods before incorporating more creative and dynamic approaches as they gain confidence and experience.

Teaching Strategies and Challenges

Participating GTAs mentioned struggling to come up with fresh, creative ideas for their lessons. Diana shared, “Just coming up with more creative ideas for teaching... I kind of found myself at this rut where I’m like, I can’t even think of what to do.” Julian echoed this in the conversation, “It was tough this week, but I got on top of it and kept going.” Some participants faced technical difficulties, such as poor internet connectivity, affecting their ability to conduct classes and grade papers efficiently. Owen stated, “I’m on my phone because my internet at my house doesn’t work very well.” adding “It works well enough I can grade papers on my computer. Well, that’s what matters, I guess,” reflecting on balancing essential tasks with limitations. This prompted a discussion about whether to have physical

copies of assignments, weighing the pros and cons of doing so. Keeping students engaged, particularly in virtual or hybrid settings, was flagged as a recurring challenge. “Sometimes it feels like I’m just talking to a screen, and I can’t tell if they’re really with me,” Mason expressed.

In response to these challenges, many ideas and suggestions were shared by the group. For instance, a key strategy involved reaching out to peers for brainstorming and sharing lesson ideas. “We had a great chat last week, and it gave me a couple of new things to try,” Heidi shared, emphasizing the importance of teamwork. Others recommended stepping away briefly when feeling stuck to return with fresh perspectives. Sasha stated, “Sometimes, I just need to step back for a minute, and then I get this random idea that works.” Engaging students in the planning process by asking for their feedback on activities helped tailor lessons to their interests, boosting engagement. Julian brought up, “I started asking my class what they want to learn about, and it actually helped me plan better lessons.” The discussion underscored the dynamic nature of teaching, where educators continuously adapt to overcome obstacles. Collaboration, adaptability, and seeking feedback emerged as essential tools for addressing both creative and logistical challenges.

The discussion among participants revealed several shared perspectives on teaching strategies and challenges. One major area of agreement was the importance of creativity in teaching. GTAs recognized that coming up with innovative ways to engage students can be difficult, yet it is essential for maintaining interest and participation. Additionally, student engagement was seen as a crucial factor in effective teaching, though there were challenges in getting students to actively participate. Participants also acknowledged the difficulties posed by student absences, particularly when they result from unforeseen circumstances like

illness. There was a collective understanding that teachers must remain flexible to accommodate these situations.

The complexities of teaching strategies became evident through various challenges. Many GTAs found it difficult to recognize students, especially when photos were unavailable, making it harder to personalize interactions. Furthermore, adapting to different learning paces posed a challenge, as some students required more guidance while others thrived on independence. Managing classroom dynamics also proved to be a nuanced task, particularly in ensuring all students had a voice without letting certain individuals dominate discussions. Additionally, technology played a role in teaching challenges, as some GTAs relied on digital tools for grading but faced connectivity issues that hindered their workflow.

Conceptual thinking in teaching emerged as a theme, particularly in striking a balance between encouraging critical thinking and maintaining classroom structure. GTAs recognized the need to adapt their approaches to meet students' diverse needs, moving away from rigid teaching styles toward more flexible and student-centered methods. Equity in learning also surfaced as a key consideration, with a focus on ensuring that all students, regardless of attendance or engagement levels, receive equal opportunities to succeed. Overall, the discussion underscored the multifaceted nature of teaching, highlighting both the common struggles GTAs face and the different perspectives on how to address them effectively.

Liminality

Time Management

Several moments revealed feelings of being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of tasks, such as grading, managing class disruptions, and dealing with students' personal crises. For instance, Heidi candidly said, "I'm tired, y'all," which was echoed by the group, creating a moment of shared understanding concerning the struggles that come with their position at

GTAs. This prompted the discussion about how students are also struggling, Heidi stating, “One of my students missed several weeks because he had COVID, and then he got into a car accident.” These instances reflect the challenge of balancing responsibilities while maintaining composure and productivity.

Diana discussed feeling stuck or uninspired when planning lessons, highlighting the mental toll of constantly needing to generate ideas. “I kind of found myself at this rut where I’m like, I can’t even think of what to do.” This aligns with the experience of liminality, where one is in a state of in-between, searching for solutions to move forward. A breakthrough moment is described by Julian when he discusses the required GTA pedagogy course, “Then I started thinking about [English 5519] and index cards. We’ll do that.”

The discussion suggests that the participating GTAs go out of their way to accommodate students who have faced personal difficulties, demonstrating time management strategies that prioritize empathy and flexibility. Heidi recalled, “Technically, my office hours are Wednesday, but I said, let’s meet after class.” However, this also adds to their workload, reinforcing the tension between structure and fluidity. Discussions about pets, home environments, and personal factors affecting productivity reflect the broader challenge of maintaining focus. Heidi mentioned, “This is my number one obstacle in getting work done at home is when [Heidi’s cat] comes.” Owen humorously adds, “Number two is the ADHD. Number three is also [Heidi’s cat].” This ties into the liminal experience of working from home, where boundaries between personal and professional life blur. It also suggests a building community between participants who are familiar with each other’s personal lives, including pets and habits. The conversation ultimately illustrates the lived experience of navigating transitional phases, balancing tasks, and managing time under the pressures of

teaching. The subtle interplay between structure and uncertainty encapsulates the essence of liminality and the ongoing negotiation of time management.

The discussion revealed both shared perspectives and differing views among participants. There is a general agreement that time is a limited resource, and managing it effectively is a persistent challenge, particularly in an academic setting. Many acknowledge the pressure of workload, balancing grading, teaching, and personal life, often feeling overwhelmed by the demands of their roles. Additionally, participants recognize that both students and educators struggle with time management, making it a shared challenge rather than an isolated issue. A consensus also emerges around the importance of flexibility, with some acknowledging that adaptability in scheduling is essential for navigating the unexpected demands of academic work. However, not everyone agrees on how to handle time constraints. Some participants advocate for strict time management and adherence to deadlines, while others argue for a more flexible and understanding approach, particularly for students who may face external challenges.

The complexities of time management stem from various factors. One significant challenge is the unpredictability of academic work, where unforeseen circumstances, such as extended grading or student crises, make rigid scheduling difficult. Another layer of complexity comes from the emotional labor required in supporting students beyond academic responsibilities, which can be both time-consuming and necessary. Additionally, GTAs acknowledge the diverse needs of students, recognizing that some face external difficulties that hinder their ability to manage time effectively. On a conceptual level, discussions reflect the “in-between” nature of academic roles, where educators must navigate a transitional space between teaching, mentoring, and administrative duties. The idea of temporal

liminality also emerges, as both students and faculty experience fluctuating workloads, making time management feel like an ongoing negotiation rather than a fixed system.

GTAs mentioned balancing grading, meetings, and class preparation. Owen noted having to grade papers at home despite internet issues. This reflects the challenge of managing tasks across multiple environments. The dialogue also referenced students missing class due to illness or accidents, requiring teachers to find extra time to meet outside normal hours. This highlights the need for flexibility in accommodating student issues while maintaining teaching schedules. Participants also discussed students who may not adhere to classroom norms, sometimes sharing personal trauma. This adds an emotional layer to the workload, as instructors must balance empathy with continuing to teach.

There were references to tracking attendance through daily work and the extra administrative burden of ensuring fairness (e.g., cross-checking submissions). Managing attendance creatively through engagement activities also helps balance monitoring while reducing administrative overhead. Mason mentioned being interrupted by a pet while working from home, reflecting the reality of remote work. Hannah noted scheduling all responsibilities on certain days to create open blocks of personal time. Several GTAs mention using tools like *Canvas* and class rosters with ID photos to streamline administrative work, showing how digital tools help manage workload.

Managing classroom dynamics was also discussed, particularly in relation to how it often involves addressing emotional and behavioral challenges. Heidi brought up one incident with a student: “He detailed once like a bullying incident that happened in his high school that was quite traumatic for him. He just kind of said it out loud in class and I was like, I’m sorry that happened to you I don’t know how to respond to this right now I have to

keep teaching." Others showed shock at how the student overshared so easily as well as concern for how to navigate this kind of situation. Sasha added ideas in response to how Heidi handled the situation, suggesting a one-on-one meeting with the student to address the concern and classroom expectations. This illustrates the emotional weight of responding to sensitive disclosures while maintaining the flow of class. She said, "It's not that we don't want students to question things and think critically, but I would love for you to do that when you're not talking or when you're not truly upsetting other students." Teachers must strike a balance between fostering open dialogue and ensuring the classroom remains a safe, structured environment.

GTAs discussed the dual role of attendance tracking and daily assignments as part of their workload. Hannah mentioned integrating attendance into daily activities: "For me, the daily work is part of attendance. I use the daily work as well, but I can cross-check them." This method streamlines administrative tasks but adds complexity to ensure accountability. To address potential loopholes, Heidi highlighted a common issue: "I've had it where people have friends in class and they don't come to class but their friend texts them the daily writing prompt." This prompted a discussion on how to adjust lessons and assignment requirements so as to cover the holes that students brought to light.

The discussion revealed participants generally agreed that teaching is a demanding profession, requiring a balance between creativity and responsibility. Many expressed challenges in devising innovative teaching methods while also fulfilling institutional and student expectations. Additionally, time management was a common struggle, as educators juggled lesson planning, grading, and personal responsibilities. Emotional labor was another shared concern, with participants acknowledging the mental effort required to maintain

student engagement, manage classroom dynamics, and care for their own well-being. Despite these challenges, there was a general interest in gaining more teaching experience in different environments, such as high schools or other institutions, to broaden their perspectives.

The complexities of balancing responsibilities became evident through various discussions. One major challenge was adapting to different student needs, as catering to diverse learning styles required significant effort. Participants also struggled with reconciling their personal teaching philosophies with institutional expectations, such as syllabus requirements and grading policies. The risk of burnout was another pressing issue, with the expectation to be both innovative and efficient leading to exhaustion. Moreover, career uncertainty added to the stress, as some participants expressed concerns about job stability and the long-term viability of their teaching careers.

Professional Identity Development

Graduate School Aspirations and Career Goals

In the discussion, there was mention of presenting advanced materials, indicating that participants are engaging with or preparing for graduate-level work. This reflects aspirations to advance their knowledge and potentially pursue further education. The conversation also reflects on pathways to further education, with references to progressing beyond a master's degree. This highlights a mindset geared towards lifelong learning and professional development. Heidi, who had been considering pursuing their PhD after completing their MFA said, "[…] if you want to go into, like, graduate school and if you want to go for another master's or a doctorate degree after." Hannah, who is also considering a similar academic path echoed this, turning the conversation to how she has been going about the application process and to which institutions. The mention of pursuing additional degrees

points to ambition and an openness to continued education, reinforcing the importance of advanced qualifications in shaping professional identity. Heidi continued the discussion by revealing how one their brother used the Teach for America program to secure a graduate degree, “Yeah, my older brother did Teach for America, and that's how he got his graduate degree.” The discussion highlights how structured service programs can open doors to further education, potentially shaping career trajectories and professional identity.

A clear demonstration of goal-setting is evident when Heidi mentions actively expanding their list of graduate school applications. This reflects deliberate planning and a strong commitment to future aspirations. “But I added the University […] to the graduate school application list.” Hannah echoed this by mentioning where she had been applying. This proactive approach to applications signals focused career and academic goals, showing intent to pursue further qualifications as part of their professional journey. The importance of networks and connections in shaping graduate school decisions emerges from a mention of familial ties to academic institutions. This underscores how personal relationships and familiarity with institutions can influence choices. By expressing interest in differing graduate experiences, the participants reveals an eagerness to expand horizons and cultivate a multifaceted professional identity. These points collectively illustrate how the discussion weaves together aspirations for advanced education, goal-setting, and the role of personal experiences in shaping career trajectories.

Participants in the discussion shared common views on the importance of graduate school, particularly as a pathway to research. Many recognized the value of structuring research papers and engaging with research narratives, highlighting an inclination toward academia. Additionally, there was a general agreement that teaching is a continuous learning

process, with early struggles being a natural part of professional development. They discussed various teaching techniques and acknowledged the challenge of finding creative approaches to engage students. Another area of consensus was the difficulty of balancing work and personal life. Many noted obstacles to productivity at home, whether due to distractions, family responsibilities, or unreliable internet connectivity, which sometimes hindered their ability to work efficiently.

Conceptually, participants framed professional growth as an iterative process rather than a fixed trajectory. Many recognized that adjusting teaching methods, refining research skills, and balancing multiple responsibilities were continuous aspects of professional identity development. There was also a discussion on defining success in academia versus industry. Some equated success with academic achievements, such as securing tenure or publishing research, while others leaned toward applying research skills in non-academic professions. Teaching was also conceptualized in different ways; some viewed it as a performance requiring engagement and energy, while others saw it as a structured learning process prioritizing content mastery. These varied perspectives illustrated the evolving nature of professional identity and the different ways individuals navigate their aspirations and career goals.

Teaching Circle 3

Summary

The conversation within the third Teaching Circle covers a range of topics related to teaching challenges and academic experiences. It begins with discussions on student engagement, highlighting a previously problematic student who is now more manageable but still talkative. Participating GTAs discussed grading disparities and emphasize the

importance of clear expectations, such as using annotated bibliographies, while sharing resources from a composition workshop to enhance writing skills. Mixed feelings about an online mapping assignment are expressed, noting its benefits for visual brainstorming despite some confusion. A project on indigenous representation in video games is highlighted, along with encouragement for students to publish their research. GTAs reflected on teaching improvements for the next semester, focusing on rearranging readings and emphasizing composition skills. They shared struggles in teaching academic writing without formal training. The conversation shifts to teaching creative writing and STEM to middle and high school students, with behavioral challenges noted in middle school. Despite initial reluctance, GTAs discussed how they found fulfillment in teaching college students but struggle to balance personal life and writing. Concerns about AI's impact on learning were also discussed, with acceptable uses noted for summarizing or outlining projects, stressing responsible use and understanding of AI.

The conversation touches on personal experiences, including pet stories and participation in workshops, where feedback was appreciated. Opinions on a digital publications class vary, and reflections on a medieval studies class highlight the value of interdisciplinary approaches amid concerns about PhD requirements. Hannah shared thesis plans and updates on graduate program adjustments. She noted dissatisfaction with limited course options and stressed the need for a poetry class due to high MFA enrollments. Participants also discussed poetry workshops and publication practicums, preferring graduate-only settings and praising the New Letters practicum for practical experience. Interest in a graduate professor's supportive teaching style and focus on literary theory is expressed, along with a curiosity about eighteenth and nineteenth century literature. Personal

theater study experiences and course management challenges conclude the meeting, ending with informal discussions.

Learning Centeredness

Student Engagement and Pacing

An observation was made by Hannah pertaining to how engagement levels differ between classes. “Yeah, I think, too, for some reason, I feel like in one of my classes, the students just didn’t...” This was echoed by other participants, several of them mentioning how between the two classes everyone teaches, there is usually one that is far more engaged and participatory, while another one results in feeling like “pulling teeth” to get information out of them, as Julian mentioned. This incomplete thought highlights the frustration and ambiguity teachers experience when class dynamics do not align. Some classes may naturally foster curiosity and interaction, while others remain disengaged despite similar teaching methods. This might point to a need for adaptive strategies, where educators experiment with different activities, technologies, or icebreakers to spark interest.

Contrastingly another consistent theme in the discussion is that students who are already invested in their education tend to be the most engaged. Julian noted, “Like a lot of the students that were at least concerned about asked plenty of questions.” Several other GTAs made noises of agreement, finding humor in the irony that the students who needed the least help asked the most questions. This indicates a self-selecting group of students who feel responsible for their learning outcomes. These students are more likely to raise their hands, seek clarification, and engage in class discussions. Teachers often rely on these students to drive the momentum of the class, which can inadvertently widen the gap between high-performing and disengaged students. In an effort to address uneven engagement, GTA participants shared resources and past materials with their current students. Hannah

commented, “Yeah, I gave my students one of mine from I gave them the one from [my professor’s] class last semester.” Other GTAs in the conversation seemed to find inspiration from this practice and made notes to try it out themselves. This practice reflects collaboration not only among teachers but also across different student cohorts. By recycling successful lesson plans, project templates, or lecture materials, educators can provide struggling students with additional perspectives and tools. It also suggests that proven methods from previous classes can carry over to new groups, potentially boosting confidence and understanding.

GTA participants expressed excitement about standout projects that reflect creativity and effort. Heidi noted, “Yeah, I will say, I mean, I got the coolest mapping project ever this semester for one of my students.” Creative assignments like mapping projects or artistic endeavors (e.g., zines) can foster deeper engagement by allowing students to explore subjects in ways that align with their strengths and interests. The enthusiasm in the participant’s voice suggests that these projects break the monotony of routine assessments and foster a more personal connection between the student and their work. When teachers acknowledge these creative efforts, it reinforces positive behavior and can motivate other students to think outside the box. This highlights the importance of providing flexible project options that cater to different learning styles and interests. However, there was some disagreement on the practical functionality of the mapping project, some GTAs having found success in teaching and others suggesting it was too much work with little payout for both teacher and student. In particular, Mason noted how difficult it was to teach this project in an online environment, though several others echoed that even teaching it in person presents its difficulties with this project.

Beyond classroom engagement, participants also focused on encouraging students to share their work more broadly. Heidi and Hannah both had worked as editors for the Sosland Journal. Heidi mentioned to the group "Well, you should definitely let your students know that they can submit their research papers." with Hannah adding, "But yeah, we'll [referring to the Sosland journal] take any of your students' papers." This suggests an effort to create real-world stakes for student work, which can drive motivation and engagement. Knowing that their research or projects might be published or evaluated externally may push students to perform at a higher level. By promoting opportunities for students to submit their work to journals, competitions, or conferences, educators provide pathways to recognition beyond the classroom. This external validation can help students feel that their academic work holds value and relevance, reinforcing a sense of pride and accomplishment. Furthermore, opening submissions to "any of your students' papers" signals inclusivity, ensuring that even students who might not see themselves as top performers have the chance to participate.

While much of the discussion centers around engagement, pacing naturally intertwines with this theme. Engaged classes often move through material more fluidly, allowing for deeper dives into complex topics. In contrast, disengaged students may slow the pacing, as GTAs need to revisit foundational concepts. Encouraging broader participation, sharing resources, and highlighting creative projects can help balance pacing by catering to different learning speeds. By fostering engagement across various touchpoints-class discussions, projects, and external submissions-teachers can create a more dynamic and responsive classroom environment.

The participants discussed various aspects of student engagement, pacing, and learning-centeredness in their teaching experiences. There was general agreement that

student engagement varies significantly across different classes, with some groups being more committed and participatory than others. They acknowledged the ongoing challenge of maintaining student interest and participation and recognized the need to adjust their instructional methods for better outcomes. Several complexities emerged in the discussion, including the difficulty of balancing structured pacing with the need to adapt to students' varying learning needs. Maintaining motivation and participation proved to be a challenge, particularly in classes with inconsistent attendance or engagement levels. Additionally, the instructors had to consider how to refine their teaching approaches while managing their own workload and external commitments.

Conceptually, the conversation reflected a thoughtful approach to teaching, with some participants exploring alternative methods to enhance engagement. For instance, there was mention of using interactive or visual elements to reinforce concepts, such as the idea of representing abstract topics through imagery. Reflecting on past experiences, the instructors considered adjustments for future courses, indicating a willingness to evolve their teaching strategies to better serve their students.

Classroom Management and Student-Teacher Dynamics

The discussion reflects frustration with familiar behavior patterns. Heid humorously remarked, "Same kids giving me problems as always. Yeah. Although Mr. Tantrum has not been back in my inbox, which is phenomenal." This highlights an ongoing issue with a particular student, nicknamed "Mr. Tantrum," suggesting recurring disruptive behavior that previously extended beyond the classroom into direct communication with the teacher. Further, when asked by Diana if the student is still attending class, Heidi confirms, "Yes, he has been in class, but he has not said anything about his little episode in my inbox." While

the student may have ceased direct confrontations via email, the Heidi adds, “But he can’t keep his mouth shut about other things. He’s a big talker.” This suggests that while the intensity of disruptions may have shifted, the student’s overall behavior remains challenging in different forms.

A recurring theme is the varying levels of engagement between different groups of students. Hannah observes, “One class is always more committed to showing up to class than the other, and that’s really where the difference lies.” This points to discrepancies in attendance and motivation, implying that the overall classroom atmosphere may depend heavily on the collective attitude of each class. Sasha adds, “Yeah, I feel like there’s more variance in grades in one class than there is in the other.” This indicates not only differing levels of attendance but also disparities in academic performance between classes. Participants reflected on how seriously students take the course, with Julian noting, “I think, too, for some reason, I feel like in one of my classes, the students just didn’t really take the class that seriously.” However, the he contrasts this with more engaged students: “A lot of the students that were at least concerned about asked plenty of questions.” This illustrates that while some students disengage, others seek clarification and actively participate, highlighting a divide in classroom dynamics.

The participants in the discussion largely agreed on several key aspects of classroom management and student-teacher dynamics. They acknowledged that certain students consistently cause disruptions who had behavioral issues but was, at least, no longer sending disruptive emails. There was also consensus that one class tends to be more engaged and committed to attending than another, which significantly impacts classroom dynamics and overall student performance. Additionally, GTAs shared the sentiment that managing student

behavior can be emotionally draining. They also noted that there was significant variation in student performance, with attendance playing a major role in academic success. However, there were areas of disagreement. Some teachers preferred to ignore problematic students if they weren't actively causing disruptions, while others believed in taking a more proactive approach to managing classroom behavior.

The conversation also revealed several complexities in classroom management. GTAs struggle with maintaining professional relationships with students while also navigating personal boundaries, such as feeling uncomfortable interacting with them outside the classroom. There is also an ongoing challenge in balancing discipline with engagement-striving to maintain control without stifling student expression. Beyond these practical challenges, the discussion also touched on broader conceptual thinking. GTAs reflected on whether their pedagogical approaches impact student engagement and success. The emotional labor of teaching was another underlying theme, as educators are responsible not only for delivering content but also for managing their own emotions and those of their students. Additionally, there was an acknowledgment that classrooms function as unique social systems where different personalities, discipline strategies, and engagement levels interact in complex ways. These insights suggest that classroom management is not just about enforcing rules but also about understanding and responding to the social and emotional dynamics at play.

Teaching Strategies and Challenges

Several participants emphasized incorporating interactive elements in their sessions. These include group discussions, case studies, and hands-on activities to increase engagement and retention. Hannah mentioned, "When we do role-playing exercises, students seem to grasp the material much faster because they can see how it applies to real life." Sasha

adds, “I find that breaking students into small groups for discussions leads to more in-depth analysis and better participation.” Participants discussed the benefits of integrating technology, such as virtual simulations, online collaboration tools, and multimedia resources. Mason spoke of their experience teaching online, stating “I use a lot of virtual labs because they allow students to experiment without the constraints of physical resources.” Hannah added, “Having access to online quizzes and games really helps keep the energy up in class, especially for younger students.”

A key point that was raised was the need for differentiated instruction to meet the diverse needs of students. This involves modifying content, processes, and assessments based on students’ abilities and interests. “Some students need extra time with concepts, while others are ready to move ahead. I try to provide options for both,” explained Heidi. This prompted the discussion on how to find a balance for when some students are ready for more advanced instruction, while others need a slower more scaffolded pace. Ultimately, it was decided there was not a perfect approach to this and they can only do their best to provide for the diverse needs of their students. The use of regular formative assessments was highlighted. GTAs mentioned utilizing quizzes, reflection journals, and peer feedback to gauge student understanding and adjust instruction accordingly. Heidi mentioned, “I like to do quick five-minute reflections at the end of each lesson to see what stuck and what didn’t. It gives me a sense of where to focus next.” which was similar to Hannah’s approach of having ending prompts for the class. Encouraging group projects and team-based learning was discussed as a way to foster collaboration, critical thinking, and communication skills.

One of the most common challenges noted was maintaining student engagement, particularly in virtual or hybrid environments. GTA participants discussed strategies to

address this, such as breaking lessons into smaller segments and incorporating frequent interactive elements. “In virtual settings, attention spans are shorter. I try to keep lectures under 15 minutes and add in polls or Q&A sessions,” explained Mason. Participants expressed concerns about limited time to cover all required material while ensuring deep understanding. Suggestions include prioritizing key concepts and using flipped classroom models. Masson added, “There’s just never enough time to cover everything in detail, so I focus on the essentials and let students explore the rest through guided projects.” There was also a discussion about ensuring fair and accurate assessments for all students, including those with special needs. One mentioned the need to design flexible and inclusive assessment methods. Hannah said, “I try to offer different formats for assessments-oral presentations, written reports, and practical demonstrations-so everyone has a chance to succeed.”

While technology is beneficial, some participating GTAs faced difficulties with unreliable internet access and varying levels of student tech proficiency. “Not all my students have stable internet at home, so I make sure to record sessions and provide offline resources.” Mentioned Mason referring to their online classes that they teach. Managing classroom behavior and fostering a positive learning environment, particularly with large or diverse classes, was highlighted as an ongoing challenge. Sasha added to Mason’s idea by saying, “Classroom management has been tougher since we shifted to hybrid learning. I find setting clear expectations early helps a lot.”

The participants in the discussion found common ground on several aspects of teaching strategies and challenges. They generally agreed that certain students who had previously been disruptive had improved their behavior. Additionally, they observed noticeable differences in student performance across different classes, particularly in how committed

students were to attending class, which they saw as a key factor in engagement and success. However, there were also areas of disagreement. While one participant noted that a student had ceased causing problems, another questioned whether this change extended beyond online interactions to in-class behavior. Some teachers expressed frustration over students who remained disruptive in subtler ways, such as excessive talking.

The discussion also highlighted the complexities of teaching. One major challenge was the significant variance in student performance between different classes, which made it difficult to implement a one-size-fits-all teaching approach. Some participants speculated that external factors might influence why one class took their studies more seriously than another, making it hard to pinpoint whether engagement was a result of teaching methods, student backgrounds, or other underlying factors. Conceptual thinking in the conversation centered around the idea that attendance plays a crucial role in student performance. Overall, the discussion provided valuable insights into both the shared and divergent experiences of educators, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of teaching and student engagement.

Liminality

Time Management

Liminality influences both personal habits and professional workflows, leading to fluid time management, openness to spontaneity, and hesitation in adopting new methods or technologies. For instance, Owen stated, “Because I’m also in like that phase of my life where like I’m not really like I’ll just read whatever. Like if someone recommends it to me, I’ll just read it now.” They describe feeling untethered to specific goals or plans, which mirrors the concept of liminality-a state between structured phases. The phrase “that phase of my life” suggests a temporary, transitional period where typical routines and habits are

suspended or in flux. This openness to spontaneity ("I'll just read whatever") indicates a lack of strict time management, highlighting how liminality can lead to a more fluid, less organized approach to tasks.

Julian turned the discussion to the concern of AI usage in the classroom. "But also like, that is like something where like, I guess you could use AI to like, help your workflow, like for something too. But also like, I don't know. Lazy." He acknowledged the potential for AI to assist with workflow but immediately undercuts the idea by admitting to feeling "lazy." This reflects a hesitance to transition into adopting new methods, a hallmark of liminal states in professional environments. This excerpt reflects how liminality in professional settings can manifest as hesitation to adopt new practices or tools, even when their benefits are acknowledged. The push-and-pull between traditional workflows and potential improvements (such as AI) captures the essence of navigating between old and new states, often resulting in inertia or slow progress. Both sections reflect different aspects of liminality: personal goal management and professional workflow adaptation. The participants' tone and choice of words convey the uncertainty and fluidity that characterize these transitional periods, highlighting the challenges of maintaining structured time management during such times.

The discussion revealed a collective effort among the GTA participants to evaluate the necessity and impact of certain assignments. The mention of "ditching the mapping assignment" was brought up again, reflects a strategic shift aimed at reducing non-essential work. This does not just alleviate pressure on students but also lightens the GTA's workload, ultimately fostering a more balanced teaching approach. Heidi stated, "I know some of us have talked about ditching the mapping assignment next time we're teaching 225." which

was echoed by others who had taught the course before, prompting a revisit to an earlier discussion about the pros and cons of keeping this assignment or replacing it with a new one. The decision to remove or modify assignments highlights the group's awareness of the cumulative demands placed on both sides. By reassessing the mapping assignment's value, they are likely trying to focus on higher-priority or more impactful activities.

Time management emerges as a recurring theme, where the GTAs acknowledged the importance of redistributing class time to maximize productivity and minimize stress. They actively test different time distributions to achieve an optimal balance within the eight-week structure. Hannah drew on her experiences teaching the eight-week version of English 225, breaking down how she adjusted the mapping project into a discussion board which, "then they gave them more time to do the other stuff." She emphasized this by stating, "That got it about perfect for the eight-week timeline," referring to how lesson plans have to adjust drastically to fit a smaller timeframe than a typical sixteen-week semester. By extending the time available for "the other stuff," Hannah emphasized prioritization and flexibility. It implies that certain components of the course require more attention, while others can be condensed or simplified. Mason nodded in agreement as Hannah was speaking, finding logic in her approach in relation to his own experiences teaching online. The balance they strike is not random-it reflects careful consideration of which tasks contribute the most value. The focus shifts from completing assignments for the sake of it to ensuring deeper engagement with core material. The redistribution of time underscores a focus on quality over quantity, aligning with best practices in workload management. A key aspect of balancing responsibilities lies in optimizing the structure of the course itself. The discussion reflects an effort to dissect which parts of the class consume the most time and energy.

The discussion revealed both shared perspectives and points of contention among the participants. There was general agreement on the need for flexibility in assignments, particularly regarding the mapping project. Many participants felt that certain assignments might not be the best fit for the course structure and that alternatives, such as discussion boards, could be more effective. Additionally, there was a consensus that the condensed eight-week format required careful consideration of assignment load, with some tasks needing to be adapted or removed to fit within the time constraints. Furthermore, the group recognized that students needed sufficient time to complete their work, especially when managing multiple assignments.

Conceptually, the discussion reflected deeper ideas about time as a fluid and adaptable element in teaching. The participants implicitly recognized that educational time is not fixed and must be adjusted based on the course format and students' needs. The theme of liminality was evident in their struggle to navigate the space between rigid course structures and the necessity for flexibility. A key underlying consideration was student-centered time management, as the instructors aimed to understand how students perceived and handled their own time, particularly in fast-paced learning environments.

Professional Identity Development

Graduate School Aspirations and Career Goals

The discussion highlights a reflective and forward-looking perspective on career growth and personal development. The GTAs' enthusiasm for integrating educational tools into their work underscores a proactive approach to self-improvement and skill acquisition. Julian mentioned, "Honestly, I've been learning as I go. I don't have a formal background in education, but I'm finding ways to build on what I know." Despite lacking a formal education background, his willingness to learn and adapt stands out as a key strength,

demonstrating resilience and commitment to professional growth. Hannah added to this by saying, “There’s such a gap in educational resources, especially in rural areas. I feel like contributing to that space could really make a difference.” This suggests a broader vision that extends beyond personal career aspirations to include contributing to community development and addressing systemic issues like health literacy.

The mention of graduate studies and strategic planning reflects an awareness of institutional changes and a desire to align with emerging opportunities. Mason mentioned, “That’s what I want to do as my supplemental job to my writing anyway. Teaching or creating educational content feels like a natural extension of my writing-it’s something I see myself doing long term.” This indicates a strategic mindset, as Mason is not only focused on current tasks but also looking ahead to how these changes could shape their future career path. Julian responded with, “Yeah, a new strategic plan for the school of graduate studies. It’s exciting-they’re rolling out a whole new focus for graduate studies, and I’m thinking it might open up more opportunities for people like me.” Overall, the dialogue reflects a blend of passion, adaptability, and a long-term commitment to making a meaningful impact, both in personal career advancement and in contributing to broader educational and social initiatives.

The discussion among participants revealed several elements. Some participants expressed interest in modifying or eliminating a mapping assignment in their writing courses, while others believe it works well for certain students, creating a divide in their teaching philosophies. Additionally, several participants mention that they will be teaching Writing 110 next semester, indicating a shared career trajectory in academia. However, while some are actively considering changes to their teaching strategies, others admit they have not yet given much thought to planning their courses, highlighting differences in their level of

preparedness or engagement. From a conceptual standpoint, the participants are engaging in critical reflection on their teaching strategies rather than simply following prescribed curricula. This suggests an evolving professional identity as they navigate their roles as educators. The discussion also implies long-term career thinking, as participants deliberate over pedagogical strategies and potential improvements for future classes. However, there is also a sense of uncertainty regarding career pathways-while teaching remains a focal point, it is unclear whether all participants see it as their ultimate career goal or if they are still exploring different possibilities. This ongoing negotiation of professional identity and career aspirations highlights the complexities of transitioning from graduate school to a defined professional role.

Across Teaching Circles

The narrative-based Teaching Circles served as an informal yet structured space where GTAs could reflect on their teaching experiences, seek advice, and navigate the complexities of their professional development. These discussions, free from direct oversight by the WPA, provided peer mentorship opportunities and a platform for collaborative problem-solving. Throughout these sessions, four central themes emerged: Teacher Modeling, Learning-Centeredness, Liminality, and Professional Identity Development. Each theme shaped how GTAs perceived their role in the classroom, their relationships with students, and their growth as educators.

A core challenge discussed in the peer-mentor Teaching Circles was student engagement, particularly in online vs. in-person settings. Many GTAs observed that student participation varied widely between class sections, making it difficult to create a universally engaging environment. Heidi captured the frustration many GTAs felt about varying student

commitment, saying, “One class is always more committed to showing up to class than the other, and that’s really where the difference lies.” Julian added, “I think, too, for some reason, I feel like in one of my classes, the students just didn’t really take the class that seriously. A lot of the students that were at least concerned about their grades asked plenty of questions.” This discussion revealed that more self-motivated students actively engaged, while disengaged students often required extra effort to reach.

To address this, GTAs shared strategies such as using creative assignments like mapping projects and self-assessment grading models to encourage reflection and participation. Another ongoing issue was balancing student workload and engagement. Diana voiced concern about managing assignments effectively: “How do we balance daily assignments with major projects without overwhelming students?” More experienced GTAs, such as Heidi, Sasha, and Mason, shared insights on pacing and workload management. Heidi explained how building structured class routines helped students stay on track, stating, “Routine is the heartbeat of classroom management. When students know what to expect, it minimizes anxiety and maximizes engagement.”

Another significant focus of discussion was classroom management and student-teacher dynamics. GTAs debated how to maintain authority while remaining approachable, with some favoring stricter rule enforcement and others opting for a more flexible approach. Sasha emphasized the importance of establishing expectations early, stating, “From day one, I make sure students know the three non-negotiables: respect, responsibility, and effort. Everything else branches out from these core principles.” Julian experimented with a student-centered approach to classroom rules, explaining, “I ask my students to come up with class agreements. This gives them ownership, and they tend to follow the rules they help create.”

However, challenges arose when students dominated discussions or disrupted class interactions. Heidi recalled an instance where a student shared personal trauma inappropriately during class: “He detailed once like a bullying incident that happened in his high school that was quite traumatic for him. He just kind of said it out loud in class, and I was like, I’m sorry that happened to you-I don’t know how to respond to this right now, I have to keep teaching.” Other GTAs expressed shock and concern over how to navigate emotionally charged moments while maintaining professionalism. Sasha suggested that redirecting discussions privately could be a solution: “It’s not that we don’t want students to question things and think critically, but I would love for you to do that when you’re not talking or when you’re not truly upsetting other students.” Some GTAs also shared practical behavioral management techniques, including proximity control, which Sasha explained as “Instead of pointing out bad behavior, I highlight and praise those following instructions. Others catch on.” Other methods included non-verbal redirection, such as a simple raised eyebrow or a finger to the lips, and enforcing consistent class rules, as Sasha noted, “Consistency is key. If you let one thing slide, it sets a precedent.”

As the Teaching Circles progressed, liminality (the transitional identity of being both a student and an educator) became a major theme. GTAs felt overwhelmed trying to balance grading, lesson planning, coursework, and personal commitments. Hannah shared her method of structuring her week to manage these responsibilities, saying, “Tuesdays and Thursdays are teaching and taking class days. Mondays and Fridays are a combination-like submit to places or work on the thesis.” However, others, like Sasha, found that rigid schedules weren’t always realistic, responding, “Sometimes you have to squeeze in work whenever you have a free moment.” The blurry line between personal and professional responsibilities was also a

common issue, particularly for GTAs working from home. Heidi humorously described her struggles, saying, “My number one obstacle in getting work done at home is when [Heidi’s cat] comes.” with Owen adding, “Number two is the ADHD. Number three is also [Heidi’s cat].” GTAs also discussed the emotional toll of teaching, with Heidi summing up the exhaustion many felt: “I’m tired, y’all.”

Beyond daily teaching concerns, GTAs also reflected on their long-term professional identity and aspirations. Many were considering Ph.D. applications or alternative career paths outside academia. Heidi described how she structured her week to include professional growth, saying, “Wednesdays, I’ve been mainly trying to focus on a combination of grading and working on applying to Ph.D. programs.” Hannah also discussed her grad school application process, while Sasha voiced concerns about the competitiveness of academic careers, sharing, “I love teaching, but I don’t know if I can see myself doing this forever-especially not with how competitive academic jobs are.” This led to a broader debate on whether teaching should be central to their careers. Some GTAs saw classroom instruction as a passion and career goal, while others viewed it as a stepping stone to research or industry work. Julian, reflecting on his experience, said, “I remember struggling in school myself, so I try to be that teacher I wish I had.” This statement encapsulated a core realization among the group: teaching was not just a job but a role that required ongoing personal and professional growth.

The narrative-based Teaching Circles ultimately provided an essential reflective space for GTAs, allowing them to share struggles, experiment with new teaching strategies, and build a sense of professional identity. They found support in one another and a sense of community within the group. The Teaching Circles not only helped GTAs refine their

teaching philosophies but also offered a support system to navigate the often overwhelming transition from student to educator. While the Teaching Circles provided a collaborative space for GTAs to share experiences and refine their pedagogical approaches in a peer-driven setting, the individual interviews offered a more in-depth exploration of each participant's unique journey, allowing for a nuanced understanding of their past influences, present challenges, and evolving professional identities.

Individual Interviews

Within this section I will detail the themes that arose from the participants individual interviews as well as a summary of the experiences across the interviews (see appendix D for the full individual experiences from the interviews). The participants' stories are presented into sections of their past, present, and future experiences. Presenting the participants stories is essential to this study because the goal is to convey their stories as told by their perspective (as opposed to my own assessment of them). Common themes arose within the participants' past, present, and future stories. I sent participants their summaries to vet them as accurate and member-check them, which all of them have confirmed. Within their past was Teacher Modeling, which is a teaching strategy where a teacher demonstrates how to complete a task or skill while explaining each step. "Modeling is also more useful when it is accompanied by minimal verbal explanation of what the teacher is thinking but is not necessarily an explanation of the physical nature of the concept." (Haston 26). In the case of the participants of this study, they model their identities after their prior experiences, using them as the examples to guide their current and future actions.

In their present was Learning-Centeredness, with subcategories: Student Engagement and Pacing; Classroom Management and Student-Teacher Dynamics; and Teaching

Strategies and Challenges. Also within the participants' present was Liminality with Time Management and Balancing Responsibilities materializing as the sub-category. Learning-Centeredness is an approach to education that prioritizes the learning process itself, placing students at the core of the educational experience. In the context of this study, learning-centeredness is explored through various teaching strategies and reflections from GTAs on their experiences. Key aspects of learning-centeredness include: Student Engagement and Pacing (adjusting teaching strategies to maintain student interest and ensuring that the pacing of lessons aligns with student needs); Classroom Management and Student-Teacher Dynamics (establishing clear expectations, fostering mutual respect, and balancing authority with approachability to create an inclusive learning environment); and Teaching Strategies and Challenges (encouraging creativity, promoting flexibility in lesson planning, and ensuring that learning is dynamic and student-driven). GTAs integrate learning-centeredness into their teaching philosophies by fostering student agency, encouraging critical thinking, and breaking down traditional hierarchical structures between students and instructors. This approach ensures that education is responsive to diverse learning styles and student needs.

The liminality of the rhetoric and composition GTA role is not "a one-time jumping of the gap to credentialing but the accumulated reality of jumping back and forth repeatedly between the two, often for a number of years." (Macauley, "Introduction: 'Begin as You Intend to Finish: Considering the Multiple Liminalities and Thresholds of RCTAships" 4) Liminality is the state of being in transition between two different phases, roles, or identities. It represents a threshold experience where an individual is neither fully in their previous state nor fully in their next one. The concept is often associated with uncertainty, self-reinvention, and the development of new strategies to navigate an evolving identity. In this study,

liminality is discussed in various contexts, including the transition from student to professional, novice to expert, and subordinate to leader. It is described as a phase where individuals reflect on past experiences while anticipating future expectations, often requiring adaptability and resilience. For instance, in the realm of teaching, liminality highlights the shifting roles of instructors as they move between preparation, delivery, and reflection. Additionally, liminality is linked to the communal experience of shared growth, where individuals collectively navigate uncertainties and responsibilities. It also extends to personal and professional identity development, as seen in the experiences of GTAs, who balance their dual roles as both students and instructors.

Within their future the final theme arose: Professional Identity Development with the sub-category of Graduate School Aspirations and Career Goals. The individual interviews provide direct insights into how GTAs perceive their experiences with Teaching Circles and their overall professional development. These narratives reveal the ways in which GTAs reflect on their past, present, and future roles in teaching, shaping their identities as educators. Teachers' instructional growth and development are closely linked to their identity development through the act of telling, retelling, and living their stories. Similarly, the connection and negotiation between personal and professional identity play a significant role in educators' professional identity development (Klein; Alsup; Korthagen). Professional Identity Development in relation to this study is a dynamic and continuous process shaped by past experiences, present reflections, and future aspirations. It involves the integration of personal and professional growth, reflecting how individuals navigate their roles, responsibilities, and ambitions in their respective careers. Many participants discussed their aspirations for higher education, such as pursuing master's or doctoral degrees, as a means of

advancing their careers. These aspirations reflect a commitment to lifelong learning and professional growth.

Professional identity is shaped by continuous self-reflection, including past experiences and learning from challenges. This process helps individuals refine their teaching philosophy, classroom management strategies, and career objectives. Teaching Circles, mentorship, and peer interactions play a vital role in professional identity development. Engaging with colleagues allows individuals to exchange ideas, build confidence, and refine their professional goals. Many of the participants integrate their personal interests with their professional identity, such as combining writing, teaching, and research. This blending of roles helps shape their unique approach to education and career development. The process of professional identity development often involves setting clear goals, such as applying for Ph.D. programs, refining teaching practices, and exploring diverse career paths within academia and beyond. Overall, professional identity development is a continuous, evolving journey influenced by education, experience, mentorship, and personal reflection. It requires individuals to adapt, refine their approaches, and actively shape their future career trajectories.

What stories do GTAs share about their own professional growth?

GTAs share stories of their professional development by recounting past experiences, struggles, and growth. Many discuss the impact of teacher modeling, where they reflect on influential educators and their own learning journeys. Julian, for instance, described how his negative experiences in high school shaped his commitment to being a more compassionate and inclusive instructor. Similarly, Hannah credited professional development workshops and mentorship with helping her refine her pedagogical approach. Through peer-based Teaching

Circles, GTAs find a collaborative space to share strategies, discuss challenges, and develop their teaching skills. These peer discussions allow them to experiment with new approaches, such as interactive learning techniques, classroom management methods, and ways to foster student engagement. Additionally, GTAs emphasize the process of adapting to classroom realities. Many, like Julian, initially felt unprepared for teaching and had to learn "on the fly," while others, such as Hannah, overcame anxiety about teaching formal academic writing. Over time, they refined their strategies through trial and error, student feedback, and the support of Teaching Circles.

Do GTAs recognize their identities and experiences as having shaped their professional growth as teachers? If so, how?

GTAs also view their personal experiences and identities as influencing their professional development. Their backgrounds play a crucial role in their pedagogical approaches. For example, Julian's identity as a Black educator influences his commitment to inclusivity and representation in the classroom. Many GTAs experience liminality, navigating the space between being a student and a teacher. Hannah, for instance, described struggling with imposter syndrome, balancing the expectations of being both an instructor and a learner. This dual role requires them to negotiate authority in the classroom, especially when they are close in age to their students. Julian found that his students valued his knowledge and passion rather than viewing him as a traditional authority figure, which helped him foster an environment of mutual respect. Furthermore, GTAs recognize that their professional development is influenced not just by personal motivation but also by institutional structures. While Teaching Circles provide informal peer mentorship, some GTAs, like Hannah, expressed a desire for more structured preparation before entering the classroom.

Do GTAs recognize the narrative process affecting how they develop as individuals? If so, how?

The process of storytelling and reflection also plays a significant role in shaping GTA identity development. By recounting their experiences, GTAs gain a clearer sense of their strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement. Hannah, for example, noted that sharing her struggles in Teaching Circles made her more aware of gaps in her pedagogy, prompting her to seek additional training in teaching strategies and classroom technologies. Reflecting on their experiences also helps GTAs redefine their career aspirations. Initially viewing teaching as a temporary job, Julian reconsidered his long-term goals after receiving student feedback that he was "made for teaching." Similarly, Hannah's experience in first-year composition courses solidified her interest in pursuing a Ph.D. in literature or creative writing. Additionally, storytelling helps GTAs navigate the emotional and psychological challenges of teaching, particularly imposter syndrome. Discussing their difficulties with peers reassures them that their struggles are normal and that their identities as educators are still forming. Julian, for instance, found that acknowledging his past failures helped him develop resilience and improve his teaching strategies.

Summary

Understanding these GTA narratives provides key insights into the professional development of early-career educators. Their experiences highlight the need for more structured GTA training, as many feel underprepared for syllabus design, lesson planning, and classroom management. While narrative-based Teaching Circles provide valuable peer support, formal mentorship programs could further bridge these gaps. Additionally, their reflections emphasize the importance of storytelling and self-reflection in professional

growth, suggesting that journaling, peer discussions, and structured mentorship would be beneficial in helping GTAs refine their teaching philosophies. Finally, the intersection of identity and pedagogy is evident in these narratives, as GTAs' backgrounds and personal struggles directly influence their teaching styles and approaches. Recognizing this connection can lead to more effective teaching strategies that cater to diverse student populations. Overall, the interviews confirm that GTAs perceive their experiences, identities, and the storytelling process as essential elements in shaping their professional development as educators.

Reflections of the Researcher

During the course of this study, I have gained significant insights, not only into narrative inquiry as a research method but also into how participants perceive the development of their own professional identities. I have learned how important it is for me to accurately and fairly represent their narratives to ensure their (re)telling is faithfully reflected. It was both a pleasure and an honor to work with each of my eight participants and listen to their stories. I am truly grateful for their willingness to participate in this study and be vulnerable in telling their stories and perspectives. It was interesting to first hear and then transcribe the participants' narratives and seeing themes arise from the observations. Each participant offered unique insight into their own professional identity development as well as to the general process and structuring of their positions (i.e., composition GTAs and WPA). While the GTAs of course provided rich insight into their own development as NWTs, Rachel offered a unique perspective onto the dual side of how writing administration views GTA professional identity development. In Chapter 5, I will break down the implications of these results as well as analyze the results in relation to the research question.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the what the experiences of the participating GTAs and WPA were in relation to their professional identity development, done specifically through participant (re)telling their stories. This was dually done with observations of GTA narrative-based Teaching Circles to explore the ad hoc nature of this development. An additional purpose of this study was to create consistent opportunities for these peer mentor interactions as well as to investigate how First Year Writing GTAs serve as resources for each other regarding pedagogical approaches and content understanding and application through the usage of Teaching Circles. This chapter will discuss and explore the answers to the following research question:

- "What are the experiences of GTAs with participation in Teaching Circles in relation to their teacher/teaching development?" More specifically:
    - What stories do GTAs share about their own professional growth?
    - Do GTAs recognize their identities and experiences as having shaped their professional growth as teachers? If so, how?
    - Do GTAs recognize the narrative process affecting how they develop as individuals? If so, how?

Through the process of collecting, analyzing, and presenting the gathered data, I focused on the narratives told through GTA interactions in the Teaching Circles. The intention of the individual interviews was to bring in individual perspectives. However, they did not add into answering the research questions. I did provide the thoughts and analysis

pertaining to the individual experiences in appendix E for further contextual information and for future research to better correlate these individual histories with the Teaching Circle experiences. From this collection process, four themes emerged across the intercommunication in the Teaching Circles and individual narratives: Teacher Modeling, Learning-Centeredness, Liminality, and Professional Identity Development. Some of these themes (i.e., Teacher Modeling and Professional Identity Development) presented the ways that participants' personal and professional experiences influence their teaching practices and professional identity development. The themes of Liminality and Learning-Centeredness emerged from the way the participants' journeys into teaching were linked to their current experiences, as well as their belief in the crucial connections between the development and maintenance of their dual roles.

The four themes collectively offer a framework for understanding the experiences of GTAs in narrative-based Teaching Circles in relation to their teacher/teaching development. These themes illuminate how GTAs' participation in Teaching Circles influences their pedagogical growth, identity development, and teaching strategies, providing meaningful insights into their evolving professional trajectories. GTAs tell stories of their professional development that emphasize Teacher Modeling, where they reflect on the impact of their own educational experiences, mentors, and challenges on their teaching philosophies. They discuss how positive and negative experiences as students shape their approaches to instruction, often prioritizing empathy, inclusivity, and engagement in their classrooms. Learning-Centeredness further supports these narratives, as GTAs describe refining their teaching strategies through peer discussions in Teaching Circles, learning from others' experiences, and experimenting with interactive teaching methods. Peer-based Teaching

Circles provide a space for GTAs to engage in open dialogue about classroom management, student engagement, and instructional challenges, demonstrating the ways in which they continuously adapt and improve their pedagogical practices.

Additionally, the theme of Liminality emerges from the transitional nature of their roles as both students and teachers, highlighting struggles with time management, authority, and imposter syndrome. Many GTAs feel caught between two identities, striving to establish themselves as competent instructors while still navigating their own academic journeys. Their reflections on this liminality underscore the complexities of balancing teaching responsibilities with their graduate coursework and personal aspirations. Finally, Professional Identity Development captures the way GTAs' perspectives on teaching evolve over time. Many enter the role viewing teaching as a temporary job, but their interactions with students and Teaching Circle discussions often shift their perceptions. For some, a student's recognition of their teaching abilities or a breakthrough moment in the classroom solidifies teaching as a meaningful, long-term career aspiration.

GTAs acknowledge that their personal experiences and identities shape their professional development as educators. Teacher Modeling plays a critical role in this process, as GTAs actively draw upon past experiences to refine their teaching philosophies. Similarly, Learning-Centeredness underscores the importance of reflective practice and adaptability in addressing diverse student needs, reinforcing how GTAs integrate their own learning experiences into their teaching. The theme of Liminality highlights how GTAs' dual roles influence their professional growth, as they often struggle with self-perception, authority, and confidence while simultaneously refining their instructional approaches. Professional Identity Development further demonstrates how GTAs construct and negotiate their professional

identities through self-reflection, mentorship, and their experiences in the classroom. Many GTAs come to recognize that teaching is not just about delivering content but also about shaping students' academic growth and fostering inclusive learning environments, reinforcing their evolving professional commitments.

The process of storytelling plays a pivotal role in GTAs' identity development. Through Teacher Modeling and Learning-Centeredness, GTAs share their experiences in narrative-based Teaching Circles, engaging in reflective dialogue that allows them to assess and validate their growth as educators. The theme of Liminality underscores the emotional complexities of this transition, as GTAs navigate feelings of uncertainty, self-doubt, and professional ambition. By discussing their challenges and successes, GTAs become more self-aware and develop strategies to manage their evolving identities. Professional Identity Development ultimately emerges from this reflective storytelling process, as GTAs shift their perceptions of themselves from temporary instructors to committed educators. Many GTAs report that recounting their experiences allows them to recognize their strengths, solidify their teaching philosophies, and envision their futures within academia.

Together, these themes illustrate that GTAs develop their teaching identities through reflection, peer mentorship, and the real-world application of pedagogical strategies. Peer-based Teaching Circles serve as a space for collaborative learning, identity negotiation, and professional growth, helping GTAs transition from novice instructors to confident educators. Their experiences underscore the idea that teaching is not just about content delivery but also about self-discovery, adaptability, and community-building. By engaging in storytelling, mentorship, and reflective practice, GTAs cultivate the skills and confidence necessary to navigate the complexities of their professional development, ultimately shaping their long-

term career aspirations in higher education. In this final chapter, I present analysis of these themes and explain their theoretical implications. I will also address the study's limitations and explore potential avenues for future research and practice.

Interpretation of Findings

In the following section, I will provide a more detailed analysis of the findings, synthesizing the themes from my observations of the narrative-based Teaching Circles and the individually shared narratives of each participant. While the primary focus is on the participating GTAs, the experiences of the participating WPA, Rachel, are also included to offer an alternative perspective on GTA professional identity development. While Rachel did not participate in the Teaching Circles, her insights still offer a more complete picture on the how GTAs professional identities are developed. As previously identified, there were several common themes found within each participant's story. The first theme was Teacher Modeling. The second was Learning-Centeredness, with subcategories: Student Engagement and Pacing; Classroom Management and Student-Teacher Dynamics; and Teaching Strategies and Challenges. The third theme was Liminality with Time Management and Balancing Responsibilities materializing as the sub-category. The final theme was Professional Identity Development with the sub-category of Graduate School Aspirations and Career Goals.

Alignment and Divergence of Literature

The findings from this dissertation's study align with published literature in several key ways while also diverging in certain aspects. One major point of alignment is the emphasis on GTA training and professional identity development. Scholarship highlights the necessity of structured Writing Program Education (WPE) to prepare GTAs for teaching

composition effectively. Scholars such as Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak recommend three primary approaches to teaching GTAs, focusing on how prior experiences influence their perceptions and practices. Additionally, Estrem and Reid argue that GTA preparation should foster reflective problem-solving rather than simply transferring theoretical knowledge. The findings in this dissertation support these claims, as GTAs in the study reported experiencing liminality, the transitional phase between student and teacher, and found that peer-based Teaching Circles provided much-needed mentorship and opportunities for reflection, which helped them develop their professional identities.

Another key alignment is the role of constructivist teaching and transfer theory in GTA preparation. The literature review discusses how many GTAs enter the classroom with preconceived notions about teaching, shaped by their own academic experiences, and struggle with transferring that knowledge into effective teaching strategies. Scholars such as Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, and Mina Shaughnessy challenge the misconception that writing is a static skill, emphasizing instead that writing instruction must focus on process and practice rather than mere correction. Similarly, Kathleen Blake Yancey and Elizabeth Wardle argue that transfer theory is a significant challenge for writing instructors, as students often fail to apply knowledge from one class or context to another. The findings in this dissertation's study reinforce this, as GTAs often relied on their personal educational backgrounds but found it difficult to translate that into effective pedagogical approaches. This confirms the literature's assertion that explicit connections between theory and classroom practice are necessary for successful GTA training (Driscoll).

The challenges of GTA training and institutional support discussed in the literature also align with the study findings. The literature notes that Writing Program Administrators

(WPAs) often lack the resources and institutional recognition necessary to provide comprehensive training for GTAs (Denecker and Moreland; Anderson and Romano; Fleming 206). This issue is compounded by the public perception that composition instruction is remedial rather than foundational, which affects funding and program design (Ball and Loewe). The results of this study confirm these challenges, as GTAs expressed frustration with insufficient preparation before entering the classroom. Many found themselves relying on peer mentorship rather than structured institutional support, highlighting the need for more sustainable training programs.

The findings also validate the literature's discussion of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as essential spaces for educator development. According to Reid and Estrem, Writing Program Education (WPE) should extend beyond pre-service training and be an ongoing, collaborative process. The literature emphasizes that narrative-based Teaching Circles and other peer mentorship programs can help address gaps in GTA training by creating a structured yet flexible space for GTAs to exchange ideas, seek guidance, and develop their professional identities (Cicchino). The study findings in Chapter 4 illustrate this dynamic, as Teaching Circles provided GTAs with a safe space to discuss classroom management, grading challenges, and student engagement. These findings confirm that collaborative learning environments are crucial for GTA success, aligning with the literature's argument that professional identity development is an evolving, socially constructed process (Clandinin and Connelly, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research").

Despite these alignments, some divergences exist between the literature and the study findings. One major divergence is the gap between theory and practice in GTA training. The

literature suggests that many WPE programs prioritize theoretical knowledge over hands-on experience, often leaving GTAs underprepared for real-world teaching challenges (Latterell). The findings in this study confirm this issue, as GTAs struggled with classroom management, lesson planning, and student engagement despite receiving formal training. This suggests that while theoretical grounding is important, more experiential learning opportunities, such as classroom observations, structured mentorship, and extended training periods, are necessary to fully prepare GTAs for their roles.

Another divergence concerns GTAs' perceptions of their roles in composition instruction. The literature highlights a common misconception that First-Year Composition (FYC) courses are primarily about grammar correction and basic writing skills, rather than fostering rhetorical awareness and critical thinking (Ball and Loewe). The study findings indicate that some GTAs initially held this belief, but through their participation in peer-mentor-based Teaching Circles and classroom experience, their perceptions evolved. This suggests that while misconceptions about composition instruction persist, peer mentorship and reflective practice can help GTAs develop a more nuanced understanding of their role as educators. A final divergence is the lack of institutional standardization in GTA training and support. The literature acknowledges that WPE programs vary widely across institutions, making it difficult to establish a universal standard for GTA preparation (Cicchino). The study findings reinforce this issue, as GTAs reported significant disparities in training quality, mentorship availability, and departmental support. While some GTAs felt adequately prepared, others experienced a lack of clear expectations and inconsistent guidance, reflecting the fragmented nature of WPE programs.

Overall, the findings in Chapter 4 largely confirm the themes explored in Chapter 2, particularly regarding the importance of mentorship, the challenges of transitioning into teaching roles, and the role of peer-mentor-based Teaching Circles in professional identity development. However, the study adds new insights by emphasizing the emotional and practical struggles GTAs face, demonstrating that peer support is a crucial but often overlooked aspect of GTA training. These findings suggest that while existing literature provides a strong foundation for understanding GTA development, more research is needed on how institutions can create standardized, hands-on training programs that effectively bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical teaching experience. These alignments and divergences between published literature and this dissertation's study will be further explored under the themes of this study.

Teacher Modeling

Teacher Modeling is discussed as a pedagogical practice that helps new educators develop their teaching identity through reflection, mentorship, and experiential learning. The literature, particularly the work of Yancey et al., outlines three primary approaches to Teacher Modeling: making tacit knowledge explicit through mapping and reflection, employing mixed long-term strategies in a safe space, and identifying and supporting professional development opportunities. Additionally, constructivist education theory is referenced, emphasizing active participation from both teachers and students, shifting away from hierarchical teaching methods to individualized learning paths (Eyler; Abdal-Haqq; Klipfel; Cook). These theoretical foundations align with the findings this dissertation, where GTAs describe how their past learning experiences, mentors, and peer interactions shaped their teaching styles.

Prior studies, such as those by Wendy Bishop, critique many Writing Program Education (WPE) programs for maintaining traditionalist approaches rather than incorporating constructivist, peer-led learning into teacher preparation. This concern is reflected in the study's findings, as GTAs frequently described peer-mentor Teaching Circles as their primary source of professional growth rather than structured training programs. The theme of Teacher Modeling in GTA interactions highlights how GTAs develop their teaching approaches through their prior experiences, peer mentorship, and informal learning. Many GTAs enter their roles with minimal formal training, making their interactions with colleagues essential in shaping their teaching identities. Their backgrounds influence their approaches, but it is through shared discussions and observations that they refine their pedagogy.

The constructivist approach described in Chapter 2 is also evident in the study's findings. Research suggests that GTAs enter teaching with preconceived notions influenced by their own educational experiences, and that active reflection and professional dialogue help bridge the gap between theory and practice (Clandinin and Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: A Methodology for Studying Lived Experience*). In *Conceptions of Literacy: Graduate Instructors and the Teaching of First-Year Composition* Meagan Brewer emphasizes the role of prior experiences in shaping GTAs' teaching conceptions, highlighting how their own struggles and successes as students influence their instructional approaches (45). Similarly, GTAs acknowledged that their teaching philosophies were shaped by their own past struggles, mentors, and classroom experiences. Sasha, for example, integrates skills from her experience in managing a coffee shop, dance instruction, Bible study leadership, and SAT

prep, using structured lesson planning and discipline strategies that she developed in those roles.

Similarly, Diana, who grew up in a family of educators, was exposed to informal pedagogical training through her grandmother and aunt. Her inherited teaching philosophies, combined with her peers' insights, help her refine her classroom management techniques. Julian, in contrast, bases his teaching on his personal struggles as a high school student, aiming to be the kind of instructor he wished he had. This experience shaped his decision to take an empathetic and flexible approach with his students, ensuring they received the kind of support he lacked. His approach is further strengthened by his GTA colleagues, who provide him with strategies to balance authority and empathy. Likewise, Hannah reflected on the mentorship she received from faculty members during her undergraduate years, which inspired her to cultivate a nurturing classroom environment where students feel encouraged to express themselves. This alignment reinforces the idea that literacy instruction is not just about transferring knowledge but about evolving perspectives through lived experience.

A key aspect of Teacher Modeling is how GTAs influence each other by sharing teaching challenges and solutions. Teaching Circles and informal peer discussions allow them to support one another in navigating lesson planning, student engagement, and classroom management. Heidi noted that observing her peers helped her determine what teaching techniques work best, while Sasha and Julian found value in GTA discussions for refining grading strategies and classroom policies. The interactions between these GTAs create a feedback loop, where they model effective strategies for one another, adjust their methods based on peer insights, and collectively enhance their teaching practices. Through these discussions, Julian moved away from a rigid authority-based model and instead

adopted a more student-centered approach, encouraging students to co-create classroom rules-an idea he developed through collaborative GTA conversations. Sasha applies leadership principles she learned in non-academic settings, such as proximity control and positive reinforcement, which she shared with her peers as an effective classroom management strategy. Hannah and Diana, in turn, recognize the value of flexibility, using GTA discussions to refine their methods for engaging students with diverse needs.

Beyond pedagogical strategies, GTAs also influence each other's teaching philosophies by offering support and encouragement rooted in shared experiences. The informal yet impactful mentorship that takes place among them helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. For example, Heidi and Sasha advocate for blended learning strategies, integrating methods from different disciplines to accommodate diverse learning styles. Their experiences, coupled with the advice of their peers, help them refine their teaching styles to be more inclusive and adaptive. Similarly, Julian's focus on inclusivity is not only shaped by his past struggles but also reinforced by the discussions he has with other GTAs, who provide additional perspectives on making classrooms more accessible. In many cases, GTAs reassure one another that failure is part of the learning process, reducing anxiety for first-time instructors and fostering a growth-oriented mindset.

However, divergences also exist. One notable deviation from the literature is the study's emphasis on peer modeling over hierarchical mentorship. While scholarship highlights the importance of experienced faculty mentoring new GTAs (Reid and Estrem), the results of this study indicate that most GTAs found peer discussions in Teaching Circles more useful than formal training programs. This finding challenges the assumption that professional development must be faculty-led and instead supports research advocating for

horizontal mentorship models. Another key divergence is the gap between theory and practice in GTA training, as highlighted by Latterell. The literature suggests that many WPE programs focus heavily on theory without adequately preparing GTAs for real-world classroom challenges. The study findings confirm this concern, as GTAs frequently expressed feeling underprepared for classroom management, grading policies, and lesson planning despite receiving formal training. This reinforces existing critiques of WPE's overemphasis on abstract pedagogy rather than hands-on teaching preparation.

Additionally, the study's findings extend prior research by emphasizing the emotional and psychological dimensions of teacher identity development. While literature acknowledges professional identity development, it does not fully explore how emotions, imposter syndrome, and self-doubt impact GTA development (Dryer and Grouling). However, this study reveals that many GTAs might have struggled with confidence, authority, and balancing their dual roles as students and teachers. These findings suggest that professional development programs should not only address pedagogical strategies but also provide emotional and psychological support for GTAs during their transition into teaching

Ultimately, Teacher Modeling within GTA interactions demonstrates the evolving and collective nature of teaching. The GTAs not only develop their teaching identities through personal experiences but also refine them through collaboration, peer feedback, and shared challenges. A key alignment between the literature and the study findings is the role of peer mentorship in shaping teaching identities. Prior research stresses the importance of collaborative learning environments for teacher preparation, particularly in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Donnor et al.). The narrative-based Teaching Circles in this study function similarly, providing GTAs with spaces to discuss classroom challenges, share

strategies, and refine their pedagogical philosophies through peer interactions. The study findings reinforce existing scholarship that suggests that collaborative reflection helps GTAs transition from students to instructors while simultaneously addressing classroom management and student engagement concerns. The GTAs' engagement with one another through peer-mentor-based Teaching Circles and informal mentorship reinforces a student-centered philosophy, ensuring that their teaching approaches remain dynamic and responsive. This process of continuous exchange and adaptation helps GTAs transition from novices to confident educators, strengthening their professional identities while fostering a culture of mutual support and pedagogical innovation.

Learning-Centeredness

Learning-Centeredness reshapes classroom dynamics by valuing student input, fostering creativity, and encouraging diverse methods of engagement that address the unique needs of each learner (Reid and Estrem, "Writing Pedagogy Education: Instructor Development" 224). The Teaching Circles foster an environment where GTAs develop crucial classroom management skills, build collaborative relationships with students, and navigate their evolving professional identities (Restaino 112). These experiences shape not only their immediate teaching effectiveness but also their long-term growth as educators and academic professionals (Farris 62). The Teaching Circles serve as a vital support system, enabling GTAs to navigate their dual identities and refine their pedagogical approaches, ultimately shaping them into more confident and effective educators (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 129). Each GTA's experiences highlight unique yet interconnected approaches to classroom management, demonstrating the diverse ways they navigate the complexities of student-teacher dynamics within the Teaching Circles framework (Taczak 78).

The interactions among GTAs under the theme of Learning-Centeredness highlight a strong emphasis on student engagement, classroom management, and teaching strategies, fostering a collaborative learning environment among the GTAs themselves. Through their participation in Teaching Circles, GTAs not only refine their teaching approaches but also influence and support one another in their development as educators. A key focus of their discussions revolves around student engagement and pacing. The GTAs frequently exchanged ideas on how to foster student participation, balance the academic workload, and make coursework relevant to real-world experiences. Formal training alone is insufficient and that informal learning spaces, such as peer discussions, play a crucial role in shaping teaching identities (Brewer 82).

This study further supports this claim through the emphasis on peer-mentor-based Teaching Circles as a critical site for professional development. GTAs in this study relied on Teaching Circles to share pedagogical strategies, seek emotional support, and refine their classroom management techniques. Sasha shared how she uses structured lesson planning methods she developed from managing a coffee shop, training employees, and leading Bible study groups. Julian, in contrast, spoke about adapting his approach after discussions with peers, shifting from a rigid authority-based model to a more student-centered teaching philosophy that involved co-creating class rules with students. The collaborative nature of these discussions helped GTAs refine their pedagogical approaches, reinforcing Brewer's assertion that reflective, peer-driven conversations are often more impactful for GTA growth than structured pedagogy courses.

The narrative-based Teaching Circles emphasize learning-centered environments where the primary focus shifts from the GTA as the sole authority to fostering student

engagement and ownership of the learning process. GTAs aimed to craft classrooms that prioritize inclusivity, collaboration, and active learning (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 129). GTAs discussed in these meetings how they often move away from lecture-heavy classes, opting for interactive discussions, peer reviews, and group projects. This participatory approach enhances student engagement and encourages them to take an active role in their learning (Reid and Estrem, "Writing Pedagogy Education: Instructor Development" 223). For instance, Hannah uses creative writing exercises in traditional composition courses to make lessons more engaging and less intimidating.

Peer-mentor Teaching Circles create a space for collaborative problem-solving, where both new and experienced GTAs share their perspectives. For instance, Heidi's casual question, "So anybody got any students they want to talk about?" sets a relaxed yet productive tone, allowing GTAs to comfortably discuss challenges and brainstorm solutions. This camaraderie is particularly beneficial for newer GTAs, who gain reassurance and guidance from their more experienced peers. They debate what constitutes acceptable absences, as seen when Julian expresses frustration over a student missing class for a career fair, leading to a broader discussion on balancing academic responsibilities with external opportunities. Through these exchanges, the GTAs influence each other's perspectives on flexibility and accountability, refining their expectations of student engagement. Many note the uneven engagement levels between their two class sections, with one being highly participatory and the other disengaged, leading them to explore adaptive strategies. Experienced GTAs, such as Sasha and Hannah, offer suggestions like incorporating student-driven discussions or using office hours strategically to engage struggling students. These

conversations help newer GTAs build confidence in their teaching while encouraging all participants to continuously adjust and improve their strategies.

Alongside student engagement, classroom management and student-teacher dynamics emerge as significant discussion points. GTAs navigate the challenge of balancing authority with approachability, often experimenting with different management styles and seeking advice from peers. Sasha emphasizes setting clear expectations early, stating that her three non-negotiables are "respect, responsibility, and effort." Meanwhile, Julian prefers a collaborative approach, allowing students to co-create classroom agreements, believing this fosters a greater sense of ownership over classroom rules. This exchange of methods demonstrates how GTAs influence one another by offering alternatives and validating different approaches. They also discuss handling disruptions, particularly when students overshare personal struggles. Heidi recalls a moment when a student disclosed a traumatic experience in class, leaving her uncertain about how to respond. Sasha suggests addressing such incidents through one-on-one meetings to maintain a supportive classroom environment while reinforcing boundaries. These discussions highlight the emotional labor involved in teaching and the importance of peer support in navigating complex student interactions. By sharing experiences and strategies, the GTAs create a network of mentorship where they can learn from each other's successes and missteps.

One significant alignment between published literature and this dissertation's study is the emphasis on student-centered learning and active engagement. Chapter 2 highlights the importance of constructivist teaching methods, where GTAs' prior experiences and conceptions shape their pedagogical development (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak). This aligns with research by Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, and Mina Shaughnessy, who argue that

writing is not simply a skill to be acquired but rather an evolving process requiring guided instruction (Elbow; Shaughnessy). The findings in this study confirm this, as GTAs in the narrative-based Teaching Circles frequently discussed student engagement strategies, including structured lesson planning and active learning. Their reflections echo Yancey et al.'s argument that constructivist teaching requires adaptability, as GTAs continuously adjusted their instructional methods based on classroom dynamics and peer mentorship. The GTAs continually adjusted their teaching methods based on student feedback as was found through multiple discussions across all three Teaching Circles. Heidi highlighted implementing interactive elements, such as workshops and group exercises, in response to students expressing frustration with lecture-heavy formats. By actively seeking feedback and making adjustments, GTAs reinforce the importance of adaptable, student-responsive teaching (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 129).

However, *Conceptions of Literacy* deeply examines how GTAs conceptualize literacy and their evolving roles in fostering students' literacy practices, emphasizing that many GTAs initially enter teaching with traditional, skills-based views of literacy before shifting toward process-oriented and rhetorical approaches (Brewer 123). In contrast, this study focuses more on the practical aspects of teaching (e.g., lesson planning, student engagement, and time management) suggesting that GTAs prioritize immediate classroom concerns over theoretical discussions of literacy. For instance, while the GTAs in Meagan Brewer's study may have explicitly debated the definition of literacy, this dissertation's study GTAs were more concerned with navigating student participation, grading practices, and classroom management. In one Teaching Circle, GTAs discussed how to handle students who dominated discussions, with some advocating for gentle redirection while others prioritized

fostering critical thinking, even at the risk of occasional disruptions. These discussions illustrate that while GTAs are engaging in reflective practice, their focus is more on pedagogical application rather than theoretical literacy frameworks.

This is a practical and necessary consideration, but unfortunately, it often leaves little room for new educators to deeply engage with the theoretical foundations and scholarship of the field. A hands-on approach to GTA preparation prioritizes immediate survival, postponing deeper reflection, growth, and development until a later stage in training (Anglesey 174). Courtney Wooten presents a very effective comparison, equating teaching WPE to "attempting to teach a child how to tie their shoes while also explaining the history of shoe-tying, theories of shoe-tying (making two rabbit's ears to fold over each other, making crisscrosses over a bridge, making a bow), different materials needed in shoe-tying, and ways to mentally and emotionally approach shoe-tying." (289)

In Kali A. Mobley Finn's study, while five participants were adapting the standardized materials, there was no clear evidence that they grasped the theoretical concepts underlying the course design, especially regarding scaffolding and the purpose of each unit. Most participants revealed some degree of uncertainty about the curriculum. For example, one stated, "I did not change the assignments and all the other stuff just because I didn't know. I mean, it's the first semester. There's no way I'm changing anything." Another stated, "Since I'm still learning the way it is here, I felt like if I'm going to use the standard syllabus, it makes sense to use the standard assignment sheets at least for this first semester until I get more comfortable with the textbooks and the curriculum and stuff." (104) These participants recognized that, despite their prior teaching experience, they needed to familiarize themselves with the new curriculum through hands-on experience. They all had confidence in

the effectiveness of the FYC program's design. Trusting this, they embraced the pedagogical tools provided to assist them in navigating teaching in an unfamiliar environment. As noted earlier, the typical orientation primarily focuses on foundational essentials, leaving little to no opportunity for in-depth engagement with the literature. However, this is where TCs assist in creating consistent spaces for the items that are being delayed for survival's sake.

Many GTAs expressed a desire to foster student development beyond course content, emphasizing critical thinking, communication skills, and personal growth (Ambrose et al. 96-97). They spoke of how they tried to encourage students to reflect on their own learning journeys, seeing failure as part of the process. By normalizing struggle and iteration, GTAs created learning environments that value progress over perfection (Wardle, "Creative Repurposing for Engaged Learning" 324-25). Some GTAs intentionally broke down traditional hierarchies between teacher and student, positioning themselves as co-learners. Julian noted the importance of highlighting their status as a graduate student to build solidarity with undergraduates. This relational teaching approach dismantles barriers, making the classroom feel more inclusive and collaborative (Clandinin and Connelly, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research" 393).

Another key alignment is the role of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in pedagogical development. As discussed in Chapter 2, narrative-based Teaching Circles function as a form of PLCs, supporting Reid and Estrem's argument that WPE should be an ongoing, collaborative process rather than a one-time orientation (Reid and Estrem, "What New Writing Teachers Talk About"). This perspective is supported by Catherine Latterell's national study of GTA preparation, which found that most programs still rely on short-term, survival-oriented practica rather than sustained professional development models. The

findings in this study reinforce this, showing that GTAs relied on peer-mentor-based Teaching Circles to share insights, refine lesson plans, and discuss classroom challenges. Rather than relying on structured institutional training, they found these peer-led discussions to be their primary source of professional growth, confirming that learning-centered development occurs in collaborative environments rather than hierarchical training programs. For example, in this study, the GTAs engaged in discussions about teaching strategies and challenges, exchanging practical techniques to enhance their effectiveness as educators. They recognize the importance of creative assignments in fostering engagement, such as Heidi's enthusiasm for a student's mapping project.

However, some GTAs express concerns about the assignment's feasibility, particularly in online formats, prompting an open discussion on how to modify it for different learning environments. The willingness to challenge and refine each other's ideas demonstrates the collaborative nature of their learning. Sharing teaching materials also becomes a common practice, with Hannah providing her students with resources from a previous professor's class, inspiring others to adopt similar strategies. Through these interactions, GTAs model teacher collaboration, reinforcing the idea that education is not a solitary practice but a shared, evolving process. Many GTAs acknowledge the need to adapt their lesson plans dynamically, with Julian describing his use of classroom debates to encourage participation. The recognition that no single method works for all students fosters a culture of experimentation, where GTAs feel supported in trying new approaches without fear of failure. This is further reinforced by Heidi, who reassures newer GTAs that "failure is not a problem." This perspective helps ease anxieties, particularly for first-time instructors who feel pressured to perfect their teaching on the first attempt.

Overall, the GTAs' discussions reflect a collaborative, student-focused model of teaching where adaptability, engagement, and reflection drive their evolving pedagogical philosophies. Through their Teaching Circle discussions, they influence and support each other in multiple ways: providing mentorship, sharing teaching materials, refining classroom management techniques, and encouraging reflective practice. The collective nature of these interactions allows GTAs to feel less isolated in their roles, fostering a sense of community that strengthens their professional identities. By engaging in open dialogue, exchanging strategies, and validating one another's experiences, the GTAs not only enhance their individual teaching skills but also contribute to a broader culture of continuous learning and improvement. This collaborative dynamic underscores the significance of peer mentorship in shaping their professional growth, reinforcing that effective teaching is a practice best developed through shared experiences and ongoing support.

Liminality

Liminality represents a transitional phase where individuals stand between two roles (such as student and teacher). This threshold state reflects the constant negotiation of identity and responsibility. GTAs often describe how they navigate uncertainty by adopting new time management strategies, like blocking out hours for specific tasks to reduce workload anxiety (Schoettler and Saur 153). Published literature establishes liminality as a transitional state in which GTAs navigate their dual roles as both students and teachers, a process marked by uncertainty, imposter syndrome, and shifting professional identities (Reid and Estrem, "The Effects of Writing Pedagogy Education"; Cicchino). Scholars such as Estrem and Reid argue that GTA preparation should emphasize reflective problem-solving rather than solely transferring theoretical knowledge, highlighting how GTAs often enter the classroom with

little preparation and must rely on peer mentorship and trial-and-error learning. Similarly, Cicchino describes how many institutions fail to provide consistent training for GTAs, leaving them to struggle with classroom management, authority, and pedagogical decision-making. The findings in this dissertation's study potentially authenticate these challenges, as GTAs express difficulty in asserting authority in the classroom, managing time effectively, and feeling professionally competent. These struggles might contribute to an overwhelming sense of liminality, reinforcing existing literature that portrays GTAs as occupying a precarious, in-between state within academic institutions (Latterell; Reid and Estrem, "What New Writing Teachers Talk About").

The challenge of knowledge transfer is another way liminality presents itself in the GTAs in this study. The literature emphasizes that GTAs frequently struggle to apply theoretical knowledge to practical teaching scenarios (Yancey, Robetson, and Taczak; Wardle, "Understanding 'Transfer' from FYC"). Scholars such as Bergmann and Zepernick argue that writing instructors often have difficulty transferring their own academic training into effective classroom strategies, as theoretical coursework does not necessarily prepare them for grading policies, student engagement, or classroom management. This study seems to support this, with GTAs reporting that while they could recall learning about composition theory, they often felt unprepared to implement effective pedagogical techniques in real-world settings. Many GTAs initially relied on their personal learning histories rather than formal training, reinforcing the literature's critique that GTA preparation programs often emphasize abstract theory over practical teaching experience (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak; Latterell).

These findings also align with Dylan Dryer's research, which found that many GTAs who had taken FYC as undergraduates did not necessarily feel more prepared to teach it. This suggests that transfer does not occur automatically and must be explicitly facilitated through structured pedagogical training. The results of this study present a possibly new dimension to this issue by highlighting the role of narrative-based Teaching Circles in facilitating knowledge transfer. Instead of relying solely on WPA-led training sessions, GTAs shared practical strategies and adapted teaching techniques collaboratively, reinforcing Driscoll's assertion that explicit connections between theory and classroom practice are essential for effective teaching development. This finding suggests that institutions should place greater emphasis on hands-on, experiential learning opportunities, such as structured peer mentorship programs and extended classroom observations, to better support GTAs in their transition to teaching.

Delegation and collective problem-solving also emerge as tools that lighten the load and foster a communal sense of responsibility. The process of syllabus refinement mentioned in the Teaching Circle discussions by GTAs highlights this liminal state, as they reflected on past experiences to tweak schedules, ensuring better alignment between course demands and personal life. This practice symbolizes adaptability and forward planning, reinforcing how structured time management anchors them during transitional phases. However, liminality sometimes leads to fluid, less structured time management (Macauley 8-9, "Introduction: 'Begin as You Intend to Finish: Considering the Multiple Liminalities and Thresholds of RCTAships"). For instance, some GTAs in this study mentioned feeling "untethered," reading randomly or procrastinating with AI tools, showcasing how transitional phases can blur professional and personal boundaries.

Dryer and Grouling discuss how many GTAs experience imposter syndrome, where they feel unqualified to teach despite their academic credentials. Meagan Brewer describes the struggle of GTAs establishing authority while still feeling like students as an inherent challenge in GTA identity formation, noting that many GTAs find it difficult to position themselves as credible instructors while simultaneously navigating their own learning processes (104). This aligns with the study's findings, as GTAs describe moments of self-doubt, insecurity, and anxiety over their roles, particularly when faced with unanticipated classroom challenges. For instance, Julian voiced his discomfort with being called "professor," illustrating the tension between how students perceive him and how he perceives himself. Similarly, Hannah described how this dual identity fosters imposter syndrome, as she questions her credibility while trying to establish authority in the classroom. Their interactions reveal a collective negotiation of their professional status, often marked by uncertainty but also by moments of clarity and self-realization. However, peer interactions played a crucial role in alleviating these anxieties. More experienced GTAs, such as Mason and Heidi, helped newer members adjust by sharing their own struggles and emphasizing that self-doubt is a natural part of the transition. The peer-mentor-based Teaching Circles served as a space where GTAs could navigate these identity tensions by sharing experiences and strategies for managing authority. For example, Sasha advised her peers to use proximity control and positive reinforcement as methods to establish authority while maintaining a supportive classroom atmosphere. The ability to discuss these challenges openly helped GTAs process their shifting roles and gain confidence in their professional identities, reinforcing Brewer's claim that identity development occurs through reflective engagement with peers.

Through these shared narratives, GTAs supported one another in recognizing that teaching is a learning process, not just for students but for educators as well. The Teaching Circles provided a valuable outlet for GTAs to discuss these struggles, reinforcing Ball and Loewe's argument that collaborative learning environments can help instructors feel more confident and supported. However, the study's findings diverge from prior research in suggesting that peer mentorship, rather than faculty mentorship, plays the most significant role in mitigating feelings of liminality. While Reid and Estrem emphasize the importance of WPA-led training and structured pedagogical coursework, the study's participants found that Teaching Circles, which functioned in this study as informal spaces for peer discussion and problem-solving, were far more effective in helping them navigate their liminal state. This suggests that institutional support structures should not only focus on faculty mentorship but also integrate structured peer learning opportunities as a crucial component of GTA training.

One of the most prominent ways liminality manifests in their experiences is through time management and workload balancing. GTAs are often overwhelmed by the competing demands of teaching, coursework, and personal responsibilities. Owen described feeling unmoored, stating that they had no strict schedule and will read whatever is recommended to them, mirroring a fluid approach to time management. Heidi, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of delegation, noting that relying on students and peers for support helped lighten the workload, signifying a shift from an individual-centered approach to a more collaborative mindset. This mentorship dynamic is crucial in easing the struggles of newer GTAs. For instance, in Teaching Circles, more seasoned GTAs share practical strategies, such as using structured grading blocks or office hour scheduling techniques, to help others avoid burnout. The fluctuating nature of their responsibilities requires constant adjustment, making

liminality not just a phase of uncertainty but also an opportunity to develop strategies for efficiency and adaptability through collective learning.

Pedagogical challenges and classroom management further highlight the transitional struggles GTAs face, but also how they influence each other through their prior experiences. Many new GTAs enter the classroom with little to no formal teaching training, leading them to lean on their peers for guidance. Diana, for example, highlighted the mental toll of constantly generating lesson ideas, describing herself as being "stuck in a rut," which is exemplary of liminality as a space of uncertainty and creative struggle. However, Heidi and Sasha, with more experience, encouraged her to borrow and adapt successful lesson plans from previous semesters instead of starting from scratch. Similarly, Julian found a breakthrough moment when he recalled a pedagogical course that inspired a new approach using index cards, illustrating how GTAs seek solutions in moments of transition by reflecting on both personal and peer experiences. These discussions reflect how their identities as educators are actively forming, with each challenge they overcome shaping their teaching philosophies and instructional methods. This exchange of ideas demonstrates the power of peer mentorship in navigating liminality, where those with prior experience help newer GTAs bridge the gap between uncertainty and confidence.

Balancing grading, meetings, and personal obligations emerged as a significant challenge in this liminal space. GTAs often adjusted schedules to accommodate student crises, reinforcing the dual identity of teacher and empathetic mentor (Anglesey 170). Hannah's experience of scheduling meetings outside office hours exemplifies this balancing act. Additionally, discussions revealed the burden of managing classroom disruptions, personal emergencies, and the emotional toll of engaging with students' trauma. GTAs

handled these by prioritizing tasks, redistributing class time, and even modifying assignments to lessen their own and their students' workload. GTAs also strived to create boundaries by reserving certain days for distinct responsibilities (e.g., grading on specific days), showing an effort to impose structure on an otherwise unpredictable workload.

Despite these struggles, peer-based Teaching Circles serve as vital spaces of shared growth and community building, where GTAs can express their frustrations and find support among their peers. Heidi noted how discussing workloads, classroom challenges, and even personal anecdotes (such as stories about their cat) helped foster a sense of camaraderie, reinforcing the idea that they are collectively experiencing a transitional phase. These moments of shared understanding serve as crucial reminders that their struggles are not isolated but part of a broader process of professional development. Mason, for example, reflected on how transitioning from teaching middle/high school to college required a "relearning" process, showcasing how liminality forces individuals to continuously adapt to new teaching environments and expectations. The collective knowledge within these peer groups offers a safety net, allowing GTAs to experiment with new methods and reflect on their challenges without the fear of formal institutional judgment. This peer-driven professional development not only benefits individual GTAs but also strengthens the broader teaching community, reinforcing the notion that supporting each other's growth ultimately enhances their collective teaching effectiveness.

Another major divergence from the literature concerns the temporality of liminality. Traditional research portrays liminality as a temporary phase that GTAs must transition through before they gain confidence and establish their professional identities (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak; Pytlik and Liggett). However, the findings in this study complicate

this assumption, suggesting that for many GTAs, liminality is a recurring and long-term experience rather than a linear process of professionalization. Some GTAs in the study expressed feeling permanently stuck in liminality, particularly those who do not plan to pursue tenure-track positions or who feel unsupported by their institutions. This challenges Elbaz-Luwisch's model of professional identity development, which assumes that educators gradually move toward professional stability as they gain experience. Instead, the study indicates that liminality fluctuates based on external factors such as institutional recognition, mentorship availability, and job security, making it an ongoing challenge rather than a developmental stage that all GTAs eventually overcome.

In the narrative-based Teaching Circles, GTAs contemplated their long-term futures and struggle with defining their roles in academia. Heidi, for instance, acknowledged that they still feels like they are "acting" the part of an educator rather than fully embodying the role, but she envisions teaching as a permanent part of her identity. Hannah similarly described how the uncertainty of being both a student and teacher has contributed to her professional growth, allowing her to refine her teaching philosophy over time. Through peer discussions, GTAs help normalize the uncertainties of career decision-making, with some, like Hannah, questioning whether academia is the right path, while others, such as Mason, offer insights from their experiences balancing teaching with other professional goals. The exchange of perspectives allows GTAs to see multiple possibilities for their careers, providing validation and reassurance that professional identity is fluid and adaptable.

Institutional constraints also shape the experience of liminality, aligning with prior research but offering new insights into how these challenges manifest on a daily, practical level. The literature frequently discusses how WPAs and GTAs struggle with limited

resources, administrative oversight, and the undervaluing of composition studies within academia (Denecker and Moreland, Anderson and Romano, Fleming). The study reinforces this, as GTAs describe feeling marginalized within their departments, often receiving less support and recognition than faculty members teaching other disciplines. Unlike the literature, which primarily addresses these issues from an administrative perspective, the study offers firsthand accounts from GTAs, illustrating how these institutional limitations directly impact their self-perception, confidence, and ability to navigate liminality. This suggests that systemic reform is needed to provide GTAs with greater recognition, professional development opportunities, and institutional resources.

Overall, the GTAs' interactions illustrate how liminality is not just a space of uncertainty, but also a catalyst for personal and professional growth. Through collaborative discussions, shared struggles, and gradual adaptations, they navigate the complexities of their evolving roles, ultimately shaping their emerging identities as educators. More experienced GTAs play a pivotal role in influencing and supporting those who are newer, offering both practical teaching strategies and emotional reassurance drawn from their own past experiences. The Teaching Circles function not just as spaces for discussing immediate teaching challenges but also as collective incubators for professional identity formation, reinforcing the importance of peer mentorship and shared learning in overcoming the challenges of liminality. The experiences they share within their peer groups serve as both a coping mechanism and a learning opportunity, allowing them to transform from uncertain novices into confident, self-assured educators. Ultimately, the narrative-based Teaching Circles capture the essence of liminality as a space where GTAs fluctuate between self-doubt and authority, structure and fluidity, constantly refining strategies to manage time and

balance their professional and personal growth (Macauley, “Introduction: ‘Begin as You Intend to Finish: Considering the Multiple Liminalities and Thresholds of RCTAships”; Schoettler and Saur 153).

Professional Identity Development

GTAs develop their professional identity through self-reflection, storytelling, and lived experiences, drawing from past educational encounters to shape their teaching philosophies. One major alignment between this study and published literature is the role of prior experiences in shaping professional identity. Literature emphasizes that GTAs enter teaching with preconceived notions informed by their academic backgrounds and personal experiences, aligning with constructivist theories that suggest identity development occurs when individuals integrate past experiences into new professional roles (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak; Reid and Estrem, “The Effects of Writing Pedagogy Education”). This is potentially echoed in the findings of this study, as GTAs frequently reflected on their own experiences as students, modeling their teaching styles based on positive and negative experiences with former instructors. Teaching Circles provided an essential peer-learning space where they could refine and reframe these perspectives collaboratively. This aligns with Elbaz-Luwisch’s work on teacher identity, which highlights the importance of narrative and self-reflection in professional development. Many reflect on their experiences as students to either emulate positive teaching models or counteract negative ones. For example, Julian noted how his high school experiences shaped his commitment to fostering an inclusive and engaging learning environment. Additionally, storytelling plays a crucial role in identity development, as GTAs refine their approaches through personal narratives. Hannah, for instance, credited professional workshops and mentorship for helping her evolve as an

educator. The process of sharing these experiences within their peer group fosters a collective professional identity, as GTAs influence one another through mutual support and validation.

A key deviation from literature that this study addresses concerns the need for more experiential learning opportunities. The literature discusses WPE as a theoretical foundation for GTA training, often emphasizing pedagogical readings and composition theory (Reid and Estrem, "The Effects of Writing Pedagogy Education"; Latterell). However, this study's findings suggest that GTAs felt underprepared for real-world teaching challenges despite their theoretical training. Many GTAs in the study reported struggles with classroom management, lesson planning, and student engagement, indicating that they would benefit from more hands-on learning experiences such as structured mentorship, classroom observations, and extended practicum training (Cicchino; Yancey, Cole, May, and Stark).

The study also supports the literature's critique of WPE in preparing GTAs for real-world teaching. Research by Latterell, Brewer, and Cicchino highlights how WPE programs often prioritize theory over practical preparation, leaving GTAs underprepared for key teaching challenges such as classroom management, student engagement, and grading policies. The findings suggest a similar trend, as many GTAs expressed frustration that their formal training failed to provide actionable strategies for handling real-world classroom dynamics. Instead, GTAs relied more on peer mentorship within Teaching Circles to develop these skills. This confirms Driscoll's argument that explicit connections between theory and classroom practice are necessary for effective GTA training and that traditional training methods fall short in preparing new educators for applied pedagogy. While the described literature focuses on how institutional training programs influence GTAs' literacy conceptions, the findings from this study suggest that peer modeling plays a more dominant

role in shaping teaching identities. Rather than relying on formal pedagogy training, GTAs in this study turned to one another for guidance, revealing a gap between theoretical coursework and the practical realities of teaching. For example, Mason admitted to frequently copying and pasting lesson plans from the teaching writing Canvas site due to feeling underprepared, highlighting the disconnect between training and actual classroom demands. Similarly, Diana, a first-time GTA, expressed anxiety about lesson planning but found relief when experienced GTAs, such as Heidi, Sasha, and Hannah, provided concrete suggestions during Teaching Circles. This indicates that while structured teacher preparation is valuable, it is often the informal, ad hoc interactions among GTAs that provide the most immediate and relevant pedagogical support.

A significant space for this professional growth is found in peer-based Teaching Circles, which provided a platform for peer mentorship, pedagogical exchange, and collaborative problem-solving. These meetings offer a support network that allows GTAs to share challenges, test new strategies, and build confidence in their roles as educators. Julian initially struggled with feeling unprepared for the classroom but gained assurance through trial and error, student feedback, and discussions with peers. Through these interactions, GTAs not only refine their own teaching methods but also contribute to the professional development of others by offering insights and suggestions. More experienced GTAs often take on informal mentorship roles, guiding newer instructors in classroom management, lesson planning, and work-life balance. This dynamic fosters a culture of shared learning, where professional growth is not solely an individual endeavor but a communal process. Literature assumes that faculty mentorship is the primary means of professional development, with WPA-led training programs guiding GTA growth (Reid and Estrem,

"What New Writing Teacher Talk About"; Yancey, Roberston, and Taczak). However, the findings in this study challenge this assumption, as GTAs reported that peer mentorship was more influential than faculty guidance. Teaching Circles functioned as horizontal mentorship models, where GTAs exchanged strategies and supported one another more effectively than they did through formal training programs. This suggests that peer-led communities may be more effective than hierarchical faculty-led mentorship, reinforcing research by Ashton, who found that horizontal mentoring structures empower educators to develop autonomy and confidence in their roles.

One of the most pressing challenges for GTAs is navigating their dual identity as both students and educators, a state of liminality that creates tension between their responsibilities. They struggle with time management, balancing lesson planning, grading, and their own coursework. Literature discusses how GTAs often struggle with imposter syndrome and uncertainty due to their dual identity as both student and instructor, requiring structured mentorship and institutional support (Clandinin and Connelly, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research."; Reid, "Teaching Writing Teachers Writing: Difficulty, Exploration, and Critical Reflection"). The findings in this study confirm this challenge, with GTAs describing their experiences of navigating authority in the classroom, uncertainty in grading practices, and balancing professional expectations with personal academic work. Peer-based Teaching Circles helped mitigate these struggles by providing a safe space for peer validation and mentorship, such as Hannah's structured weekly planning and Sasha's more flexible approach. This reinforces prior studies that argue for PLCs as critical for novice teacher development (Cicchino). This aligns with research by Wenger, who describes communities of practice as essential for professional identity development, as individuals

transition from peripheral participants to fully integrated members of their professional field. The sense of camaraderie built in these discussions allows GTAs to offer reassurance and practical advice, easing feelings of stress and imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is particularly common, as many GTAs initially question their authority in the classroom. Heidi, for example, described "acting" like an educator while still feeling like a student, emphasizing how confidence builds gradually with teaching experience. By vocalizing these concerns in Teaching Circles, GTAs find validation in their shared struggles, reinforcing their growing identities as educators.

This study places a stronger emphasis on Teaching Circles as a developmental space than some literature does. For example, in Megean Brewer's study in Conceptions of Literacy, while she acknowledges the role of peer discussions, she situates formal GTA training as a primary driver of pedagogical growth (Brewer 139). The findings of this study, however, suggest that peer-mentor-based Teaching Circles function as an alternative and potentially more effective form of professional development, allowing GTAs to construct their identities through interaction, reflection, and problem-solving. For instance, during discussions on time management, Hannah shared that she structured her week with designated days for teaching, grading, and Ph.D. applications, which helped her balance her responsibilities. Sasha, who juggled multiple roles as a student, teacher, mother, and spouse, acknowledged that strict scheduling was not always feasible and instead encouraged GTAs to "squeeze in work when there's a free moment." These contrasting perspectives on workload management highlight how Teaching Circles allow GTAs to exchange strategies and adapt their approaches based on individual needs, reinforcing the argument that professional development should be more experiential and collaborative.

Additionally, this study highlights the emotional and psychological aspects of professional identity development, which receive less emphasis in prior literature. While much of the research focuses on knowledge acquisition and pedagogical skill-building, the study findings suggest that self-doubt, imposter syndrome, and emotional resilience play a crucial role in professional identity formation. GTAs frequently discussed feelings of inadequacy and stress, particularly in their first semesters of teaching, mirroring research by Restaino, who found that emotional labor is a central, yet underexplored, aspect of teacher training. Teaching Circles provided a space for GTAs to process these emotions and receive peer validation, reinforcing prior calls for more holistic teacher development models that include emotional support systems (Rodrigue).

Another divergence between literature and the results of this study concerns the fluid nature of professional identity development. Prior research often presents identity development as a linear progression from novice to expert (Lave and Wenger, Latterell), but the study findings suggest that professional identity is highly fluid and evolving. GTAs' perceptions of themselves shifted dynamically, particularly as they encountered real-world classroom challenges and moments of student recognition. This aligns more closely with research by Dryer, which critiques the assumption that professional identity is fixed and instead argues that it is constructed and reconstructed through iterative experiences in the classroom. Discussions in the narrative-based Teaching Circles often resulted in the GTAs reflecting on their aspirations for advanced education and evolving career goals. This collective discourse underscores the significance of graduate school as a pathway for professional growth, reinforcing the development of their identities as both students and educators. For many GTAs, the teaching assistantship serves as a bridge to further academic

pursuits. Heidi explicitly mentioned adding a prospective university to their graduate school application list, illustrating proactive planning and a clear focus on career advancement.

However, some initially viewed it as a temporary role but reconsidered after receiving positive student feedback. Julian, for example, had not initially planned to remain in academia but found himself more invested after meaningful classroom interactions. Julian initially saw teaching as a means to fund graduate school but reconsidered this view after a student remarked they were "made for teaching." This interaction shifted his perception of teaching as a viable, fulfilling career path. Other GTAs celebrated this with him when learning that a student remarked on his capability as a teacher. Similarly, Hannah, despite entering teaching for financial reasons, developed a passion for pedagogy through classroom experiences and student growth. This goal-setting highlights not only individual ambition but also the influence of personal networks and familial connections in shaping decisions. By referencing ties to academic institutions, Heidi revealed how existing relationships can guide and validate their aspirations, enhancing confidence in pursuing specific graduate programs. Teaching Circles and peer discussions provide GTAs with a space to explore career goals and receive guidance from those with similar ambitions. While some GTAs, like Sasha, see teaching as an integral part of their identity, others remain uncertain due to concerns about the job market and the demands of academic careers. By discussing their aspirations and anxieties with one another, GTAs help each other navigate these career uncertainties, offering support and alternative perspectives on their professional futures.

GTAs often spoke of PhD applications, thesis work, and professional development in the discussion, balancing current responsibilities with long-term goals. Heidi shared that Wednesdays were dedicated to both grading and PhD applications, reflecting an intentional

effort to maintain progress toward future aspirations. Hannah allocated specific days for teaching, coursework, and application submissions, demonstrating the importance of structured time management in achieving academic and career goals (Macauley 8-9, "Mentoring Graduate Students Through the Process: Meeting the Challenges of Teaching, Coursework, and Application Submissions"). Balancing immediate teaching duties with forward-looking career goals requires meticulous planning. GTAs carve out time for graduate school applications alongside grading and class preparation, ensuring that career advancement remains a priority amid competing demands. Heidi emphasized the desire to continue teaching even if their primary career shifts toward research, reflecting a commitment to lifelong learning and interdisciplinary growth. Their interest in expanding into literature and media studies signals the importance placed on diversifying their academic expertise. The GTAs' interest in broadening their teaching portfolios highlights the role of continual learning in professional identity development. By envisioning teaching as a long-term component of their careers, GTAs demonstrate a deep investment in the educational process and a desire to contribute meaningfully across disciplines. The GTAs' discussion in the Teaching Circles also revealed the influence of alternative routes to graduate education. Heidi referenced their brother's experience with Teach for America, illustrating how structured service programs can facilitate access to advanced degrees. This highlights the value of non-traditional pathways in achieving academic aspirations, reinforcing the notion that graduate school is accessible through diverse experiences. The GTAs recognized that professional development and graduate education do not always follow linear trajectories.

Teaching Circles themselves act as space for career planning, with GTAs utilizing these collaborative environments to exchange insights and resources. Heidi underscored the

importance of these peer-based Teaching Circles in providing guidance and fostering professional growth, reinforcing the collective nature of their academic journeys. By participating in the Teaching Circles, GTAs create networks of mentorship and support that shape their career trajectories. These communities foster dialogue around graduate school aspirations, providing a space for reflection, goal-setting, and mutual encouragement. The discussions within narrative-based Teaching Circles reflect a shared narrative of ambition, growth, and long-term career planning. Graduate school aspirations emerge not only as personal goals but as integral components of professional identity development. Through structured planning, mentorship, and hands-on teaching experiences, GTAs actively constructed their futures, positioning themselves for continued success in academia and beyond.

Ultimately, GTAs' interactions in narrative-based Teaching Circles and their process of self-reflective storytelling play a crucial role in shaping their professional identity development. They navigate the complexities of being both students and educators while relying on peer support to refine their teaching philosophies and career aspirations. More than just individual growth, professional identity development in this context is deeply collaborative-GTAs shape each other's perspectives, reinforce confidence, and collectively build a shared sense of professionalism. The ability to influence and support one another through mentorship, shared struggles, and pedagogical exchange highlights the transformative power of community in shaping early-career educators. This journey is dynamic, continuously shaped by past experiences, present reflections, and future goals, illustrating the evolving nature of professional identity.

Summary

The study explored the professional identity development of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) through narrative storytelling via Teaching Circles. It examined how GTAs serve as peer mentors and resources for each other while developing their pedagogical approaches. Using narrative inquiry, it highlighted how personal experiences shape teaching practices and career aspirations. Four key themes emerged: Teacher Modeling (participants drew from personal and educational experiences, incorporating mentorship and empathy into their teaching); Learning-Centeredness (Teaching Circles encouraged collaboration, creativity, and student engagement, helping GTAs refine their strategies); Liminality (the WPA navigated multiple responsibilities and GTAs navigated dual roles as students and instructors, often facing impostor syndrome, time management challenges, and a lack of preparation); and Professional Identity Development (many GTAs shifted from seeing teaching as a temporary role to envisioning it as a meaningful, long-term career, inspired by student feedback and reflective practices). Peer-mentor-based Teaching Circles served as supportive spaces where GTAs could share challenges, exchange strategies, and grow professionally. The WPA played a crucial role in mentoring GTAs, fostering inclusivity, and bridging gaps in their training.

Teacher Modeling highlighted how GTAs drew on their past educational experiences and mentors to shape their teaching philosophies, often integrating empathy, inclusivity, and resilience into their classrooms. The role of the WPA was also central in modeling effective teaching strategies and fostering inclusivity. Learning-Centeredness emphasized the importance of student engagement and adaptive classroom management, as GTAs refined their approaches through Teaching Circles, discussions, and reflections. They implemented

interactive teaching methods, adjusted pacing, and developed strategies for fostering participation and inclusivity.

Liminality described the dual role of GTAs as both students and teachers, which created challenges in balancing responsibilities and asserting authority. Time management, adaptability, and peer mentorship emerged as essential tools for navigating this transitional space. Finally, Professional Identity Development focused on how GTAs' experiences shaped their career aspirations, with many considering long-term teaching careers based on their classroom interactions and mentorship experiences. The study emphasized the significance of self-reflection, mentorship, and communities of practice in supporting GTA development, while also recommending extended training, structured mentorship programs, and Teaching Circles to strengthen identity formation and pedagogical growth. Despite limitations related to researcher bias and insider/outsider perspectives, the study provided valuable insights into how GTAs evolve into confident, reflective educators. The following section breaks down several important implications for policy and practice.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Drawing on the comparison of the eight participants' narratives (as told by a combination of individual interviews and participation in the Teaching Circles), this section will reveal the potential practical implications of this study. One key implication is the possible impact of identity on teaching practices. The study highlights how GTA and WPA identities are shaped by their past teachers, mentors, and personal experiences, directly influencing their classroom engagement and student development. Schlein and Schwartz argue that "what happens in classrooms among teachers and students" closely influenced by the teacher's sense of identity and how they interpret their own experiences (158).

Recognizing the role of identity in shaping pedagogical approaches underscores the need for structured professional development programs that integrate identity formation as a fundamental component of GTA training.

Another major implication is the importance of communities of practice and mentorship in professional identity development. The study demonstrates that peer mentorship and structured support networks, such as Teaching Circles, significantly contribute to GTA confidence and instructional growth. Wenger's *Communities of Practice* suggests that engagement with a professional community fosters identity development, affecting the ability to participate, belong, and make meaningful contributions (Wenger 226). Additionally, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been identified as critical to professional growth, as they provide spaces for trust, honest interactions, and constructive feedback, all of which contribute to long-term intellectual development (Donnor et al. 565). The study supports these claims by showing that narrative-based Teaching Circles allow GTAs to engage in ongoing dialogue about teaching challenges and strategies, ultimately promoting successful professional identity development.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need for structured identity development planning within GTA training programs. While existing programs primarily focus on preparing GTAs for classroom instruction, identity development has often been overlooked. Researchers such as Dryer and Grouling note that professional identity formation among GTAs has been largely ignored until recent years. To address this gap, institutions should incorporate identity formation frameworks into their professional development programs, addressing issues such as impostor syndrome, confidence building, and career planning.

Establishing longitudinal training programs instead of short, intensive orientations would allow GTAs to gradually construct and refine their teaching identities.

The interdisciplinary nature of the study also presents important implications for practice. GTAs often come from diverse academic backgrounds, including creative writing, literature, and rhetoric, which influence their teaching approaches. The study suggests that institutions should design customized professional development programs that acknowledge these interdisciplinary experiences, ensuring that GTA training is relevant and adaptable across different fields (Adler-Kanner and Wardle). Furthermore, the study highlights the pivotal role of the WPA in shaping GTA experiences. As a mentor, the WPA provides critical guidance on teaching strategies, professional growth, and student engagement. However, the study found that many GTAs feel underprepared due to short and condensed training programs before the start of the semester. Expanding pre-semester orientation programs and offering structured WPA-led mentoring sessions throughout the semester would better equip GTAs for success in their roles.

The study also addresses the challenges of liminality, where GTAs navigate the dual roles of student and instructor. This liminality creates difficulties in asserting authority, managing time, and balancing professional responsibilities (Macauley 8-9, "Introduction: 'Begin as You Intend to Finish: Considering the Multiple Liminalities and Thresholds of RCTAships"). Institutions should implement structured guidance on time management and work-life balance, helping GTAs effectively manage grading, lesson planning, and research obligations. Another key implication relates to career development and long-term aspirations. Many GTAs initially view teaching as a temporary role but reconsider it as a viable career path after experiencing student engagement and receiving positive feedback. For example,

Julian reflected on how a student's comment ("You were made for teaching") prompted him to reconsider his future in academia as a more permanent role. Encouraging reflective practices and structured discussions in peer-mentor Teaching Circles can also help GTAs articulate their professional goals and plan their academic futures.

Finally, the study highlights the importance of storytelling and reflective practices in GTA identity formation. Reflection plays a crucial role in helping GTAs make sense of their teaching experiences, refine their strategies, and build confidence. The theoretical framework of Clandinin and Connelly emphasizes how narrative storytelling allows educators to construct professional identities by integrating past experiences with present teaching practices ("Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research" 393). Institutions should integrate narrative inquiry and storytelling-based pedagogical training into GTA development programs to encourage critical self-reflection and identity construction.

Based on these findings, several policy recommendations emerge. Universities should extend GTA orientation programs to ensure more comprehensive preparation. They should also utilize Teaching Circles as an ongoing peer-mentor based professional development resource, providing structured spaces for reflection, mentorship, and collaboration. By implementing these policies, institutions can better support GTA identity development, enhance teaching effectiveness, and foster a more inclusive and reflective teaching environment. These improvements would not only strengthen GTA experiences but also positively impact student learning and institutional teaching quality.

Communities and Mentorships of Practice of Professional Identity Development

Additionally, the current study demonstrates through the positive reception and support of Teaching Circles that a community of practice and peer mentorship benefits and promotes

successful professional identity development. Although composition and rhetoric scholars (see Miller; Yancey; and Miller et al.) have recognized that the goals of GTAship should go beyond just preparing writing instructors for the classroom, the focus on identity development has largely been overlooked until recently (Dryer and Grouling). GTAs enter a complex landscape of interconnected communities of practice. They require opportunities to engage with various practices and cross boundaries, to develop an understanding of this landscape and their changing role within it, and to discover ways their work can be meaningful.

Researchers (see Edgington and Taylor; Dryer, and Restaino) have found that new GTAs often face difficulties balancing their roles as novices in their graduate courses with their responsibilities as experts in writing classrooms or as graduate administrators. Additionally, many GTAs perceive their disciplinary background as distinct from the writing courses they teach (Grouling). To address these challenges, it is recommended that WPE recognize the impact of a GTA's previous experiences and affiliations on their teaching practices (Pawlowski and Jacobson 188). Something that would aid in GTAs acclimating to their dual (and sometimes dichotic) positions are Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), specifically GTA lead Teaching Circles. According to Donnor et al., "a learning community is a group that act on an ongoing basis to develop their knowledge of a common interest or passion by sharing individual resources and by engaging in critical dialogue." (565). Therefore, if relationships among members are based on trust, open communication, inquiry, and constructive feedback (key elements for intellectual growth) a positive dynamic can be created that fosters long-term interaction and development.

In Wenger's *Communities of Practice*, involvement with the members and practices of a community transforms who we are by "affecting our ability to participate, to belong, and make our way in the world" (226). In essence, learning to participate involves a process of developing one's identity, both professionally and personally. Individuals do not enter learning situations as empty vessels (as Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak emphasize), nor do they discard their previous identity and adopt a completely new one in practice, as traditional pedagogy might suggest. Instead, prior experiences join current ones to create new ideas, mindsets, and experiences (aligning with a more constructivist mindset).

Reflections on Interdisciplinarity of the Study

The results of this study highlight its interdisciplinary character, linking the fields of English and Curriculum & Instruction. The very character of who the participants are presents one level of interdisciplinarity: composition and Graduate Teaching Assistants and Writing Program Administrator. The interdisciplinary nature of this study is evident in how it integrates multiple fields, theories, and methodologies to explore the professional identity development of GTAs and WPAs. Rooted in education and pedagogy, the study draws from teacher education, composition studies, and learning-centered instruction to examine key themes such as Teacher Modeling, Learning-Centeredness, and Classroom Management. These concepts align with pedagogical frameworks emphasizing reflective teaching, student engagement, and constructivist learning. The research underscores that GTAs develop their teaching philosophies through their lived experiences and mentorship, drawing upon past educational influences to foster inclusive and adaptable teaching strategies (Clandinin and Connelly, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research"; Reid et al.). Additionally, the role of peer-mentor Teaching Circles as a collaborative space for

professional development further emphasizes a learning-centered approach, where GTAs refine their instructional methods and classroom dynamics through peer engagement (Marshall, Moore et al.; Powell and Harrington; Ashton; Fassinger and Gilliland).

This study also employs narrative inquiry to analyze the interplay between cover stories, secret stories, and sacred stories in shaping the participants' professional identities. According to Clandinin and Connelly, educators construct their identities through storytelling, reconciling public-facing professionalism (cover stories) with internal struggles (secret stories) and deeply held pedagogical values (sacred stories). This methodological choice underscores the importance of storytelling and lived experiences in the formation of teaching philosophies. The participating GTAs often grappled with imposter syndrome and feelings of inadequacy but found affirmation in student feedback and peer mentorship, which ultimately shaped their evolving identities as educators (Anglesey; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak).

GTAs developing their professional identities through peer mentorship and collaborative learning also are representative of the interdisciplinary nature of this study. Narrative-based Teaching Circles, a central component of the study, are positioned as professional learning communities that foster knowledge construction through discussion and reflection (Donnor et al. 565). Participating GTAs emphasized that engaging in Teaching Circles allowed them to exchange strategies, troubleshoot classroom challenges, and develop confidence in their roles (Restaino 112). Furthermore, the mentorship role of the WPA aligns with leadership and organizational development, emphasizing structured professional support and training. The WPA serves as a mentor, facilitator, and advocate, guiding GTAs through

the challenges of transitioning into teaching while also addressing institutional constraints that limit the scope of their formal training (Stancliff and Goggin).

Additionally, the study highlights the interdisciplinary nature of higher education by acknowledging that GTAs come from diverse academic backgrounds, including creative writing, rhetoric, literature, and political science. Their varied disciplinary training influences their teaching philosophies, suggesting that institutions should design customized professional development programs that accommodate interdisciplinary perspectives (Adler-Kanner and Wardle). Furthermore, the research delves into psychological and emotional labor aspects of teaching, addressing imposter syndrome, stress, and time management. The experiences of GTAs navigating self-doubt and identity negotiation reflect broader psychological theories on professional adaptation and resilience (Macauley 8-9, "Introduction: 'Begin as You Intend to Finish: Considering the Multiple Liminalities and Thresholds of RCTAships"; Schoettler and Saur 153). GTAs expressed struggles with balancing their dual roles as students and instructors, often experiencing liminality, where they must assert authority while still learning the profession themselves (Reid and Estrem, "The Effects of Disciplinarity on TA Preparation in Rhetoric and Composition" 224). The WPA plays a crucial role in helping GTAs navigate these challenges, offering ongoing mentorship and professional development sessions to bridge the gap between theoretical training and practical application.

By integrating these interdisciplinary perspectives, the study provides a holistic understanding of GTA professional identity development, emphasizing the interconnected nature of pedagogy, identity construction, mentorship, and institutional frameworks. The findings suggest that fostering structured mentorship, reflective practice, and

interdisciplinary teaching approaches can enhance GTA training and professional growth, ultimately improving teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. Moreover, the study emphasizes that extending GTA orientation programs, integrating Teaching Circles as semi-structured peer-mentor programs, and incorporating reflective storytelling into training curricula would better support GTA identity development and teaching effectiveness (Dryer and Grouling; Pawlowski and Jacobson 188). By bridging institutional expectations with GTA lived experiences, these interdisciplinary approaches ensure that educators develop not just as teachers, but as thoughtful, adaptable professionals committed to inclusive and responsive pedagogy.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The study acknowledges several limitations that could impact its findings and interpretations. One primary limitation is the potential for researcher bias due to my dual role of the researcher as both an insider (similar prior experiences as a composition GTA) and an outsider (a researcher and Graduate Instructor). This may have influenced data interpretation, particularly in the subjective analysis of narratives. Additionally, though done purposefully, the limited sample size of seven GTAs and one WPA from a single institution (University of Missouri-Kansas City), as well as the methods used, restrict the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the variability in GTA backgrounds presents inconsistencies in how they approach teaching, as participants came from different academic disciplines. While this diversity enriches the study, it also complicates drawing uniform conclusions. Lastly, institutional constraints on training limit the scope of GTA preparation. The study identifies that GTAs often receive inadequate formal training before teaching, affecting their

confidence and preparedness. However, the WPA's ability to expand orientation programs is constrained by institutional policies and resource limitations.

Building on these findings, several suggestions for future research and enhanced practices regarding GTA professional identity development are put forward. This study emphasizes the value of narrative, mentorship, and collaboration in shaping empathetic and adaptable educators, laying a foundation for future research and improved pedagogical practices. The intent of the individual interviews was to gain a more individualized perspective, but they did not mold into answering the research questions. In future research, I could better correlate these individual histories with the Teaching Circle experiences. Drawing on the findings and implications of this study, I propose the consideration of the following recommendations for the development of current and future Graduate Teaching Assistants at higher education institutions throughout the United States:

- Provide semi-structured peer mentorship programs. Formalized mentoring relationships (e.g., pairing novice GTAs with experienced educators) may yield significant benefits in areas like classroom management, pedagogical confidence, and professional growth. Such studies could also explore the long-term mutual advantages for mentors and mentees, as well as the feasibility of virtual mentorship in supporting GTAs in remote or resource-limited contexts.
- Explore how Teaching Circles promote inclusivity, particularly for GTAs from marginalized backgrounds. Similarly, future studies should delve deeper into the liminal experiences of GTAs as they navigate dual roles as students and instructors. Understanding how this transitional state shapes their sense of belonging, career

aspirations, and teaching identity could illuminate strategies to better support their growth, reduce stress, and foster confidence.

- Evaluate the efficacy of extending orientation programs to include more hands-on simulations, problem-solving workshops, or year-long training modules. The potential benefits of shadowing experienced educators could be investigated, offering insights into how such immersive experiences prepare GTAs for classroom challenges.
- Assess the practical impacts of peer feedback loops within Teaching Circles, focusing on how structured feedback mechanisms enhance GTAs' teaching strategies and confidence. Barriers to creating inclusive classrooms, such as limited resources or systemic constraints, should also be examined, with the goal of developing frameworks that GTAs can apply despite challenges.
- Explore more in-depth examination of GTA liminality and identity negotiation which could provide further understanding of how GTAs navigate their dual roles as students and instructors, particularly in handling authority, imposter syndrome, and career uncertainty.

By addressing these limitations and pursuing these research directions, institutions can enhance GTA professional development and establish more effective training programs that support both immediate teaching needs and long-term career growth.

Conclusion

This study investigates the professional identity development of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in first-year writing programs, emphasizing the impact of narrative inquiry and structured peer mentorship, such as Teaching Circles (TCs). The research addresses a critical challenge: supporting GTAs who come from diverse academic backgrounds and often

lack formal training in composition pedagogy. Teaching Circles are proposed as a practical and innovative approach to address this gap, offering GTAs opportunities to share experiences, develop teaching practices, and build professional identities. This method also aims to alleviate some of the responsibilities carried by Writing Program Administrators (WPAs), creating a sustainable support system for GTAs. Narrative inquiry emerged as a vital tool in this context, enabling GTAs to articulate their personal and professional stories. The study further explored the concept of liminality, as GTAs navigate the transitional space between being students and educators, and underscores the value of collaborative professional learning communities like Teaching Circles. These structured peer-support environments not only foster mentorship but also encourage reflective teaching practices and create inclusive spaces for ongoing development.

The methodology for the study was qualitative, employing narrative inquiry to collect data through narrative-based Teaching Circle observations and semi-structured interviews with seven GTAs and one WPA at the site of the study: the University of Missouri-Kansas City. The research examined how GTAs perceive their professional identities and how storytelling and peer interaction influence their growth. The findings revealed four central themes: teacher modeling, learning-centeredness, liminality, and professional identity development. GTAs frequently draw from their own educational experiences and mentors to inform their teaching, emphasizing inclusivity and adaptability in their pedagogical approaches. They also grapple with the challenges of balancing their dual roles as students and educators, which shapes their evolving teaching philosophies and career aspirations.

The results highlight the significance of Teaching Circles among the study's participants as spaces for peer mentorship, reflective practice, and community building.

Participants found value in sharing their narratives, learning from their peers, and collaboratively addressing teaching challenges. The TCs provided a structured yet flexible environment that encouraged innovation, collegiality, and mutual support. The study points to the possibility that Teaching Circles can offer a scalable and effective solution to enhance GTA professional development, providing consistent support and addressing gaps in traditional WPE. This study underscores the transformative potential of narrative-based peer mentorship in shaping the professional identities of GTAs. By creating structured spaces for reflection, collaboration, and storytelling, institutions can empower GTAs to navigate their roles more effectively and contribute meaningfully to the field of composition pedagogy. The findings advocate for a more inclusive and reflective approach to GTA training, one that leverages the power of shared experiences to foster professional growth and pedagogical innovation. When educators reflect on their lives through the lens of storytelling, it becomes easier to forge meaningful connections between our past, present, and future selves. Professional identity development is an ongoing process, and storytelling can serve as a tool to deliberately create meaning and connections between our personal and academic experiences.

APPENDIX A: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The following appendixes (A1-A2) include the consent forms the participants signed to agree to participate in this study. They include a base description of the study, what their participation will involve, the risks and benefits to the participants, how their confidentiality will be protected, and who to contact if they have questions.

Appendix A1

GTA Consent Form

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

University of Missouri-Kansas City

Title of the Study: Investigating the Application of Teaching Circles as Peer Support for Composition GTAs

Principal Investigator: Dr. Antonio Byrd (antoniobyrd@umkc.edu)

Student Researcher: Kristin Nicole Schmidtlein (kns4gf@umsystem.edu)

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study about how First Year Writing GTAs serve as resources for each other in the form of ad hoc peer mentorship regarding pedagogical approaches and content understanding and application through the usage of Teaching Circles (TCs). The goal of the peer-support practice in the form of Teaching Circles is multifaceted: 1) TCs are intended to maximize the GTAs resources that help them learn to teach composition as well as to lessen the load WPAs are carrying. 2) GTAs have confirmed that they rely on one another to develop their professional identities and pedagogical practices. Utilizing TCs will create dependable opportunities for this practice to take place. 3) TCs will serve as a space for GTAs to tell stories about themselves as literacy learners and as sponsors of literacy in first year writing programs 4) Rather than demand WPAs do more, the intention is to take on some of that responsibility while simultaneously offering additional support. The goal of this study is to examine how Teaching Circles serve as a type of peer support that produces consistent opportunities for GTAs within UMKC's English department to utilize each other as resources to develop their professional identities and pedagogical practices. The results of this study will indicate whether a structured space holds the same success as the kind of "real talk" that happens in ad hoc daily interactions in the GTA office space.

You have been asked to participate because you are a Graduate Teaching Assistant within the University of Missouri-Kansas City's (UMKC) English department. Interview(s) will be conducted after the Teaching Circles conclude over Zoom at a time of your choosing and will

last approximately 1-2 hours. Teaching Circle observations will take place once a month for up to three months starting in the Fall 2024 semester in place of one of the pre-scheduled bi-monthly GTA meetings conducted by WPA Dr. Crystal Doss.

Audio and video tapes will be made of your interview and your Teaching Circle participation. The only people who will see or hear the audio recording are a faculty advisor, Dr. Antonio Byrd, and myself, the student researcher. The recordings will be transcribed, and the actual audio and videos will be destroyed after the conclusion of the study. I will not be publishing the actual audio/video tapes.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOVLE?

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to take part in at least 1-3 Teaching Circles where myself, the student researcher, Kristin Nicole Schmidtlein, will take notes on the events of the meetings and at least one formal interview. These Teaching Circles will have a loose design as the goal is to have this be space used by GTAs as they dictate. During observation of the trial TCs, you will be asked to act normally as you would when collaborating with each other in the workplace. Each TC is expected to last for approximately one hour. You as a participant will be asked to discuss topics of interest (e.g., pedagogical approaches currently being used, issues they have been having with students or course content, ideas on how they are approaching upcoming class assignments, venting frustrations, etc.)

The formal interview(s) will be conducted after the Teaching Circles conclude over Zoom at a time of your choosing and will last approximately 1-2 hours. During the formal interview(s), you will be asked to answer some questions about the following subjects: your reasons for taking on role of a GTA, your GTA training/preparation, your interactions with others in the field of rhetoric and composition, and your experiences and thoughts on Teaching Circles.

Audio and video tapes will be made of interviews and Teaching Circle meetings if all students consent in writing. The only people who will hear or see the audio and video recordings are a faculty advisor, Dr. Antonio Byrd, and myself, Kristin Nicole Schmidtlein. The recordings will be transcribed, and the actual audio and videos will be destroyed after the conclusion of the study. I will not be publishing the actual audio/video tapes. Likewise, while there will most likely be publications as a result of this study, such as a description of your academic background and your transcribed responses in the interview(s), your name will not be used nor associated with your background or responses and will be replaced with a pseudonym.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

A potential risk is that participants may reveal personal, sensitive, or identifiable information when responding to open-ended questions. To lessen this risk, no information which may be used to identify a participant will used in any publications that result from this study. Likewise, because any internet-based communication such as Skype or online chat is not

guaranteed to be secure/confidential, both the researcher and participant should minimize security risks by ensuring that communication is taking place in a private room over a secure internet connection.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

You will benefit from this study in the following ways: 1) you voices and opinions will be considered seriously within the larger context of scholarship, 2) you will an opportunity to gather advice from and collaborate with colleagues of varying experiences and ideas on a consistent basis, and 3) the director at UMKC has expressed a desire to start applying some of the methods described in our prior conversations, so there is a chance for real change and application.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will most likely be publications as a result of this study, your name and/or any information that could potentially be used to identify you will be omitted from all potential publications. Audio and video recordings will be transcribed and processed on a password-protected laptop and stored via a locked, no-access file box in Onedrive. Names and faces will be removed in the actual project. Academic and teaching backgrounds will be described, but not associated with specific named individuals. In place of these identifiers, there will be pseudonyms (e.g., participant A, WPA, GTA 1, etc.) to separate individual responses. Likewise, if any interviews take place in your home, I may be required to break confidentiality if abuse or neglect is suspected or witnessed while in your home. Even though you will not be identified directly to the study data, the information from the transcription may include information that could indirectly identify you because of the small sample size.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after today, you should contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Antonio Byrd (antoniobyrd@umkc.edu). You may also contact the student researcher, Kristin Nicole Schmidtlein (kns4gf@umsystem.edu). If you are not satisfied with the response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact UMKC's Office of Research Services at 816-235-5927 or via e-mail at: umkcirb@umkc.edu.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty. Unless requested otherwise, the information you provide up to this point will be kept and potentially published. If you desire to have all responses and information removed from this study, you only need to request this via email for documentation purposes, and they will be completely removed from all aspects of this study. Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this

research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

I understand the study described above and have been given a copy of the description as outlined above. I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate.

Name of Participant (please print):_____

_____ I consent to audio recordings being made of Teaching Circle sessions.

_____ I consent to video recordings being made of Teaching Circle sessions.

_____ I consent to audio recordings being made of interview sessions.

_____ I consent to video recordings being made of interview sessions.

Signature _____
Date_____

Appendix A2

WPA Consent Form

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

University of Missouri-Kansas City

Title of the Study: Investigating the Application of Teaching Circles as Peer Support for Composition GTAs

Principal Investigator: Dr. Antonio Byrd (antoniobyrd@umkc.edu)

Student Researcher: Kristin Nicole Schmidtlein (kns4gf@umsystem.edu)

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study about how First Year Writing GTAs serve as resources for each other in the form of ad hoc peer mentorship regarding pedagogical approaches and content understanding and application through the usage of Teaching Circles (TCs). The goal of the peer-support practice in the form of Teaching Circles is multifaceted: 1) TCs are intended to maximize the GTAs resources that help them learn to teach composition as well as to lessen the load WPAs are carrying. 2) GTAs have confirmed that they rely on one another to develop their professional identities and pedagogical practices. Utilizing TCs will create dependable opportunities for this practice to take place. 3) TCs will serve as a space for GTAs to tell stories about themselves as literacy learners and as sponsors of literacy in first year writing programs 4) Rather than demand WPAs do more, the intention is to take on some of that responsibility while simultaneously offering additional support. The goal of this study is to examine how Teaching Circles serve as a type of peer support that produces consistent opportunities for GTAs within UMKC's English department to utilize each other as resources to develop their professional identities and pedagogical practices. The results of this study will indicate whether a structured space holds the same success as the kind of "real talk" that happens in ad hoc daily interactions in the GTA office space.

You have been asked to participate because you are a WPA within the University of Missouri-Kansas City's (UMKC) English department. Interview will be conducted after the Teaching Circles conclude over Zoom at a time of your choosing and will last approximately 1-2 hours.

Audio and video tapes will be made of your interview(s). The only people who will see or hear the audio recording are a faculty advisor, Dr. Antonio Byrd, and the researcher, Kristin Schmidtlein.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to take part in at least one formal interview. The formal interviews will be conducted after the Teaching Circles conclude over Zoom at a time of your choosing and will last approximately 1-2 hours.

During the formal interview(s), you will be asked to answer some questions about the following subjects: your responsibilities as a WPA, what your support system looks like, the major challenges and successes you've encountered as a WPA, the level of autonomy you have in the design of training GTAs, what sort of training approaches you use, and your opinions of TCs being used in the proposed manner.

Audio and video tapes will be made of interviews if the participants consent in writing. The only people who will hear or see the audio and video recordings are a faculty advisor, Dr. Antonio Byrd, and myself, the student researcher. The recordings will be transcribed, and the actual audio and videos will be destroyed after the conclusion of the study. I will not be publishing the actual audio/video tapes. Likewise, while there will most likely be publications as a result of this study, such as a description of your academic background and your transcribed responses in the interview(s), your name will not be used nor associated with your background or responses and will be replaced with a pseudonym.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

A potential risk is that you may reveal personal, sensitive, or identifiable information when responding to open-ended questions. To lessen this risk, no information which may be used to identify you will be used in any publications that result from this study. Likewise, because any internet-based communication such as Skype or online chat is not guaranteed to be secure/confidential, both myself as the researcher and you as the participant should minimize security risks by ensuring that communication is taking place in a private room over a secure internet connection. Even though I do not plan to identify them directly to study data, the information from the transcription may include information that could indirectly identify you because of the small sample size and your position as the singularly identified WPA.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will most likely be publications as a result of this study, your name and/or any information that could potentially be used to identify you will be omitted from all potential publications. Audio and video recordings will be transcribed and processed on a password-protected laptop and stored via a locked, no-access file box in Onedrive. Names and faces will be removed in the actual project. Academic and teaching backgrounds will be described, but not associated with specific named individuals. In place of these identifiers, there will be pseudonyms (e.g., participant A, WPA, etc.) to separate individual responses. Likewise, if any interviews take place in your home, I may be required to break confidentiality if abuse or neglect is suspected or witnessed while in your home. Even though you will not be identified directly to the study data, the information from the transcription may include information that could indirectly identify you because of the small sample size and your position as the singularly identified WPA.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after today, you should contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Antonio Byrd (antoniobyrd@umkc.edu). You may also contact the me, the student researcher, Kristin Nicole Schmidtlein (kns4gf@umsystem.edu). If you are not satisfied with the response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact UMKC's Office of Research Services at 816-235-5927 or via e-mail at: umkcirb@umkc.edu.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty. Unless requested otherwise, the information you provide up to this point will be kept and potentially published. If you desire to have all responses and information removed from this study, you only need to request this via email for documentation purposes, and they will be completely removed from all aspects of this study. Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

I understand the study described above and have been given a copy of the description as outlined above. I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate.

Name of Participant (please print):_____

_____ I consent to audio recordings being made of interview sessions.

_____ I consent to video recordings being made of interview sessions.

Signature _____
Date_____

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT

The following appendixes (B1-B2) include the recruitment emails sent out to participants seeking their participation in this study. Similar to the consent forms, they include a base description of the study, what their participation will involve, the risks and benefits to the participants, how their confidentiality will be protected, and who to contact if they have questions.

Appendix B1: GTA Recruitment Email

SUBJECT LINE: VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR STUDY IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION GTA PROFESSIONAL DEVLEOPMENT

I am writing to ask if GTAS with UMKC's English department would consider taking part in a study on how First Year Writing GTAs serve as resources for each other in the form of ad hoc peer mentorship regarding pedagogical approaches and content understanding and application through the usage of Teaching Circles (TCs). If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to take part in at least 1-3 Teaching Circles and to allow me, the student researcher, Kristin Nicole Schmidtlein, to observe participants during these meetings. These observations will then be followed by at least one formal interview.

The formal interviews will be conducted after the Teaching Circles conclude over Zoom at a time of your choosing and will last approximately 1-2 hours. During the formal interview, you will be asked to answer some questions about the following subjects: your reasons for taking on role of a GTA, your GTA training/preparation, your interactions with others in the field of rhetoric and composition, and your experiences and thoughts on Teaching Circles.

The observations, performed by myself, will take place once a month for up to three months starting in the Fall 2024 semester in place of one of the pre-scheduled bi-monthly GTA meetings conducted by WPA Dr. Crystal Doss so that GTAs are not asked to volunteer more of their free time. During these TCs, I will take notes on the events of the meetings. Keep in mind that your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind, you may end your participation at any time without penalty. Audio and video tapes will be made of interviews and Teaching Circle meetings if all students consent in writing. If you choose to participate you will have to be audio/video taped. The only people who will hear or see the audio and video recordings are a faculty advisor, Dr. Antonio Byrd, and the student researcher, me. The recordings will be transcribed, and the actual audio and videos will be destroyed after the conclusion of the study. I will not be publishing the actual audio/video tapes. Likewise, while there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used and replaced with a pseudonym.

As participating GTAs, you will also be asked to give your consent to take part in this study. You have the ability to end their participation at any time without penalty. Unless requested otherwise, the information you provide up to this point will be kept and potentially published. Any information published will be removed of identifying features, such as names and faces. If you desire to have all responses and information removed from this study, you only need to request this via email for documentation purposes, and they will be completely removed from all aspects of this study.

A potential risk is that participants may reveal personal, sensitive, or identifiable information when responding to open-ended questions. To lessen this risk, no information which may be used to identify a participant will used in any publications that result from this study.

Participants will benefit from this study in the following ways: 1) your voices and opinions will be considered seriously within the larger context of scholarship, 2) you will an opportunity to gather advice from and collaborate with colleagues of varying experiences and ideas on a consistent basis, and 3) the director at UMKC has expressed a desire to start applying some of the methods described in our prior conversations, so there is a chance for real change and application.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, you should contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Antonio Byrd (antoniobyrd@umkc.edu) or myself, Kristin Nicole Schmidtlein (kns4gf@umsystem.edu). Thank you for taking the time to read this email. We look forward to the possibility of working with you.

Best,

Kristin Schmidtlein, Student Investigator
Dr. Antonio Byrd, Principal Investigator

Appendix B2
WPA Recruitment Email

SUBJECT LINE: VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR STUDY IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION GTA PROFESSIONAL DEVLEOPMENT

I am writing to ask if WPAs with UMKC's English department would consider taking part in a study on how First Year Writing GTAs serve as resources for each other in the form of ad hoc peer mentorship regarding pedagogical approaches and content understanding and application through the usage of Teaching Circles (TCs). If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to take part in at least one formal interview.

The formal interviews will be conducted after the Teaching Circles conclude over Zoom at a time of your choosing and will last approximately 1-2 hours. During the formal interview, you will be asked to answer some questions about the following subjects: your responsibilities as a WPA, what your support system looks like, the major challenges and successes you've encountered as a WPA, the level of autonomy you have in the design of training GTAs, what sort of training approaches you use, and your opinions of TCs being used in the proposed manner.

The formal interviews will take place towards the end of the Fall 2024 semester or the beginning of the Spring 2025 semester. Audio and video tapes will be made of interviews if the participants consent in writing. The only people who will hear or see the audio and video recordings are a faculty advisor, Dr. Antonio Byrd, and myself, Kristin Nicole Schmidtlein. The recordings will be transcribed, and the actual audio and videos will be destroyed after the conclusion of the study. I will not be publishing the actual audio/video tapes. Likewise, while there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used and replaced with a pseudonym. Even though I do not plan to identify them directly to study data, the information from the transcription may include information that could indirectly identify you because of the small sample size and your position as the singularly identified WPA.

As a participant, you will be asked to give your consent to take part in this study. You have the ability to end your participation at any time without penalty. Unless requested otherwise, the information you provide up to this point will be kept and potentially published. If you desire to have all responses and information removed from this study, you only need to request this via email for documentation purposes, and they will be completely removed from all aspects of this study.

A potential risk is that you may reveal personal, sensitive, or identifiable information when responding to open-ended questions. To lessen this risk, no information which may be used to identify you will be used in any publications that result from this study. Any information published will be removed of identifying features, such as names and faces.

There are no potential direct benefits of this study to benefits.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, you should contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Antonio Byrd (antoniobyrd@umkc.edu) or the myself, Kristin Nicole Schmidtlein (kns4gf@umsystem.edu). Thank you for taking the time to read this email. We look forward to the possibility of working with you.

Best,

Kristin Schmidtlein, Student Investigator
Dr. Antonio Byrd, Principal Investigator

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following appendix includes the foundational questions used within the individual interviews as a baseline for the conversation and for follow-up questions as they formed organically.

Demographic Questions

- What are your degree(s) in?
- How long have you been teaching?
- What kind of training have you received in teaching in general up to this point?
- What kind of professional development (both good and bad) have you received in your experience as an educator?
- What kind of exposure have you had to technical writing, particularly composition?
- What kind of training have you received in teaching rhet./comp. specifically?
- If you have received prior training to the kind given in UMKC's writing program, how do they differ? How are they similar?
- Describe yourself personally and professionally.

GTAs

Past

- What are some of your prior experiences with teaching and composition (as a student and an educator)?
- How did you come into this position?
- What part(s) of your past play a role in who you are now as a professional educator? For example, did you have a prior experience with a teacher you promised yourself not to emulate?

Present

- How would you describe yourself as a professional?
- What are some of your current experiences with teaching and composition as well as a graduate student?
- Do you find yourself facing the struggle of being liminal in your position? For instance, do you feel you are no longer quite a student but not fully a teacher? Do you feel like you simultaneously feel both you belong in your position but are separate from it?

Future

- How do you see your professional identity as an educator developing? How do you see your career in relation to your degree developing?
- What sorts of challenges do you anticipate facing?
- Are there any aspects you are looking forward to (e.g., graduating, publishing, pursuing a specific position, etc.)?

Reasons for Taking on Role of GTA

- What are your reasons for taking this particular job position?
- What are your personal goals/responsibilities for the job beyond making a salary?

GTA Training/Preparation

- What are your "go-to" approaches to continuing to learn how to teach composition and rhetoric?
- Do you feel you were adequately prepared in previous education for teaching composition and rhetoric on the job? Why/Why not?
- What kind of training did you receive?
- What kind of training do you want to receive?
- What is your understanding of what it means to teach composition and rhetoric?
- What were your experiences like when first teaching composition and rhetoric?

Interactions With Others in the Field

- What are your interactions/experiences with colleagues and their values teaching composition and rhetoric like?
- What is your role within teaching community and your responsibility to students?

Teaching Circles

- What have been your experiences with Teaching Circles or any kind of Professional Development?
- Do you feel like your fellow GTAs are an effective resource for your education and growth as a composition GTA?
- What is one or more example of strong advice you've received from a peer GTA?
- Have there been times when you received incorrect or misleading advice from a peer?
- Do you think these moments where you seek each other out help prepare you for your position as a composition GTA? Or, should more be done and if so, what?
- Do you feel you can rely the same way on the WPA as your fellow GTAs? If there are differences or barriers, what are they?

WPA

- What have been your primary responsibilities as a WPA?
- What kind of support system do you have as a WPA?
- What are some of the biggest challenges you face as a WPA?
- How much freedom and authority do you have in the training design of GTAs? Who else is a stakeholder in this process and what is their role(s)?
- What has been your approach to training and preparing new GTAs in composition?
- What are some of the challenges you have had to face when training GTAs?
- Would this kind of formalized peer-mentor program be more beneficial or well-meaning but harmful if you were to utilize it?
- In your experience as a WPA how successful would you say new GTAs are in acclimating and succeeding in their roles as new composition educators?
- What kinds of changes would you like to see in the training and professional development of composition GTAs? What would you like to see be maintained that is already in place?

Past

- What are some of your prior experiences with teaching and composition?
- How did you come into this position? What positions did you hold before this?

- What part(s) of your past play a role in who you are now as a professional educator? For example, did you have a prior experience with a teacher you promised yourself not to emulate?

Present

- How would you describe yourself as a professional?
- What are some of your current experiences with teaching and composition as well as a WPA?
- Do you find yourself facing the struggle of being liminal in your position, even this far into your career? Do you feel like you simultaneously feel both you belong in your position but are separate from it?

Future

- How do you see your professional identity as an educator developing? How do you see your career in relation to your degree developing?
- What sorts of challenges do you anticipate facing?
- Are there any aspects you are looking forward to (e.g., promotions, publishing, pursuing a specific position, etc.)?

APPENDIX D: INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTS

The following appendixes (D1-D8) includes the data collected from the individual interviews of each participant, providing 1) a deeper understanding of each participant's professional identity development through their past, present, and prospective future accounts in their own words and 2) to provide a model for future research on the ways individual accounts can enhance ad hoc peer mentorship.

Appendix D1

Julian

Julian is a twenty-two-year-old, Black, male. He attained an undergraduate degree of a Bachelor of Arts in English and is currently working towards his Master of Arts in English with an emphasis in rhetoric and composition also at UMKC. He is a first-time GTA, serving in his first semester at the time of this study. Reflecting on mixed feelings about a course affected by the COVID pandemic, Julian's rhetoric background influences his teaching, particularly online. He discussed curriculum confusion and minimal training beyond the week-long orientation and the pedagogical course (English 5519) all GTAs are required to take. Motivated by research interests in reading struggles within the Black community, Julian chose to pursue teaching, aiming to connect with students through candidness about past challenges.

Contrasting traditional and modern educational approaches, Julian critiqued outdated authority models and reflects on teaching methods, acknowledging past mistakes and advocating for adaptable strategies. He stressed the importance of critical reading skills and diverse analytical trends, proposing a flexible writing curriculum aligned with students' interests. Emphasizing creativity over traditional grading, Julian suggested alternative

assignments for academic engagement and prioritizes inclusivity in education. Julian expressed how his teaching philosophy focuses on inclusivity and collaboration, valuing diverse perspectives and informal student interactions, despite logistical challenges in GTA meetings.

Past

Teacher Modeling

In his experiences, Julian had not always done well in high school prior to college. He recalled his struggles, where he sought grace and received none, which in turn influenced his approach to teaching as a GTA, making sure to give students the understanding and support he was not given. He did clarify that this does not mean he lets students do whatever they want with no consequences; he simply offers a level of understanding and compassion for those who are struggling. He highlighted how he did not have an English teacher he really enjoyed until he entered college so a subconscious goal was to not be the kind of teacher he despised. He was open in saying that he did not enjoy English classes until about his second year of his undergraduate degree. It was when he started enjoying English classes that he decided to switch from a political science major to an English major.

He took English 110 and 225 (the courses he is currently teaching) at UMKC as an undergraduate so he has a dual perspective of the course as both a student and "learning the teacher side and expectations." A difference was that he took it during the pandemic which did alter his perception of how the course functions as he currently teaches it in person several years after the pandemic stabilized.

Present

Learning Centeredness

Julian's discussion about learning centeredness highlighted the importance of fostering inclusivity and adaptability in the classroom. He shared how his own experiences in English classes, where they often felt excluded, shaped his teaching philosophy. The interviewee emphasized creating a holistic environment that prioritizes students who might otherwise feel left out, acknowledging that not every student learns the same way or enjoys traditional class structures. Julian's reflected on the necessity of having a flexible mindset, shaped by experiences where his preferences and learning styles were not considered. This approach translates into the classroom by his making an effort to include everyone, even if not all students resonate with the material. Julian also discussed the importance of breaking down barriers between professors and students, promoting a more collaborative and empathetic learning environment. He also highlighted that learning is often disjointed for students, while professors may view the curriculum more holistically. He admitted to initially feeling unprepared and learning "on the fly," which contributed to his understanding of the student perspective. This reflective approach, combined with a willingness to engage with students as peers and acknowledge personal growth, played a significant role in shaping their teaching style.

Julian is transparent with his students and openly tells them he did not used to like English, creating a strong sense of solidarity and mutualism, "receiving visible relief from students" and making them more open to the idea of exploring the study of English. If he, someone who teaches an English course and is working towards at least two degrees in English, has found something enjoyable to be had from it, it gives students hope that they can

too. He recalled how his students told him they found comfort in the idea of being taught by a "young professor" who is relatable in several ways, including age, experiences with English, and attitude. He spoke to how this open dialogue made the dynamics of the classroom smoother and students more willing to respond and voice their ideas. He made a point to emphasize to his students that he is a graduate student, so he is a student too, just like them. In part this was so they understood his intense workload and also to create a sense of solidarity.

When discussing whether the emphasis on his status as a student would potentially be an issue in terms of authority, he mentioned how he gained a sense of his students' idea of what authority means for them when teaching a literacy narrative essay, where students were asked to define authority. From that, he came to the conclusion that authority to his students is dependent on passion, knowledge of the subject, and the ability to communicate rather than control.

Liminality

Julian's experiences with liminality seem to stem from academic learning and reflections on societal transitions. He mentioned encountering the concept of liminality during discussions about societies experiencing famine, "We learned about, like, liminality whenever we were talking about, like, societies going through famine, […] basically, I learned what liminal is." From this, it is clear that his introduction to liminality came through structured educational experiences. Over time, he developed a strong connection to the term, integrating it into his personal and professional life: "I learned what liminal is and I use it all the time."

Julian, who is working towards a master's degree in English with an emphasis in writing and rhetoric, shared feelings of isolation due to program differences and discussed his role as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA). He highlighted limited training that prioritized syllabus details over teaching methods, likening it to a "survival guide," and expressed appreciation for the required English 5519 course all GTAs were required to take and stated he wished he was able to take it prior to his GTA appointment. The concept of "liminality" is examined concerning Julian's dual roles as student and teacher, with him stating that time management was and is a challenge. Despite scheduling and role uncertainty, he expressed how he used their rhetoric expertise to establish authority, facing challenges teaching peers close in age.

Future

Professional Identity Development

Julian discussed the evolution of his professional identity and future career goals, focusing on his journey into teaching. Initially, he viewed teaching as a temporary role to help fund graduate school but gradually developed a deeper passion for it as he went through his first semester of teaching. One pivotal moment was when a student remarked that Julian seemed "made for teaching," which profoundly influenced his perspective and led him to consider teaching as a long-term career path. Despite expressing enthusiasm for teaching, Julian acknowledged concerns about job availability in academia, particularly within the humanities. He noted the prevalent discourse advising against degrees in these fields and recognized that he might not fit the traditional mold often associated with academic professionals. Through his consideration of teaching as a potential long-term career, Julian

also emphasized the significance of representation as a young Black English teacher, especially for first-generation and English language learners.

He highlighted the personal and professional fulfillment that was a result from working with students, emphasizing compassion and the desire to create a supportive and inclusive environment (calling back to his prior experiences of lacking these responses from his own teachers). He reflected on their own educational experiences, striving to become the kind of teacher they wished they had during their earlier schooling. Ultimately, while uncertain about the specific trajectory, Julian expressed optimism and a willingness to pursue teaching as a career, balancing logistical concerns with their passion for education and student engagement.

Appendix D2

Hannah

Hannah is a White twenty-five-year-old female. She attained her undergraduate degree of a Bachelor's in Creative Writing and Spanish. She is currently working towards her Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing with an emphasis in poetry at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She has been a GTA in the English department for about two and a half years at the time of this study. In her interview, Hannah outlined her educational journey, highlighting a bachelor's degree in creative writing and Spanish, ongoing MFA studies in poetry, and two to three years of college teaching experience. When describing her role as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA), she spoke of anxiety from limited formal training in rhetoric and composition. She spoke in particular about challenges such as teaching citation styles due to her creative writing focus and helping students transition from high school to college-level writing. Despite this, she emphasized the importance of further professional development, particularly in her general technological systems coursework and graduate pedagogy courses.

Her involvement with the General Education Assessment Committee at UMKC offered insights into grading standards, albeit informally. She noted shifts in student attitudes towards writing, from grammar-focused to broader conceptual issues. Initially driven by financial needs, Hannah has grown passionate about teaching, valuing the adult responsibilities of college students. Her experiences at Upward Bound and STEM Camp are highlighted, along with positive interactions with parents and curriculum assessment significance, which also contributed to her pedagogical approach when teaching FYC. Hannah discussed her dual identity as student and teacher, resulting in imposter syndrome

but gaining confidence over time. She spoke of how she aspires to pursue a PhD after completing her MFA, enhance presentation skills, network at conferences, and teach at a four-year university while aiming to publish an academic paper. Enthusiasm for teaching creative writing is expressed, emphasizing flexibility compared to academic writing, and plans to provide guidelines that encourage creativity.

Through the interview, Hannah spoke about new educator training, such as extending the week-long orientation into the summer for better preparation in tasks like syllabus creation. The conversation contrasts teaching assistant and professor expectations, focusing on authority dynamics in teacher-student relationships, cultural influences, and name preferences. Teaching Circles among GTAs are praised for fostering camaraderie and addressing contemporary issues like AI use in classrooms, with suggestions for more structure and focused topics.

Past

Teacher Modeling

Hannah's academic journey began with a Bachelor's degree in Creative Writing and Spanish. This dual focus reflects a strong foundation in both literary expression and language, showcasing a multidisciplinary interest that enriches her communication and cultural fluency. Currently, she is pursuing an MFA in creative writing with an emphasis on poetry at UMKC, which signifies a deepening commitment to refining her craft and academic engagement in the literary arts.

Prior to her experience teaching at the college level, Hannah worked with younger students in diverse settings. She taught at a middle school STEM camp over several summers and participated intermittently in the Upward Bound program, a college preparatory initiative

for high school students. These engagements demonstrate her adaptability and her interest in fostering educational growth across different age groups and disciplines. Hannah emphasized the need to recognize each student's unique path and growth, much of this stemming from her prior experiences in education. She draws from her personal journey, particularly moments of struggle, to create a supportive and empathetic classroom environment. She spoke of how she values collaborative learning, inspired by her experiences in group settings where knowledge-sharing enriched her understanding. The interviewee mentions participating in undergraduate research early in her academic career. This hands-on experience not only developed her interest in teaching but also shaped her mentorship philosophy. She emphasizes the importance of giving students opportunities to engage in projects that allow them to apply theoretical knowledge. During her experience as a GTA, she spoke of holding sessions and mentoring students one-on-one. The experience helped her recognize the diverse learning styles among students and reinforced the value of personalized teaching approaches.

Past mentors played a crucial role in her development, instilling the importance of guiding students and fostering curiosity. Hannah highlighted the influence of specific professors and mentors who guided her during her studies. One professor, in particular, encouraged her to pursue teaching and demonstrated how to balance academic rigor with compassion for students. She also recalled moments of academic struggle and how supportive faculty helped her overcome those challenges. These experiences inspire her to create a classroom environment where students feel comfortable seeking help and are encouraged to persist through difficulties.

Hannah also mentioned attending professional development workshops on pedagogy. These workshops introduced her to new teaching techniques, active learning strategies, and

methods for engaging students. She integrates these strategies into her teaching model today. These experiences collectively shape a teaching philosophy grounded in empathy, inclusivity, and personalized student development.

Present

Learning Centeredness

Hannah shared that when she first began teaching composition and rhetoric, she felt underprepared in certain areas. To address this, she actively sought mentorship from senior faculty and attended professional development workshops. One particular experience she highlighted was shadowing a colleague's class to observe different pedagogical techniques. This experience helped her reshape her lesson planning and adopt more effective strategies, such as incorporating multimedia resources and student-led presentations. She described this process as an ongoing cycle of learning and refinement, driven by a desire to provide the best possible experience for her students.

Hannah spoke of how she continues to actively seeks professional development and learning opportunities to refine her teaching techniques so that students can receive a high-quality education. She acknowledged that teaching is an evolving craft, often requiring new strategies and perspectives. It reflects humility and a willingness to grow, suggesting that she values mentorship, collaboration, and feedback from peers to enhance her effectiveness in the classroom.

Hannah also spoke about moments when the learning environment was not fully conducive to student success. In one instance, she recalled students expressing that certain lecture formats felt disengaging. As a response, she implemented more interactive elements such as group discussions and peer review sessions. By allowing students to voice their

concerns and adjusting accordingly, she noticed an improvement in class participation and overall morale. This example illustrates her belief that a dynamic and adaptable classroom fosters better learning outcomes. Hannah emphasized the need to recognize when students are disengaged or when the teaching methods might not be fostering effective learning. This suggests that she values adaptability (adjusting lesson plans, incorporating student feedback, and being responsive to class energy). Her approach prioritizes student comfort and engagement, ensuring that the learning environment feels inclusive and supportive.

She mentioned incorporating activities like writing prompts, storytelling exercises, and collaborative workshops into her composition classes to introduce a creative writing element to them. One example she gave was a group poetry exercise where students build off each other's lines, resulting in a collectively created poem. This not only reinforces key writing techniques but also builds a sense of community within the classroom. Hannah emphasized that such activities make the learning process feel less like a chore and more like an engaging, exploratory experience. She noted that students often leave these sessions feeling more inspired and confident in their creative abilities. "And like, there's lots of fun type of activities and ways of learning creative writing that..." The use of "fun activities" suggests she sees value in breaking away from traditional lecture formats, promoting hands-on and exploratory learning. Her focus on engaging students through creativity aligns with her goal of making writing less intimidating and more accessible.

Liminality

Hannah offered an insightful reflection on the concept of liminality, particularly in relation to her experiences as a GTA. Liminality, often described as the state of being in-between two roles or phases, played and currently still does play a significant role in shaping

her professional and personal growth during their time as a GTA. In the interview, Hannah acknowledged the dual identity that comes with being a GTA (occupying the space between student and instructor). This unique positioning creates an ongoing negotiation of authority and vulnerability. Hannah describes moments where she must assert herself in the classroom, acting as the primary instructor and guiding undergraduate students, while simultaneously remaining a student under the supervision and evaluation of faculty members. This fluctuation between roles frequently leads to what Hannah identifies as imposter syndrome, which results in her questioning her credibility and preparedness as an educator.

Despite these challenges and anxieties, Hannah highlights the growth that emerges from this liminal space. By existing between the roles of learner and teacher, she expressed how she develops adaptability and resilience. For instance, she recounts instances where she had to pivot lesson plans or adjust their pedagogical approach based on real-time feedback from students or mentors. This reflective practice, cultivated through the dual nature of her position, becomes integral to her evolving teaching philosophy. Moreover, Hannah noted that the liminality of the GTA role extends beyond classroom instruction, speaking of how it invades her and other GTAs' entire graduate experience, influencing their engagement in academic research, conference presentations, and professional development. Hannah spoke of how while tasked with producing original scholarly work, GTAs must also fulfill obligations as a student, attending classes and completing coursework. This balancing act requires careful time management and often reinforces the feeling of being suspended between two worlds. Interestingly, Hannah interprets this liminal state as a catalyst for creative and intellectual growth. She spoke of how this sense of uncertainty, while sometimes uncomfortable, pushes her to explore new pedagogical strategies and refine her academic

voice. Ultimately, Hannah's reflections illustrate how embracing the complexities of liminality allows for profound personal and professional development. By navigating this in-between space, she cultivates the skills, confidence, and adaptability necessary to transition fully into the role of a faculty member in the future.

Future

Professional Identity Development

Hannah's teaching career aligns closely with her academic progression. Since starting her MFA program, she has accumulated approximately two and a half to three years of experience teaching at the college level. This hands-on involvement in higher education marks an important step in developing her professional identity as an educator and mentor in the field of creative writing. Hannah's professional identity development is characterized by an intersection of academic achievement, creative practice, and teaching experience. Her pursuit of higher education and active involvement in multiple educational environments signifies a clear trajectory toward becoming a well-rounded educator and writer. Her dedication to both personal growth and the mentorship of others indicates a dual commitment to advancing the literary arts and contributing to the academic community. Her experiences in diverse educational contexts have also shaped her identity as a flexible and innovative educator. By engaging with different student populations and teaching formats, Hannah has cultivated a pedagogical approach that values inclusivity, creativity, and experiential learning. This evolving identity reflects her readiness to take on leadership roles in curriculum development, literary outreach programs, and cross-disciplinary collaborations.

Her current trajectory suggests a strong interest in continuing her role as an educator while simultaneously advancing her writing career. Her MFA program, coupled with her

teaching background, positions her well for future roles in academia, potentially as a professor of creative writing. Additionally, her involvement with younger students through STEM camps and Upward Bound highlights a passion for outreach and community-based education, which could lead to future opportunities in educational program development or leadership roles within youth-focused initiatives. Hannah combined experiences indicate that her professional identity is shaped by a balance between creative practice and teaching. This blend not only enriches her skill set but also broadens her career possibilities, several of which she expressed consideration of, including positions in writing, publishing, curriculum design, and educational administration. Furthermore, her ability to navigate both academic and community-based educational environments suggests potential for roles that bridge creative arts and public engagement, contributing to a more holistic and impactful professional identity.

APPENDIX D3

Diana

Diana is a twenty-seven-year-old, biracial Black and White female. She attained an undergraduate degree of a Bachelor of Liberal Arts with an emphasis in Humanities and is currently working towards her Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing with an emphasis in poetry at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She is a first-time GTA for the English department, serving in her first semester at the time of this study. Despite her limited formal experience, Diana spoke of how she draws on previous experience as a writing tutor and peer mentor, coming from a family of educators. She noted challenges in student reading levels and engagement from hearing about the experiences from her family members who are educators.

Diana spoke of her educational background and how she took several advanced courses prior to college, resulting in her skipping first-year writing classes. As a GTA, she reflected on their training as a writing tutor and initially felt anxious about the leadership responsibilities that came with taking on the appointment of GTA. She emphasized building relationships with students to foster confidence and resilience, shaped by past experiences attending school conferences and professional development with her educator family members and being able to witness early on how it operates on "the teacher side of things." Diana also mentioned how she experienced culture shock in graduate school due to a lack of specialization in undergraduate studies and felt intimidated by peers, having anxiety in finding belonging within her emphasis area.

Diana highlighted how she used videos in teaching to enhance engagement but faced challenges addressing diverse learning styles. She also discussed finding the balance between

managing coursework, attendance, grading, and reflections on penalizing missed homework, with positive stories about students overcoming anxiety. She stressed the need for support and understanding of student challenges, mentioning online classes for first-year students and expressing uncertainty about long-term commitment to education despite enjoying teaching. The conversation highlighted the preparation and training of GTAs for teaching composition, emphasizing the variability in student dynamics and the need for differentiated learning. Tools like Hypothesis for class activities and library resources were also discussed, along with transitioning from creative to technical writing, particularly citation formats and maintaining a personal voice. Reflections on professional development revealed a preference for in-person meetings for better engagement, debating structured versus unstructured formats. Diana shared her experiences with challenges in seeking academic advice and feelings of intimidation when reaching out for help were also brought up, alongside the value of peer evaluations and classroom observations.

Past

Teacher Modeling

Diana's teaching seems to be shaped by a combination of academic knowledge, informal mentorship, and family legacy in education. Although she lacks formal educator training, her experiences in tutoring, mentoring, and community involvement provide her with a foundation in empathy, leadership, and student engagement. Diana spoke of how her family influenced her approach to teaching, having witnessed and listened to their teaching approaches, struggles, and successes growing up. In particular, Diana spoke of her grandmother who is now a retired reading teacher, and her aunt who is currently a middle school ELA teacher. Growing up around educators provided Diana with early exposure to

teaching strategies, classroom dynamics, and the challenges educators face. She spoke of how conversations and observations equipped her with informal but valuable insights into managing students and fostering engagement. This generational knowledge shapes her philosophy and respect for the profession, grounding her in traditional yet adaptable teaching methods.

In addition to her family's influence, Diana also had prior experience as a writing tutor at a local univeristy for one year, enhancing her ability to guide students in improving their writing skills. In this role, she was assigned to assist students in the university library with their writing assignments, during which she provided one-on-one feedback and honed her ability to identify specific areas where students needed support, improving their writing and comprehension. This role also resulted in her translating complex writing concepts into digestible advice improved her ability to explain nuanced topics (a critical skill for teaching writing to new college students). Additionally, as tutoring often involves students struggling with confidence or understanding, this experience nurtured her empathy, an essential trait for educators working with diverse learners. This experience directly feeds into her approach by fostering a student-centered perspective.

She also volunteered as a peer mentor for students struggling with homework when she was in high school. This early mentorship experience suggests she developed empathy and communication skills. In this role, she helped peers with their homework, offering academic and emotional support. In acting as a mentor, she was positioned as a role model, reinforcing her sense of responsibility toward student success. By guiding peers, she learned the value of creating a supportive and non-judgmental learning space. Though informal, peer mentorship is often the first step toward developing teaching instincts, such as assessing

student needs and adjusting explanations accordingly. She also shadowed at a local middle school during the pandemic, an experience that exposed her to the challenges faced by educators and students, such as students not reading at grade level. This experience left a strong impression, highlighting the complexities and difficulties within the education system, further shaping her perspective on teaching.

Diana also volunteered as an African American scholar, modeling leadership for younger African American students in middle and high school. Understanding the importance of representation allowed Diana to approach teaching with inclusivity and cultural awareness. Additionally, acting as a role model for younger students strengthened her ability to build confidence and self-esteem in learners. Diana's experiences highlight her commitment to fostering an inclusive, empowering environment. This background may translate into classroom practices that celebrate diversity, equity, and representation.

Present

Learning Centeredness

Diana's teaching philosophy, as reflected in her interview, demonstrates a commitment to fostering a learning-centered environment. Her approach prioritizes student engagement, differentiated learning, relationship-building, and the development of critical and creative thinking. Diana placed significant emphasis on creating opportunities for students to express themselves, both verbally and through writing. "I kind of want my students to have a voice and to feel like they can all have a voice in the classroom or through their writing." This statement underscores her dedication to student agency, a foundational element of learning-centered teaching. By encouraging diverse forms of participation, she acknowledges that students engage with content in different ways. This aligns with

constructivist theories, which suggest that learners actively construct knowledge through experiences and self-expression (Yilmaz). The emphasis on voice not only fosters confidence but also helps develop critical communication skills, empowering students to take ownership of their learning journey.

Diana's holistic perspective on teaching extends beyond the classroom, as evidenced by her belief in nurturing relationships with both students and their families. She spoke of how she observed her grandmother and aunt and how they interacted with the families of their students: "This is teaching isn't just in the classroom. Build that relationship with not just the students, but the parents and making sure that they have everything they need." This approach aligns with community-based and relational teaching models, which highlight the importance of external factors in shaping a student's academic success (Jakubowski and Burman). By fostering open lines of communication with parents and guardians, Diana ensures that students receive comprehensive support. This reinforces the interconnected nature of education, where collaboration between teachers, students, and families cultivates a more robust and resilient learning environment.

Diana exhibited a growth mindset by recognizing the value of continuous learning in her teaching practice. Reflecting on her journey, she noted "But it did challenge me and push me to like, you know, try to try to like learn new things." This statement highlighted her adaptability and willingness to evolve as an educator. The process of learning through experience and reflection is a fundamental aspect of experiential learning theory (Jakubowski and Burman). Diana's openness to new challenges and her drive to refine her methods exemplify a reflective teaching practice. Such an approach not only benefits her professional development but also enriches the classroom experience by fostering a dynamic and evolving

educational environment. Diana spoke of a goal to cultivate higher-order thinking skills in her students. “And also teaching them how to think more critically, creatively.” This focus reflects her dedication to preparing students for complex problem-solving and innovative thinking. By prioritizing critical and creative thinking, Diana aligns her practice with the goals of twenty-first century education, which emphasize the importance of analytical skills, creativity, and adaptability.

Diana’s teaching philosophy is characterized by her commitment to fostering student engagement, relationship-building, and differentiated instruction. Her emphasis on continuous growth and the development of critical and creative thinking reflects a dynamic, learning-centered approach. By integrating these principles into her practice, she contributes to the cultivation of inclusive, empowering, and transformative educational experiences for her students.

Liminality

Diana’s experiences as a GTA reveal several aspects of being in a liminal state. During the conversation, she highlighted the week-long orientation before starting as a GTA. While she found it helpful in introducing tools like *Canvas* and offering advice from experienced GTAs, she also felt the training was rushed. “I kind of wish that it was like maybe a month-long type of training before we just start. Or at least maybe two weeks.” This reflects a desire for a more extended preparation period to feel more confident in their teaching abilities. She described feeling overwhelmed by the large amount of information delivered in a short period. “Yeah, that was a lot of information in a very short span. It was very overwhelming.” This contributed to anxiety about her competence, with concerns such

as, “Am I going to do this right? Am I going to let down my students?” These feelings reflect the uncertainty inherent in transitioning from a student role to an instructor role.

Contrasting these anxieties and uncertainties, Diana spoke of the bi-weekly professional development sessions as valuable, particularly collaborative exercises such as group grading of rubrics. “The one that stuck out to me the most was when [Rachel] had us all as a group look at a rubric for the discourse authority essay.” Through these exercises, she realized they were approaching tasks inefficiently compared to more seasoned GTAs and admitted that “I was kind of working harder, not smarter with it. And it was taking me way longer to get through than some of the more experienced GTAs.” Diana often compared her performance to that of other GTAs, which amplified her sense of being in a transitional phase. She recognized that more experienced GTAs tended to navigate tasks more efficiently, due to their experience and learning from prior mistakes. This reinforced the feeling of being “in-between”-neither fully a student nor a confident instructor. Overall, her reflections paint a picture of the liminal state as a period marked by uncertainty and self-doubt, but also gradual growth and adaptation through practice and professional development.

Future

Professional Identity Development

Diana’s professional identity is shaped by a blend of mentorship, volunteer work, and familial influences. She did express some uncertainty about long-term commitment to education, which stems from several factors, such as her family’s background in education, her feelings of under-preparedness, exposure to educational challenges, and holding a greater passion for writing creatively than teaching. Diana’s experience shadowing in the middle school during the pandemic left her “horrified” by the state of the classroom, including

students not reading at grade level and engaging in tedious tasks. The chaotic environment during the pandemic also amplified the difficulties she witnessed, reinforcing hesitation about entering the field as a career. While her grandmother and aunt have had long careers in education, Diana also spoke of feeling the weight of expectations or comparisons. The challenging nature of middle school teaching, highlighted by her praise for her aunt's perseverance, hints at her awareness of the resilience needed for a long-term teaching career.

Furthermore, although Diana participated in orientation and GTA meetings, she felt the training was rushed. She expressed a desire for a longer, more thorough preparation period (suggesting a month or at least two weeks). Her concerns about feeling overwhelmed and lacking confidence in areas like *Canvas* design and grading reflect self-doubt about her readiness. She also mentioned anxiety about "letting down her students" and feeling as though she might not "do this right." Diana also spoke of how she's considering whether she wants to pursue creative writing as a career or something to do in addition to teaching.

Appendix D4

Sasha

Sasha is a forty-year-old, Black American, female. She attained an undergraduate degree of a Bachelor's in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing, with a minor in Dance and French, and is currently working towards her Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing with a concentration in Poetry at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She has been a GTA for the English department for approximately a year and a half at the time of this study. Sasha started out her undergraduate career majoring in dance and switched to majoring in English. Her teaching experiences began formally at UMKC, with informal teaching and retail work helping to develop classroom management skills. She emphasized the impact of her parenting on her teaching approach, advocating for student boundaries and choices, while learning from interactions with other GTAs and workshops.

Her liberal arts education and freelance work inform her desire to connect academic writing with students' skills, balancing compassion with accountability, professionalism, and timely communication. She explored narrative inquiry when teaching composition, linking identity with storytelling, and sharing her inspiration for poetry. Sasha has created a composition workshop to aid students with academic writing and plans to teach college-level courses and creative writing workshops for high schoolers after earning their MFA.

Financial motivations also influence her teaching aspirations, with an interest in a PhD being tempered by familial responsibilities. Challenges in the academic job market, especially in literature and creative writing, are also acknowledged by Sasha. She recounted teaching experiences involving intertextuality and debates about hip-hop and Lin-Manuel Miranda, stressing communication among GTAs. Despite feeling underprepared for teaching

composition courses, she advocated for practical training in pedagogy and peer review. She also shared some of her initial struggles with lesson planning, using past job experiences to manage stress and to differentiate between composition and creative writing.

Past

Teacher Modeling

Sasha's teaching journey reflects a blend of formal instruction, community engagement, and leadership roles, all contributing to her dynamic approach in the classroom. Her first institutional teaching position was at UMKC, where she currently teaches as a GTA. Before UMKC, Sasha "[…] briefly taught dance for like a nonprofit to elementary school kids." In addition to dance instruction, Sasha also led Bible study groups. While she acknowledged that this is not traditional classroom teaching, she recognizes its relevance, stating, "I've like led Bible studies and stuff, but that's not exactly the same thing... I would still count it within that realm because you're still teaching." These experiences highlight her leadership in informal educational settings, where guiding discussions and facilitating learning remained central. Sasha also brings leadership experience from outside the classroom. She mentions, "I managed a coffee shop [...] so I had to like train people with that." Training staff in a fast-paced environment cultivated her ability to mentor and instruct in a professional setting, sharpening her communication and organizational skills.

Additionally, Sasha gained experience in academic preparation, having worked for an SAT prep company. She recalled, "I think I did a year, maybe less than a year, I worked for like a SAT prep company. I think Kaplan... like an SAT prep class, like a semester or something." This role further solidified her instructional skills, providing her with insights into standardized testing and structured curriculum delivery. Sasha's teaching background,

while diverse, consistently reflects her passion for mentoring and guiding others, shaping an empathetic and versatile teaching philosophy.

Present

Learning Centeredness

Sasha acknowledged that her formal preparation for teaching was brief, describing the training at UMKC as, "not very extensive […] We just had a week before classes started." This short training period contrasts sharply with the complex and multifaceted nature of teaching, particularly for someone without prior institutional teaching experience. When she stepped into the classroom for the first time, Sasha described the experience as "Being in the classroom very much felt like trial by fire type of deal." This expression underscores how much she had to learn on the job, relying on intuition and adaptability. Rather than feeling defeated by the lack of structured preparation, Sasha leaned into her previous professional experiences to shape her teaching philosophy.

Interestingly, Sasha highlighted her experience managing a coffee shop as one of the most influential factors in developing her teaching style. She reflected, "I think my experiences working in coffee retail was really helpful." At first glance, the link between managing a café and teaching may not seem obvious. However, Sasha draws direct parallels between the two roles. For example, just as she trained new baristas to ensure consistent service quality, Sasha approaches teaching with a focus on empowering students to develop and refine their skills. This reflects a hands-on, mentorship-driven teaching philosophy. Additionally, the café required her to understand not only customer service but also the technical workings of equipment. She mentions, "They really wanted the baristas to have a lot of knowledge about coffee... to know how the equipment works." This resonates with the

idea of fostering deep, practical knowledge in the classroom. When issues arose, Sasha often had to troubleshoot rather than immediately seeking outside help. She recalled, “You have to be able to, like, fix things when they’re broken... You don’t just call a phone number.” This mentality translates into teaching by fostering resilience and adaptability, qualities she strives to instill in her students. Sasha emphasized that her work in customer service also honed her interpersonal skills-something she sees as critical in teaching. The ability to engage with people from diverse backgrounds and manage interactions with patience and understanding mirrors the relational aspect of education.

She also draws a strong connection between her role as a parent and her teaching style. She mentioned how parenting, much like teaching, requires setting boundaries, demonstrating empathy, and fostering growth in others. She hinted at the importance of patience and nurturing qualities that naturally translate to a student-centered learning environment. Sasha’s approach acknowledges that, much like children, students thrive when given guidance, encouragement, and space to explore independently.

Rather than relying heavily on theory, Sasha’s teaching philosophy reflects an experiential, hands-on approach. Her experiences in non-traditional educational environments, whether training baristas, leading Bible study groups, or teaching dance at nonprofits, emphasize learning by doing. This practical orientation informs her classroom, encouraging students to engage actively with material rather than passively absorbing it. She also highlighted how adaptability, quick thinking, and empathy are essential, regardless of the environment, reinforcing the belief that education is not just about knowledge transfer but about fostering confidence and critical thinking.

Sasha's approach to learning-centeredness is deeply shaped by real-world experiences rather than formalized pedagogical training. Her background in coffee shop management, dance instruction, Bible study leadership, and parenting all contribute to a teaching philosophy rooted in empathy, adaptability, and problem-solving. Her diverse background enables her to create a dynamic and supportive classroom environment where students are encouraged to learn through experience, ask questions, and build resilience-ultimately promoting a holistic and learner-centered educational experience.

Liminality

Sasha's unique position as both a graduate student and an instructor creates an intrinsic tension that shapes her day-to-day experiences. She described this dual identity as complex and sometimes challenging, referencing how she holds her position in relation to her students, stating: "I understand you're a student, you have a lot going on but I'm a student also, in addition to teaching, preparing for this class. And then I also have a life outside of school." This acknowledgment reveals that Sasha feels a deep sense of solidarity with her students. She recognizes the stress and workload they manage because she navigates the same pressures herself. However, this empathy does not eliminate the need to maintain professional authority and responsibility as an instructor.

A significant aspect of Sasha's teaching approach is balancing compassion with accountability. By existing in this in-between space, she develops a heightened sensitivity to the personal and academic struggles her students face. This perspective informs how she designs and administers her courses: "I try to make the assignments not too cumbersome and make sure that they can easily perceive the usefulness of them […] I don't want them to feel like they're wasting their time." Her awareness of the burden of excessive or unclear

coursework leads her t' craft assignments that are purposeful and manageable. Sasha emphasized how she strives to avoid busy work, ensuring that every task she assigns adds value to the students' learning experience. However, she also recognizes the necessity of enforcing boundaries, "I try to balance being gracious with also like having standards and holding them accountable." This tension reflects the core of Sasha's liminal experience. While she sympathizes with the students' workload, she must also ensure that they meet the academic expectations of the course.

Sasha admitted that managing this dual role became easier as she gained experience. In the early stages of teaching, the overlap between being a peer (as a student) and an authority figure (as a teacher) felt more pronounced and challenging. Over time, she found ways to assert her authority without compromising empathy. "I think by the second semester I got more comfortable being like, 'Okay, I know what I'm doing... I can balance this a little better.'" This growth in confidence allowed her to embrace the complexities of her role, signaling a shift in how she perceived herself within the academic hierarchy.

Sasha's experience in this liminal space deeply influenced her overall teaching philosophy. She developed a pedagogical style that emphasizes collaboration, transparency, and mutual respect. Her willingness to acknowledge her own limitations and responsibilities as a student fosters an environment where students feel seen and understood. This dual perspective enhances her ability to model vulnerability and growth, foster open dialogue, and adapt and personalize instruction. By sharing aspects of her own learning journey, Sasha normalized the idea that learning is a continual process, even for instructors. She also encourages students to communicate their struggles, knowing firsthand how difficult it can be to juggle responsibilities. Recognizing that one-size-fits-all approaches often fail, she also

tailors her teaching to accommodate diverse needs while upholding rigorous academic standards.

Operating in this transitional space involves emotional labor. Sasha must consistently navigate internal and external expectations, shifting between the roles of learner and leader. This balancing act underscores the invisible work that accompanies teaching, particularly for graduate students. Her experience highlighted how liminal positions can foster growth, adaptability, and a student-centered teaching style. Ultimately, Sasha's reflections suggest that her ability to exist between these two identities not only strengthens her empathy but also enriches the learning experiences she provides for her students.

Future

Professional Identity Development

Sasha demonstrated a structured and intentional approach to her professional identity development by consistently reflecting on her past, present, and future self. This reflective practice indicates that she values self-awareness and growth, recognizing the importance of learning from past experiences while remaining conscious of her current trajectory. By actively assessing these three dimensions, Sasha can identify patterns in her professional behavior, leverage strengths, and address areas for improvement. This recurring process of reflection fosters continuous development, positioning her to adapt effectively to evolving career demands and personal ambitions.

Sasha views her current educational and professional endeavors as serving a dual purpose: both as a stepping stone and as a direct path toward her long-term career goals. This perspective reveals her ability to appreciate the immediate value of her experiences while keeping her broader aspirations in focus. Such a mindset allows Sasha to remain flexible and

open to diverse opportunities that may arise, understanding that each experience contributes to a larger framework of growth. Her ability to embrace this dual perspective ensures she remains motivated and adaptable, maximizing the benefits of every stage in her journey.

Sasha anticipates potential obstacles in pursuing her career or further educational goals, highlighting a high level of self-awareness and resilience. This foresight allows her to prepare for difficulties in advance, enabling her to develop strategies to overcome barriers. For instance, she voiced how she is considering continuing on to pursue a PhD after attaining her MFA. However, this is tempered by the financial, emotional, and social strain of raising a family. Additionally, Sasha acknowledged the challenges in the academic job market, especially in literature and creative writing. By acknowledging possible challenges, Sasha demonstrates a pragmatic and solution-focused outlook, essential traits for navigating complex career landscapes. Her willingness to confront these hurdles reflects not only confidence in her abilities but also a realistic understanding of the unpredictable nature of professional growth. This proactive stance equips her to handle setbacks constructively, fostering long-term perseverance and success. Overall, Sasha's reflective approach, dual perspective, future-oriented thinking, and anticipation of challenges form a comprehensive framework for her professional identity development. These attributes collectively contribute to her resilience, adaptability, and forward momentum, positioning her to achieve her long-term goals with clarity and purpose.

Appendix D5

Owen

Owen is a White, non-binary twenty-four-year-old. They attained an undergraduate degree of a Bachelor of Science in Creative Writing and are currently working towards their Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing with an emphasis in Poetry at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. They are a first-time GTA, serving in their first semester at the time of this study. Owen reflects on their own academic and professional development, recounting challenges in a college composition class due to limited writing experience and a shift from music and psychology to English after a transformative poetry course. They discussed anxiety about teaching and the importance of connecting with GTAs for support. Influential classes and positive student feedback have bolstered their confidence, though they admitted struggling to balance dual roles as a graduate student and teacher, which led them to drop a class for better time management. They mentioned how they grapple with feelings of authority and imposter syndrome, which fortunately eased over the semester.

Owen mentioned how they are considering a high school education career, reflecting on licensure requirements and their admiration for professors who inspire them. Owen also expressed how they are developing confidence in syllabus design and understanding student needs while preparing for a 225-level course (they taught English 110 during the time of the study and will be teaching the next course, English 225 in the following spring), acknowledging student variability. Owen also spoke of the challenges in higher education related to financial and time constraints, along with managing their ADHD and how it impacts their idea execution. Despite these struggles, Owen expressed enthusiasm for teaching and prefers peer conversations over online resources for preparation.

Direct communication was emphasized during the interview as crucial for educators handling teaching challenges. Owen expressed how they felt prepared with materials but seeks more hands-on training and collaboration with experienced instructors. They highlighted the need to understand students' prior education, especially homeschooled backgrounds, and suggested shadowing seasoned teachers for practical experience. The conversation outlines the roles and expectations of GTAs in teaching composition, stressing literacy and media literacy for student preparation. It discussed the transition from creative to technical writing for MFA-based GTAs, emphasizing communication skills over strict formatting. Owen's teaching philosophy focuses on audience engagement and idea development, resonating with quieter students. They acknowledged diverse teaching approaches among colleagues and viewed their role as supportive, especially for new college students facing learning curves.

Past

Teacher Modeling

Owen described their transition into teaching from a diverse career path involving project management and leadership roles. They noted, "Before I started teaching, I spent over a decade managing projects and leading teams in the tech sector. I was constantly balancing timelines, budgets, and team dynamics-skills that are surprisingly similar to running a classroom."

This highlights how Owen's organizational skills and ability to manage complex workflows directly influence how they structure their classes and maintain classroom discipline. Owen emphasized the importance of connecting theoretical knowledge to practical applications. "Students often ask, 'Why do we need to learn this?' I like to pull examples from my

previous job-showing them how the math or the writing skills they're learning are things I used almost daily." This approach allows students to see the relevance of their studies, fostering engagement and motivation by linking curriculum content to tangible career outcomes. In discussing the unpredictable nature of their former career, Owen explained, "Every day presented a new problem to solve-whether it was a client issue or a technical roadblock. That taught me to think on my feet, and now, if a lesson isn't landing, I'm not afraid to pivot and try a different approach." Their adaptability ensures that their teaching methods remain flexible and responsive to students' learning needs, creating a more dynamic and effective classroom environment.

Mentorship played a key role in Owen's prior experiences, as they shared, "One of the most rewarding parts of my previous job was mentoring junior team members. Watching them grow and succeed felt incredibly fulfilling and I realized I wanted to do that full-time, which led me to teaching." Their passion for mentorship translates directly into their supportive teaching style, focusing on individual student growth and encouraging a nurturing learning environment. Owen also highlighted the collaborative nature of their past roles and how it shaped their classroom strategy, "In my old job, no project was ever done alone. I bring that same mindset into the classroom-lots of group projects, peer feedback sessions, and teamwork. I want students to learn how to collaborate because that's what they'll face in the real world." This reinforces teamwork as a core part of their teaching philosophy, preparing students with essential interpersonal skills for their future careers.

Present

Learning Centeredness

Owen emphasized creating an environment where students actively engage with the material and take ownership of their learning. They stated, *"*I don't believe in just lecturing for an hour and expecting students to absorb everything. I want them asking questions, exploring, and even leading parts of the lesson when they can." This reflects their belief in fostering an interactive and participatory classroom where students feel empowered to guide their own learning process. Owen also highlighted the importance of pushing students to think critically rather than memorizing information. "It's not about memorizing facts-it's about understanding how to approach problems. I try to ask open-ended questions and let students wrestle with the answers." By shifting focus from rote learning to analytical skills, they promote deeper intellectual engagement and problem-solving abilities.

Additionally, Owen stressed the significance of recognizing and adapting to the unique needs of each student. *"*Every student learns differently. I spend time figuring out their strengths and where they might struggle, so I can adjust how I teach." This personalized approach underscores their commitment to ensuring no student is left behind, aligning with the principles of a learning-centered environment. Owen also stated how they believe that students learn best when they feel comfortable and supported. "I want the classroom to be a place where students aren't afraid to fail. Mistakes are part of the process-we learn from them together." This focus on psychological safety allows students to experiment, take risks, and grow without fear of judgment. Owen stated how they incorporate ongoing feedback to keep students involved in shaping their educational experience. "I regularly ask for feedback from my students-what's working for them, what isn't-and I adjust accordingly. It's their

education, so they should have a say in it." This approach ensures that their teaching evolves in response to the needs and preferences of their students, reinforcing the learning-centered model.

Liminality

Owen's description of the shift from their previous career to teaching encapsulates the core of liminality: being caught between an old identity and the uncertainty of a new one. "I remember feeling like I was stuck between two worlds-I wasn't quite part of the teaching community yet, but I also felt disconnected from my old career. It was unsettling but also exciting." This sense of duality is characteristic of liminal states, where individuals often feel suspended in ambiguity. Owen's acknowledgment of excitement amidst discomfort suggests they recognize the potential of this state of being. By embracing this in-between space, they were able to gradually redefine their professional identity, allowing their previous experiences to inform their evolving role as an educator.

A characteristic of liminality is the questioning of one's skills, value, and place within a new environment. "I kept wondering if the skills I had built over the years would actually help me as a teacher. It felt like I was starting over, but also carrying pieces of my old self into this new role." This internal conflict highlights the delicate balance between shedding aspects of an old identity and integrating them into a new one. Owen's awareness of "carrying pieces" of their past signifies a crucial aspect of navigating liminality: the realization that past experiences do not need to be discarded but can instead serve as elements for growth. Their eventual acceptance of transferable skills, such as leadership and communication, allowed them to rebuild confidence and reshape their approach to teaching.

Additionally, Owen's ability to frame uncertainty as a learning opportunity speaks to their adaptability and growth mindset. They noted, "I had to get comfortable not having all the answers. That's when I started seeing the overlap-managing a classroom isn't so different from leading a team. Both require patience, communication, and empathy." This perspective reflects a critical turning point in Owen's journey through liminality. By recognizing parallels between their former and current roles, Owen shifted from perceiving themself as inexperienced to viewing their transition as an extension of their previous career. This not only facilitated their personal growth but also informed their teaching philosophy, emphasizing patience and empathy (qualities essential for fostering a supportive learning environment).

Owen highlighted the role of community and mentorship in navigating transitional periods. "Talking to other teachers who had been through the same thing made a huge difference. They reminded me that everyone feels like an outsider at first." Liminal experiences are often eased by connecting with others who have traversed similar paths. Owen's engagement with experienced educators provided reassurance and normalized their feelings of uncertainty. This communal aspect of liminality reflects the importance of shared knowledge and collective support in personal and professional development. By seeking guidance and leaning on others, they found stability, gradually stepping into their new identity as an educator. Owen's experiences serve as a broader reflection on the nature of career transitions and personal growth. Liminality, while often uncomfortable, promotes resilience, adaptability, and deeper self-awareness. Their journey underscores the importance of viewing transitional periods not as obstacles but as grounds for reinvention and expansion.

Future

Professional Identity Development

Owen's professional identity began evolving during their initial transition into teaching from the tech sector. Reflecting on this shift, they said, "When I first started teaching, I still felt like someone from the corporate world just visiting a classroom. It took time for me to feel like I belonged here." This sense of being an outsider highlights the early stages of identity reconstruction, where Owen was negotiating the overlap between their previous career and their emerging role as an educator. They gradually began to integrate elements of their prior experience into their teaching identity, using their past leadership roles to shape their classroom management style. "I realized I didn't have to leave that part of me behind. My experience leading teams and managing projects became a strength in how I plan lessons and engage students." This represents a key moment in Owen's identity development: acknowledging that their professional past could enrich their present role rather than conflict with it. By blending old and new skills, they established a unique teaching approach rooted in real-world applications and leadership principles. As Owen settled into their teaching role, their sense of purpose began to solidify, aligning more closely with long-term educational goals. "The more I teach, the more I see this as a career where I can make a real impact. I want to help students not just learn content, but develop the skills they'll need beyond school." Their evolving identity reflects a shift from focusing solely on subject delivery to promoting broader life skills in students, demonstrating a deepening commitment to holistic education.

Owen expressed aspirations to expand their influence beyond the classroom, contributing to curriculum development or mentoring new teachers. They mentioned, "I'm

starting to think about how I can take what I've learned and support other educators. Maybe that means moving into leadership or designing programs that connect students to industry experiences." This forward-looking perspective shows that their professional identity is still evolving, with a trajectory toward leadership and systemic contributions in education. Their future goals reflect a desire to scale their impact, positioning themself as both a teacher and a mentor within the educational community.

Appendix D6

Heidi

Heidi is a White, non-binary twenty-nine-year-old individual. They attained an undergraduate degree of a Bachelor of Arts in Language and Literature and are currently working towards their Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing with an emphasis in Poetry at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. They have been a GTA for the English department for approximately a year and a half at the time of this study. Prior to this appointment, Heidi taught environmental science to kindergartners approximately twelve years prior when they were in high school.

Their teaching preparation involved orientation and professional development meetings, highlighting varying departmental support for GTAs. Initially hesitant about teaching, they found it rewarding, adopting a relaxed, student-friendly approach while balancing authority with kindness and accountability. Experiencing imposter syndrome, particularly regarding the title "Professor," they spoke of how they aspire to pursue a PhD in English focused on literature. They reflected on their self-taught teaching style, influenced by past educators, and recounted securing their GTA position at UMKC. Challenges included perceptions related to their youthful appearance and a shift in personal style during the pandemic, contrasting traditional professor appearances.

Heidi emphasized representation and dialogue among graduate students, supported by a nurturing university environment. This encouragement fuels their passion for a PhD and teaching, especially in creative writing workshops. They highlighted overcoming criticism during their undergraduate thesis presentation, which bolstered their confidence. As a GTA, they value peer support, collaboration, and suggest an online course for better preparation.

They advocate blending creative and technical writing to enhance student confidence and address challenges within a restrictive curriculum. Heidi stressed the need for improved communication among GTAs to enhance professional development and combat isolation, citing Northwestern University's successful graduate student unionization as a positive model. Their relationship with Rachel exemplifies the transition from fear of judgment to collaborative engagement, emphasizing the importance of asking questions and acknowledging knowledge gaps for growth.

Past

Teacher Modeling

Heidi did not initially want to study or pursue a career in education. "I was very hesitant to be a teacher for much of my life, because I didn't really want to study education, nor did I want to teach middle schoolers." The main motivation for Heidi to take this appointment was to fund their graduate school. This mindset has shifted and Heidi is currently considering a long-term career in higher education. As a result of these prior lack of aspirations to enter the teaching field, Heidi's formal experience in teaching is limited. They stated, "So, for teaching composition, the only place I've taught is UMKC." This is their primary and formal teaching experience, which plays a foundational role in their approach to classroom instruction. Heidi acknowledged that their formal training in teaching is limited to their experiences at UMKC. "That was the only, like, formal training that I've had for teaching." However, they mention that even experiences that are not directly related to formal teaching contributed to their overall development as an educator. Heidi elaborated that they often draw from their experiences as a student and from informal leadership roles, which have helped shape their ability to engage with others. "I think even group projects or mentoring younger

students, that kind of thing, really helped me learn how to communicate ideas more clearly and guide others through complex topics." Additionally, they reflected on the influence of peer discussions and collaborative learning environments. "When you're in a space where everyone is sharing ideas, you naturally start to develop ways to facilitate those conversations, even if you're not the designated teacher."

Heidi highlighted the impact of working alongside other GTAs and observing their methods. They reflected on a friend of theirs from a separate university, "She graduated, like, two years ago, I think, and she was a TA, so she wasn't quite, like, teaching. She wasn't doing composition, but just in the way that, like, graduate teaching assistants and just, you know." Heidi brought to light the difference of responsibility GTAs and TAs hold from different departments and institutions. This was especially apparent when Heidi revealed their expectation to taking this appointment was to *assist* in teaching, not lead the entire class, labeling the title as misleading. Heidi was grateful for their adaptive nature and how it helped them acclimate to the new expectations of the position.

Heidi also discussed the importance of continuously adapting strategies in the classroom based on real-time challenges and student needs. "We talk about, like, different strategies in the classroom and have real, blunt, transparent conversations, but I make sure that we're not, like, going off the rails in our classrooms." They emphasized collaboration with colleagues to refine approaches and maintain classroom effectiveness. Heidi expressed that they felt supported in their teaching environment, which positively influenced their confidence and willingness to experiment with different teaching methods. A recurring theme in GTA's reflections is their focus on student interaction. They value creating a space where students feel comfortable engaging and contributing, which in turn shapes their teaching philosophy

and methods. Heidi's teaching approach is shaped by their academic background, hands-on experience, and reflections on their initial teaching experiences.

As mentioned previously, Heidi's entry into formal teaching began with their GTA appointment at UMKC. They acknowledged that this role marked their first exposure to pedagogy and formal training in teaching. "That was really my first exposure to like, teaching at a, I mean, not only a professional level, but just like my first exposure to pedagogy, or like any sort of training for teaching." This highlights how their early teaching experiences were shaped by on-the-job learning rather than extensive prior training. Heidi openly reflected on how their teaching style evolved over time. In their initial semester, they spoke of adopting a stricter approach, striving to establish authority. "I think I was a little too harsh my first semester teaching because I wanted to, like, be like, I'm an educator. I'm teaching a college class." However, by their second semester, they adjusted their methods. "And then my second semester teaching, I was like, maybe I was too mean and like a little more laid back." This trial-and-error process illustrates their ability to critically evaluate their performance and make adjustments to enhance student engagement and classroom dynamics.

Heidi emphasized the importance of learning from their peers and participating in collaborative teaching environments, such as Teaching Circles. "But I think like just working with peers has been really helpful sharing our experiences with each other." They described the Teaching Circles as beneficial spaces for professional growth and community. "I think that having the teaching circles as a dedicated space to be with each other is really good and important." This underscores how collaborative learning and shared experiences play a significant role in shaping their teaching philosophy.

Present

Learning Centeredness

Heidi demonstrated a strong focus on creating a supportive, empathetic environment for their students, highlighting the importance of fostering open communication. “I think too, something that kind of disarms students is when I actually walk into the room for class and just have a conversation with them.[…] I’ve had several students get comfortable enough to open up to me about some pretty harrowing things.” However, Heidi did acknowledge the balance between authority and understanding: “I think there’s this weird balance between being a student and being an educator. I don’t want to be overly authoritative, but I also know I need to set boundaries.” Their student-centered philosophy is further highlighted in their teaching methods, in particular to the integration of workshops (modeled after their experiences in creative writing workshops). “Running peer review as like a workshop has been really great, I think, for some of these students. But I think that having these moments of collaboration has been really important to the way that I teach.” From these experiences, Heidi advocates blending creative and technical writing in curriculum.

Heidi expressed the value of professional development, such as participating in Teaching Circles. “My only like real professional development stuff has been our GTA meetings and then now the Teaching Circles. […] I think that having the Teaching Circles as a dedicated space to be with each other is really good and important.” Heidi stressed the importance of representation and dialogue among graduate students. They highlighted this when drawing attention to the idea that the “whole point” of being in the position they are in is that “we’re all kind of stupid and learning things together.”

Liminality

Heidi reflected on the complexities of straddling the roles of being both a graduate student and an instructor, which places them in a state of liminality. “And I think that there is this idea in some of my students’ heads that I am only an educator. Even though I introduce myself the first day of class like, ‘I’m a graduate student here.’ […] There’s a weird balance between being a student and being an educator and it does make me feel guilty just based on what my students need from me.” This tension highlights their feeling of existing in an undefined space: not fully seen as a peer by students, but also not entirely occupying the authoritative role of a faculty member. However, this also offered an opportunity for strong rapport building with students. Heidi indicated that they regularly emphasized to students that they were also a student. “I mean, not in a bad way, but just like… I’m just some guy. I’m also a student. I get it.” Their connection with students sometimes complicated the boundary between educator and peer, further reinforcing her liminal position, but not necessarily in a negative way. “I’ve had several students get comfortable enough to open up to me about some pretty harrowing things.” “I think too, something that kind of disarms students is when I actually walk into the room for class and just have a conversation with them.” Their empathy and approachability blur lines of professional distance, situating them in a role that blends mentorship, authority, and peer-like understanding.

Heidi did, however, wrestle with establishing authority while maintaining relatability, reinforcing their sense of in-betweenness. “I think I was a little too harsh my first semester teaching because I wanted to, like, be like, I’m an educator… And then my second semester, I was like, maybe I was too mean and a little more laid back.” As mentioned in a prior section, they adjusted their teaching style, attempting to find equilibrium between

professional detachment and personal connection. “I don’t want to be overly authoritative, but I also know I need to set boundaries.” A recurring theme in Heidi’s reflections is imposter syndrome (the persistent feeling that they are not fully qualified or that their role as an educator is somehow temporary). This self-doubt is closely linked to their transitional status as a graduate student: “I think sometimes I still feel like I’m pretending to be a teacher. Like, I’m waiting for someone to be like, you’re not qualified for this.” Their acknowledgment of imposter syndrome speaks to the vulnerability many early-career educators experience.

Despite teaching multiple courses, Heidi continues to feel as though they are “acting” the part of an educator rather than fully inhabiting the role. This perception shapes how they envision their professional trajectory, “It’s hard to feel like I’m really an educator when I’m still very much learning myself.” Heidi’s reflections suggest that their professional identity is tied to her sense of competency, and as they grow in confidence and skill, this aspect of their identity will likely become more solidified. Despite the liminality, Heidi envisions teaching as part of her long-term path, indicating a desire to transition fully into the role of educator. “I think teaching will be a long-term part of that as well… definitely PhD, definitely teaching.” Their reflections suggest that while liminality currently shapes her experience, it also serves as a space of growth and self-discovery.

Future

Professional Identity Development

Heidi expressed a clear interest in continuing their teaching career beyond their current role, conveying their passion for the profession. “So, I do think teaching will be like a long-term part of that as well. Like, I'm really interested in teaching literature courses and

maybe some media studies courses." They expressed interest in eighteenth to nineteenth-century crime literature, specifically in the twentieth-century French philosopher, Foucault, who they frame their analysis of crime literature through. Their ambition to expand into literature and media studies signals their intention to diversify their teaching expertise and grow as an educator. Heidi's professional identity is not static but something they actively construct through experience and reflection. Their desire to pursue a PhD indicates that Heidi envisions themself continuing along the academic path, moving from the transitional role of GTA to a more permanent position as a professor or researcher. This statement signals that while their professional identity is still forming, they have a clear sense of direction and purpose. Their acknowledgment of teaching as a core part of their future reflects the way their current experiences are shaping their aspirations: "I don't know if I'll ever stop teaching. Even if I'm primarily doing research, I think I'll still want to be in the classroom." Heidi's future goals, therefore, center on fully integrating the roles of educator, researcher, and lifelong learner.

Their role as a GTA represents an early step into the professional world of academia. They acknowledged that stepping into the role of an educator was initially intimidating "I mean, I still had a couple of years of teaching under my belt, but not very many… I feel like I'm still figuring out what it means to be an educator." This statement highlights the liminality they experience, embodying both the role of a student and a teacher. Heidi framed teaching as a learning process, suggesting that identity as an educator develops gradually, shaped by trial, error, and self-assessment: "I think teaching is like, such a process of trial and error, and you kind of refine who you are as an educator over time." Their willingness to

adapt and evolve reflects an awareness that professional identity is fluid and constructed over time, influenced by experiences in the classroom and interactions with students.

A defining characteristic of Heidi's professional identity is their belief in lifelong learning. They view academia not as a place of mastery, but as a space where learning never stops. "Especially being in academia, the whole point is that we're all kind of stupid and learning things together." This perspective reflects humility and a collaborative approach to knowledge-building. By embracing the idea that everyone is in a state of continuous growth, Heidi alleviates some of the pressure associated with imposter syndrome. Their belief that students, educators, and peers are all learning together helps shape a professional identity rooted in openness and curiosity. "I think one of the best parts about being a writer and being a student is being a writer and a student with other people." Their professional identity, therefore, is not framed around having all the answers but rather around fostering an environment where learning is shared and collective.

Professional development plays a crucial role in Heidi's identity formation. They highlighted Teaching Circles as vital spaces for growth and reassurance: "The Teaching Circles have been really important. It's helpful to be in a space where we can ask questions and not feel judged." These circles provide Heidi with the opportunity to engage in reflective practice, exchange ideas, and witness how other educators handle classroom challenges. "I learn a lot from how other people handle their classrooms, and that helps me figure out what kind of teacher I want to be." This peer-based development offers them not only practical strategies but also validation, contributing to the ongoing construction of their professional identity. The ability to learn from others reinforces their belief in the collective nature of education.

For Heidi, the line between personal and professional identity is blurred. Their passion for writing, their experiences as a student, and their role as an educator inform and reinforce one another. “I think that being a writer and being an educator are kind of inseparable for me at this point.” This integration of personal passion and professional identity shapes how they envision their future. Teaching is not just a career path but an extension of their identity as a writer and a learner. “I think I’m always going to be someone who teaches, even if I’m doing something else. Teaching just feels like part of who I am now.” Heidi’s reflections reveal that their professional identity development is deeply intertwined with their personal growth. As they continue to pursue advanced degrees and teaching opportunities, this blending of identities will likely deepen, influencing both their pedagogical style and their career trajectory.

Appendix D7

Mason

Mason is a White, non-binary twenty-seven-year-old individual. They attained an undergraduate degree of an Associate in Arts Teaching before attaining a Bachelor of Science in Education with an emphasis in English and a minor in Theatre. They are currently working towards their Master of Arts in English with an emphasis in Literature at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. They have been a GTA for approximately two years at the time of this study, though they had teaching experience prior to this position. Concurrent with their GTA appointment, Mason also does admissions for a separate community college. They student taught at a high school while working towards their teaching licensure of grades 5-8 in Language Arts and 9-12 in English. They acquired their substitute license prior to this achievement as well. After attaining their full licensure, Mason taught middle school for a year. Through their experiences in gaining licensure, Mason observed the necessity for emphasizing a need for classroom management training. Professional development at a local community college was discussed in the interview, including AI workshops and a book club on personal growth. The benefits of a supportive campus community were noted, alongside their transition to a GTA role, adapting to college-level composition teaching while advocating for innovative methodologies like using video games as literature.

Mason also discussed challenges in engaging students in online classes and the decision to pursue a master's degree due to supportive teachers and financial aid opportunities. They also spoke on feelings of being overwhelmed and impostor syndrome, along with balancing roles as a graduate student, teacher, and admissions professional. They pointed out a need for updated educational methodologies, advocating for contemporary

literature and diverse forms like young adult fiction and graphic novels. They mentioned how collaboration with other GTAs and faculty guidance has bolstered their confidence in teaching composition. However, they did point out the need for comprehensive GTA training, curriculum understanding, and helping students apply writing skills meaningfully. They addressed misconceptions about writing instruction, frustrations with standardized curricula, and value recent collaborative Teaching Circles for fresh perspectives.

Past

Teacher Modeling

Mason's prior experiences have significantly shaped their approach to teaching. Their educational background includes an Associate's in Arts Teaching, a Bachelor's in Science in Education with an emphasis in English and a minor in Theater, and currently, they are pursuing a Master's in English with a literature emphasis at UMKC. Their teaching journey began with student teaching at the high school level. This experience exposed them to structured educational environments and the challenges of engaging with older students. Following this, Mason taught middle school for a year at a middle school in a more rural and affluent district. However, Mason's decision to leave middle school teaching stemmed from several factors. While they valued the experience, they felt under-compensated relative to the workload and recognized opportunities to pursue further education and potentially secure positions that aligned more closely with their interests and financial expectations. "It was like a compounding bunch of things. One of them was wanting to go back to school, but more so, it was kind of like, just kind of having the feeling that like, I'm worth a lot more than I'm being paid for this job that I'm doing, and I can get paid more to do less work, right? So, I should probably do that, and that's what I did."

Their enduring interest in mid-20th century speculative fiction, authors like Ray Bradbury, Kurt Vonnegut, and Philip K. Dick, also influences their teaching style. “I keep finding myself going back to mid-20th century speculative fiction, so Ray Bradbury, Kurt Vonnegut, Philip K. Dick, all those guys. I keep finding myself just very fascinated by their work.” This passion shapes their engagement with students, fostering a classroom environment that values critical thinking, creative expression, and the exploration of diverse narratives.

Present

Learning Centeredness

Mason’s teaching approach reflects a combination of formal education, practical experience, and adaptability to evolving classroom dynamics. Their academic journey highlights a strong commitment to both subject knowledge and pedagogy. This layered academic background reflects their dedication to deepening their expertise across multiple disciplines, which likely informs their multifaceted teaching approach. An element of Mason’s teaching philosophy is adaptability, shaped by their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflecting on that period, Mason explained, “Yeah, it was rough, especially because that was back in 2021, so we were still feeling the effects of COVID, as far as its effect on student behaviors, and just being behind on everything.” Their acknowledgment of the pandemic’s lasting impact on student development demonstrates an awareness of how external factors influence classroom dynamics. This sensitivity aligns with a learning-centered approach, focusing not only on academic content but also on addressing the holistic needs of students as they recover from disrupted learning experiences.

Additionally, Mason's teaching experiences span both rural and suburban environments, providing them with diverse insights into student engagement. "I did my student teaching at the high school level and then taught middle school for a year." This blend of teaching settings suggests that Mason tailors their methods to fit the unique needs of different student populations, reinforcing a flexible and student-centered approach. Mason's experience with licensure and substitute teaching also highlights their proactive engagement with the teaching process: "I graduated certified for grades 9 through 12 for English, and then I got a language arts certificate for grades 5 through 8, just to kind of broaden my options." This breadth of certification underscores their commitment to being prepared for diverse educational environments, further demonstrating their focus on fostering student growth at multiple levels. Mason's teaching philosophy reflects a balance of academic rigor, practical experience, and empathy. Their responsiveness to post-pandemic challenges, diverse teaching environments, and continuous professional growth illustrates a nuanced, learning-centered approach that prioritizes student engagement, adaptability, and reflective practice.

Liminality

Mason's experiences and reflections reveal not only shifts in career and teaching responsibilities but also transformations in mindset and adaptability. A significant moment of liminality emerges in Mason's transition from teaching middle and high school to instructing college students in composition. They reflected about this shift, acknowledging a need to "readjust" to a new environment. This transitional phase is one that necessitates relearning and recalibrating his approach to pedagogy. Their openness about the need to "readjust" highlights the fluid nature of this stage, where past experiences blend with emerging challenges.

Mason elaborated further on the complexities of navigating different educational environments, explaining, “I had taught paper writing, you know, in middle school and high school, but it’s just, it's very different, like, what you’re looking for from those students versus what you're looking for from a college student.” Here, they articulated the dissonance between familiar methods and new expectations, situating themself within a liminal space, neither fully anchored in past practices nor entirely at ease with new responsibilities. This recognition of differing pedagogical approaches exemplifies the essence of liminality, where existing frameworks must evolve to meet the demands of a changing context.

Beyond professional transitions, Mason reflected on the internal shifts in his mindset and adaptability. Speaking about personal growth, they noted, “That’s just been helpful on, like, a personal level to, like, change my thinking about things and become more adaptable in certain situations.” This insight suggests that Mason’s liminal experiences extend beyond the classroom, influencing their broader outlook on life and professional resilience. The process of evolving their thought patterns and becoming more flexible reflects the continuous nature of personal development within liminal spaces. Additionally, Mason highlighted structured opportunities for growth within their workplace, revealing how external factors contribute to their evolving sense of self. “My team at my work, our supervisor has us do, like, a book club every year, where she picks a book for us to develop.” Participation in such initiatives suggests a proactive embrace of liminality, positioning Mason in a space of ongoing reflection and learning. By engaging in collective growth activities, they acknowledge the value of transition as a means of fostering new perspectives and expanding his professional capabilities.

The influence of external circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, further amplifies Mason's experiences of liminality. Reflecting on a particular teaching experience, they stated, "Yeah, it was rough, especially because that was back in 2021, so we were still feeling the effects of COVID, as far as its effect on student behaviors, and just being behind on everything." This period of uncertainty, marked by the pandemic's residual effects, illustrates how Mason found themself in a liminal space not just as an individual but as part of a collective experience with students. Navigating this phase required adaptability and patience, reinforcing their identity as an educator capable of guiding students through their own liminal journeys.

Mason's narrative captures the multifaceted nature of liminality, spanning professional transitions, personal growth, and external disruptions. Their reflections reveal a teacher evolving alongside their students, embracing the uncertainties of liminal spaces as opportunities for transformation and deeper engagement with his role. Through these experiences, Mason exemplified the value of navigating transitional phases with adaptability, reflection, and a willingness to continually reshape his approach to both teaching and life.

Future

Professional Identity Development

Mason's professional identity development is a dynamic process influenced by their educational background, teaching experiences, and aspirations for the future. Their narrative reflects a continuous evolution shaped by past experiences, present reflections, and future ambitions. A key element in Mason's identity formation is their pursuit of a master's degree, which they frame as both a practical and aspirational step. They explained, "I knew I wanted to get my master's degree, and I had applied for, like, a bunch of different places, and I went

with UMKC mostly out of, like, a proximity thing, just because I already lived in Kansas City." This decision reflects a balance between long-term goals and logistical considerations, highlighting how Mason's professional path is shaped by both ambition and practicality. Their awareness of external constraints, such as the ability to relocate, underscores the grounded nature of their career planning.

Mason's engagement in reflective practices also plays a significant role in their identity development. They noted the influence of structured activities like workplace book clubs: "My team at my work, our supervisor has us do, like, a book club every year, where she picks, like, a book for us to develop." This ongoing professional development aligns with their broader goal of growth and adaptability, suggesting a proactive approach to expanding their skill set and perspective. Moreover, Mason reflected on how their teaching experiences, particularly at different educational levels, contribute to their evolving identity. They note the shift from teaching middle and high school to instructing college students, stating, "I had to kind of think back more to, like, the college side of things and kind of think back, like, okay, well, what, like, skills did I not develop, like, right away and work on?" This reflective process illustrates how Mason draws on past experiences to shape their present approach, reinforcing the iterative nature of identity development. Mason's professional identity emerges as a composite of reflective practices, adaptive learning, and future-oriented planning. Their commitment to further education, engagement in structured growth opportunities, and introspective approach to teaching reflect a continuous process of shaping their career path and refining their goals for the future.

Appendix D8

Rachel

While the participating WPA, Rachel, did not participate in the Teaching Circles, she was still interviewed in order to offer a dual perspective on how the writing administration views GTA development/training and to develop a fuller picture of GTA professional identity development. Rachel is a forty-seven-year-old, White/Non-Hispanic, female. She has been teaching at UMKC for thirteen years and holds the official title of Associate Teaching Professor. She got her undergraduate degrees in English and Philosophy before she attained her master's degree in English with an emphasis in Literary Theory and her PhD with a focus on American Literature. Rachel taught composition as a GTA while working towards her master's for two years and continued as a GTA for two years while completing her PhD coursework. After completing PhD coursework, she returned to Missouri and worked as an adjunct instructor for approximately five to six years, teaching composition classes, while writing her dissertation. Rachel initially pursued a career in literature but shifted to teaching composition, influenced by mentorship during her studies. She advanced from a Graduate Teaching Assistant to a full-time lecturer at UMKC, where she focused on composition and held (and continues to hold) administrative roles. In addition to her duties as Writing Director and Writing Program Administrator, she also teaches English 126: Popular Literature, English 242: Women Reading, Women Writing, English 360: The Modern Novel, CDV 206: Culture and Diversity-Intersectionality, and GRT AH 108: Critical Thinking in the Arts and Humanities.

Rachel's diverse teaching experiences, including online classes for military veterans and community college students, prepared her for UMKC's non-traditional student

population. Despite UMKC's aim to become an R1 institution, she recognizes that many undergraduates will remain non-traditional. Initially relying on traditional methods, she transitioned to active learning strategies, acknowledging challenges in educational programs, particularly in writing and composition. Rachel discussed in her interview how budget cuts ended the Faculty Scholars initiative at the UM System, and limited advertising hampered efforts to revive past initiatives. The integration of writing and public speaking classes required flexible approaches amid standardized curricula. Challenges for graduate students and adjuncts, such as low pay and job insecurity, were noted alongside frustrations with first-year composition scholarship. As a WPA, she manages scheduling and enrollment during staff shortages while supporting GTAs and serving on various committees related to writing and course review. Currently, Rachel teaches multiple classes each semester, balancing extensive committee responsibilities, and emphasizing the importance of written and oral communication skills despite institutions' struggles to align with employers' priorities. WPAs face difficulties in balancing administrative duties with student and GTA needs, often lacking authority in program design. The appointment of individuals without strong composition backgrounds to WPA roles is due to a shortage of qualified specialists.

She discussed the undervaluation of administrative work, affecting women's advancement from associate to full professor, and advocates for practical GTA training, focusing on student-centered approaches that boost confidence and engagement. Despite resource and pay constraints, Rachel claims that the program excels, influenced by the WPA who came before her. She advocated for mentoring faculty in teaching practices rather than solely research expertise and emphasizing peer mentorship. While recognizing the importance of theoretical foundations, she critiqued traditional orientation sessions and noted

GTA challenges transitioning into teaching, especially those from literature or creative writing backgrounds. Instructors and students struggle with new theoretical content, yet teaching it ultimately benefits both. Improved GTA training and professional development are called for, with one-on-one teaching loads and structured mentoring suggested.

Past

Teacher Modeling

During her time as a PhD student, Rachel was involved in teaching composition courses as part of her responsibilities as a GTA. This experience served as an essential entry point into academia, where she first applied theoretical knowledge in a practical classroom setting. GTAs often manage introductory courses, and this hands-on involvement helped her develop skills in lesson planning, grading, and guiding students through foundational writing skills. The repetitive nature of teaching composition during this period likely allowed her to refine her methods and gain confidence in front of a classroom. Rachel also spoke highly of her mentor from when she was working on her master's degree, who was a specialist in Rhetoric and Composition. This mentorship played a crucial role in steering her toward composition studies, even though her primary interest was in literature. Mentorship often shapes early career paths by exposing mentees to areas of study they may not have initially pursued. Her mentor's expertise and guidance likely provided her with frameworks and teaching strategies specific to composition, influencing how she approaches teaching writing and rhetoric.

One of the formative experiences during Rachel's time working on her master's degree involved participating in a composition-focused service learning project. Service learning integrates community service with classroom instruction, emphasizing reflective

thinking and civic responsibility. This project deepened her understanding of experiential learning, allowing her to blend academic objectives with real-world applications. By working on projects that connect classroom learning to community needs, she developed an approach to teaching that emphasizes practical engagement and social impact.

While working towards her PhD, Rachel briefly served as an assistant to the WPA. Writing Program Administrative experience typically involves overseeing course development, mentoring new instructors, and managing the broader composition curriculum. Even if this role was short-lived, it exposed her to the administrative side of academia and broadened her perspective on how writing programs function. This experience contributed to her holistic understanding of teaching composition, from managing individual classrooms to influencing larger curriculum structures.

After completing PhD coursework, Rachel returned to Missouri to write her dissertation while working as an adjunct instructor. Adjunct positions often involve teaching multiple courses at different institutions, fostering adaptability and versatility. Her adjunct work involved teaching composition and literature classes, reinforcing her practical teaching experience. During this period, she faced diverse student populations and adjusted her teaching strategies to meet various needs, further sharpening her pedagogical skills. She transitioned from adjunct teaching to a full-time lecturer position at UMKC. This move signified a more stable and permanent role, allowing her to expand beyond composition into courses related to her area of specialization. As a lecturer, she taught three composition classes alongside one class in her primary area of interest each semester. The combination of composition and specialized literature courses enabled her to merge her academic passion

with the practical needs of students. Over time, this dual focus allowed her to adopt a more interdisciplinary teaching style that connects literary theory with writing instruction.

Present

Learning Centeredness

Rachel highlighted in her interview the practical and career-driven reasons for starting as a teacher. She began teaching as part of her responsibilities as a GTA, focusing on composition. Learning-centeredness is often informed by an educator's early exposure to teaching practices. Starting with a focus on writing and composition cultivated an understanding of the importance of communication, critical thinking, and tailored feedback in the learning process. She also worked on a service-learning project related to composition. Service learning combines academic instruction with community engagement, providing students with meaningful, hands-on learning opportunities. This project underscores Rachel's interest in creating impactful educational experiences that connect coursework with real-world applications. The conversation revealed Rachel's substantial teaching responsibilities. She mentioned teaching full-time (e.g., 4-4 load) and sometimes taking on an even heavier schedule, taking on a 6-6 load at one point, across multiple institutions. This workload points to her extensive experience but also reflects the demands and constraints of adjunct or part-time teaching roles. Teaching across different institutions, workloads, and student populations implies adaptability and versatility. It likely required her to modify her strategies to suit varying learner needs, fostering a learner-first approach.

She also shared her exposure to various teaching contexts, including different institutions and student demographics. This variety equipped her with a broad understanding of different teaching strategies and learner needs, emphasizing adaptability in her approach.

This approach aligns with the core principles of learning-centered teaching, which prioritizes relevance, engagement, and fostering responsibility among students for their own learning. Addressing diverse learner needs is central to learning-centeredness, as it requires instructors to understand and accommodate individual and group learning preferences, creating more inclusive learning environments. Rachel's involvement in such a project suggests their inclination toward dynamic, participatory teaching methods. With two years of teaching experience before entering her PhD program, Rachel participated in an accelerated training or orientation. This program catered specifically to individuals with existing teaching backgrounds, offering opportunities to refine and deepen pedagogical skills.

Liminality

Rachel identified literature as her primary area of interest and expertise, specifying that her training was not in rhetoric and composition, but in literature. She emphasized that she does teach composition courses (English 110 and 225), but she primarily teaches women's gender studies in literature. "So, there's kind of this weird in between. A place for my own teaching where it's, well, you know, I'm the WPA, but I don't teach a lot of writing classes. I mean, I teach writing in my other classes, but I'm not teaching 110 and 225 only in every semester." This sets the stage for exploring how teaching composition, often a required responsibility for GTAs or contingent faculty, introduces an additional layer to their professional identity. Balancing expertise in literature with the practical demands of teaching composition creates tension in defining one's professional identity. The requirement to teach composition as a GTA or contingent faculty can place individuals in a liminal space between scholarly aspirations and institutional expectations.

"I think contingent faculty who are not on the tenure track always have kind of a liminal position. And I also think, particularly as a WPA, because you've got the administrative hat and the faculty hat, but then my faculty hat is a non-tenure. And I'm not research faculty." This statement underscores the systemic nature of liminality for contingent faculty. Their roles are inherently transitional, lacking the permanence and recognition associated with tenure-track positions. When asked how she faces the challenges of existing in a liminal space and state of being, Rachel responded with explaining that it is fairly easy to contend with because of the strong department leadership. "So that if I'm like, 'Hey, there's something that I feel very strongly about,' I don't feel like anyone's like, 'Oh, well, you're not tenure, so we're not going to listen to you on WPA stuff.' I don't feel like that has been a problem by and large." She did clarify that this has not always been the case and that when she first started working at UMKC non-tenured, full-time, non-tenured faculty could not even vote in the College of Arts and Sciences. "So, that has changed and there's been a lot of positive changes where I think the value of contingent faculty and recognizing, so that has helped a lot in terms of dealing with at least that piece of the liminality."

Rachel also spoke on her experiences of existing in multiple fields. "I kind of feel I have to keep up in three fields." She spoke on how though her position is not primarily dedicated to research, she still aims to keep up with it in order to be an effective teacher. However, "But then since I'm teaching other fields, I also need to kind of keep up. I'm probably not as up to date in any of them as I should be." This suggests a practical awareness of the difficulty of balancing multiple fields and the struggle of maintaining a contemporary knowledge base of all of them simultaneously.

Future

Professional Identity Development

Rachel's journey into teaching illustrates the fluid and multifaceted nature of professional identity development. Significant factors that influenced this journey were the intersecting between planned and accidental career choices, the impact of workload and experience, the role of institutional support, and the negotiation of qualifications. These factors collectively shaped her sense of self as a professional educator over time. The decision to teach composition was described as driven more by necessity than intention. This suggests Rachel initially entered teaching not as a deliberate career choice but as an available opportunity while pursuing other goals. The mention of teaching composition as a GTA highlights how teaching roles in academia are often tied to graduate studies, offering initial exposure to the profession without a long-term career commitment. While teaching may have started as a functional necessity, over time, it contributed to Rachel's evolving sense of professional identity. This shift from obligation to professional integration reflects a common developmental trajectory for many educators as has been made evident by some of the participant GTAs and their future career goals. This unintentional pathway mirrors how many individuals in academia often "fall into" teaching as they navigate opportunities and constraints in their professional environments. Such narratives underscore the importance of flexibility and adaptability in professional identity development. Even when a career is not initially planned, ongoing experiences and external circumstances shape one's professional commitments and self-concept.

Rachel shared details of her teaching workload, including intense schedules such as a "4-4" (teaching four courses per semester) and even a "6-6" (six courses per semester) at one

point during her time in graduate school. She described these workloads as challenging, especially when teaching at multiple institutions simultaneously. These experiences provided a wide-ranging set of teaching experiences, allowing her to navigate diverse institutional cultures, student populations, and course demands. Heavy teaching loads and varied experiences often contribute to the practical expertise and resilience of educators. These challenges shape teaching philosophy and professional confidence, even if they were physically and emotionally taxing at the time. Rachel addressed assumptions about her qualifications, noting she did not have a formal degree in education or specific training when starting her teaching career. Instead, her qualifications and teaching identity were developed through practical experience and on-the-job learning. This highlights the common divide between academic expertise in a discipline (e.g., English literature) and formal credentials in teaching or education. Overcoming such assumptions and proving capability through experience can strengthen professional identity. It also underscores the broader tension in academia between subject-matter expertise and pedagogical training, both of which contribute to an educator's professional identity.

APPENDIX E: ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTS

The following appendix includes the initial analysis of the data collected from the individual interviews of each participant, providing 1) a deeper understanding of each participant's identity development through the themes of Teacher Modeling, Learning-Centeredness, Liminality, and Professional Identity Development and 2) a model for future research on the ways the analysis of the individual accounts can enhance ad hoc peer mentorship.

Teacher Modeling

Individual Perspectives: GTAs

The theme of Teacher Modeling was also heavily prevalent in the participants' individual narratives. Within it, GTAs reflected on and incorporated their past educational experiences, mentors, and personal journeys into their teaching practices. Yancey et al. propose three main approaches to teacher modeling: (1) making tacit knowledge explicit through mapping and reflection, (2) employing mixed long-term strategies in a safe space, and (3) identifying and supporting professional development opportunities (Yancey, Cole, May, and Stark 129-131). These strategies emphasize theory-practice integration and reflective dialogue**.** Teacher knowledge and professional identity are tied to lived experiences and storytelling. Through sharing and reflecting on their own stories, the participants test their theories of teaching against real-life experiences, refining their professional identities. This connection is supported by Elbaz-Luwisch, Pritzker, Graven, and Pinnegar, highlighting the role of storytelling in understanding teaching practices and identity development.

Many GTAs discussed how their own struggles, successes, and encounters with past teachers shaped their approach to teaching. For example, Julian recalled not having

supportive English teachers until college, which motivated him to provide empathy and understanding to his students. His experience of not receiving the grace or flexibility he needed as a student influences his decision to foster a more understanding and compassionate environment for his own students. This does not mean lowering academic standards, but rather acknowledging students' individual struggles and creating space for growth. By doing so, Julian modeled empathy and resilience, showing students that academic challenges can be met with support rather than punishment. Similarly, Hannah drew from moments of academic struggle and mentorship during her undergraduate studies to foster a compassionate and inclusive classroom environment.

Conversely, positive experiences shape teaching strategies that prioritize engagement and accessibility. Hannah recalled moments when faculty members encouraged her academic growth and provided mentorship during difficult times. Inspired by these experiences, she created a nurturing classroom environment, ensuring students feel comfortable seeking help and expressing their ideas. Their mentorship not only helped Hannah academically but also shaped her teaching methods, reinforcing the value of one-on-one interactions, office hours, and personalized feedback. Constructivist education encourages active participation by teachers and students, recognizing their prior knowledge and narratives. This collaborative model moves beyond traditional top-down teaching methods, emphasizing individualized learning paths (Eyler 52; Abdal-Haqq; Klipfel and Cook). Hannah demonstrated this when discussing how she took into consideration the ideas and experiences of her students prior to entering her classroom. Constructivist modeling views teacher preparation as a collaborative effort, enabling GTAs to connect prior knowledge with new pedagogical strategies (Clandinin and Connelly, *Teachers as Curriculum Planners*; Reid et al.).

Diana similarly credits her enjoyment of English classes in college with inspiring her switch from political science to English, which motivates her to foster a similar love for the subject in her own students. GTAs who previously took the same courses they now teach also offer a unique perspective. Julian, for instance, took the very composition courses he now instructs. This dual perspective allows him to tailor lessons in ways that directly address the challenges he once faced, effectively modeling learning from both sides of the classroom dynamic.

Participating GTAs frequently cited influential mentors or professors who modeled effective teaching practices. These figures serve as aspirational models, encouraging GTAs to balance rigor with empathy and to prioritize student engagement. Sasha, for instance, highlighted how her experiences managing a coffee shop and leading Bible study groups contribute to her ability to mentor students effectively. It was also made clear how Teacher Modeling extends beyond formal classroom experiences. Diana, for example, grew up in a family of educators, including her grandmother and aunt. This familial exposure instilled an early appreciation for teaching and provided her with informal but valuable insights into student engagement and classroom management. She recalled attending professional development events and conferences with her family, which gave her a behind-the-scenes view of teaching. This modeling from within the family helped Diana craft a teaching style that values relationships and open communication with students.

Many GTAs, like Sasha, also draw from collaborative environments, such as Teaching Circles, where they engaged in peer mentorship and exchange teaching strategies. Despite the lack of focus on formal pedagogy, TCs are credited with being safe places for learning, exploration, change, and accomplishment (see Marshall; Moore et al.; Powell and

Harrington; Ashton; Fassinger and Gililand). A Teaching Circle has three main goals: 1) To give educators the chance to discuss strategies with peers for enhancing the student learning experience (e.g., providing specific and quality feedback, teaching methods, LMS usage, etc.). 2) To create a space for educators to talk about current events and their impact on the classroom. 3) To offer a reliable point of contact where educators can seek support, guidance, or teaching resources (Ashton 12).

Teaching Circles are identified as vital spaces for professional development, allowing GTAs to share experiences and strategies, thus building a supportive community. This structure enhances mentorship and collaboration, mitigating feelings of isolation often experienced by new educators. The influence of other GTAs, as well as the guidance of the Writing Program Administrator (WPA), helps build confidence and provides practical tools for navigating classroom challenges. Sasha's experience managing a coffee shop helped her develop crucial skills in leadership, problem-solving, and mentorship. She noted how training baristas and troubleshooting operational issues mirrors the process of guiding students through academic challenges. Similarly, Owen, who previously worked in project management, highlighted how balancing timelines and leading teams translates into managing a classroom, designing lesson plans, and fostering collaboration among students.

Diana recalled volunteering as a peer mentor and participating in outreach programs during high school, which helped develop empathy, communication skills, and patience. Her role as a writing tutor at the university she was attending (not the site of this study) further honed her ability to offer constructive feedback and tailor guidance to individual student needs. This hands-on approach to learning, even in informal settings, underscores the importance of fostering student growth through personalized mentorship. Sasha, as a parent,

drew parallels between parenting and teaching. She emphasized the importance of setting boundaries, offering consistent support, and nurturing student development, all of which reflect the skills she developed as a parent. By modeling patience and accountability, she created a structured yet compassionate classroom environment.

A recurring sentiment among GTAs was the aspiration to become the kind of teacher they wished they had during their education. Reflective practices help make implicit knowledge explicit, bridging prior experiences with new teaching concepts. Reflection facilitates metacognition, where teachers analyze their decision-making processes, fostering the integration of theory and practice (Yancey, Robertson, and Tazak 129). This desire drives their teaching philosophy, focusing on inclusivity, adaptability, and fostering a supportive learning environment. Heidi, despite initially lacking aspirations to teach, adopted strategies inspired by peer collaboration and past classroom experiences to develop a student-centered approach. Julian specifically highlighted the importance of being a relatable and empathetic figure, particularly for students from marginalized backgrounds. As a Black educator, he emphasized the significance of representation, aiming to provide the kind of support he lacked in high school. His openness about struggling with English early on created a strong rapport with students, showing them that academic growth is possible regardless of their starting point.

Hannah spoke about the shift from authoritarian teaching models to more collaborative and inclusive approaches. She recalled feeling anxious in rigid classroom environments and seeks to create a space where students feel empowered to contribute. This philosophy is reflected in her emphasis on creative writing exercises and peer collaboration, fostering a sense of ownership over learning. Heidi emphasized the importance of creating

"safe spaces" for students to express themselves. By sharing their personal journeys, including feelings of imposter syndrome and self-doubt, they model vulnerability and growth, encouraging students to view challenges as opportunities for development. Heidi frequently reminded students that they are also learners, reinforcing the idea that education is a shared journey rather than a hierarchical process.

The theme of Teacher Modeling reveals that GTAs shape their teaching identities through reflective practice, mentorship, experiential learning, and a desire to transform their classrooms into supportive, inclusive environments. This narrative-driven approach highlights the evolving nature of teaching, where personal experiences and professional aspirations converge to create dynamic, empathetic educators. Teacher Modeling among GTAs reflects a blend of personal narrative, experiential learning, and mentorship. Their teaching identities are shaped by reflections on past experiences, reinforcing the notion that teaching is as much about modeling empathy and adaptability as it is about delivering content.

Individual Perspectives: WPA

Rachel, the participating WPA, offers an alternative perspective on GTA identity development under the theme of Teacher Modeling by serving as a mentor, institutional guide, and role model for the GTAs. While the GTAs primarily develop their teaching identities through peer mentorship, storytelling, and experiential learning within Teaching Circles, Rachel provides a structured and experienced viewpoint that helps bridge gaps in their professional growth. Unlike the GTAs, who are in a transitional phase between student and instructor, Rachel's teaching philosophy is well-established, allowing her to provide stability and insight that GTAs can rely on as they navigate their evolving roles. Through her

mentorship, she fosters inclusivity, adaptability, and reflective teaching, encouraging GTAs to integrate diverse perspectives and develop student-centered approaches in their classrooms.

Though Rachel did not directly participate in Teaching Circles, her influence is evident in shaping the professional development sessions that GTAs attend. She provides essential guidance on lesson planning, curriculum design, and student engagement, offering a broader institutional framework that helps GTAs refine their teaching strategies. Additionally, Rachel's role emphasizes the importance of balancing authority with approachability, a challenge that many GTAs face as they attempt to establish credibility in their classrooms. While GTAs often develop their teaching styles through reflection on personal experiences and peer collaboration, Rachel models effective teaching through explicit training, structured mentorship, and administrative support, ensuring that GTAs have the necessary resources and frameworks to succeed.

Another key aspect of Rachel's influence is how she helps GTAs recognize their professional potential. Many GTAs initially view teaching as a temporary role but reconsider it as a long-term career after experiencing student engagement and positive feedback. Rachel reinforces their evolving teacher identities by providing long-term strategies for professional growth, helping them transition from novice instructors to confident educators. Her role in the organization of Teaching Circles and development other mentoring opportunities ensures that GTAs are not only supported in their immediate classroom challenges but also encouraged to think critically about their future in academia. Ultimately, while GTAs cultivate their teaching identities through storytelling, peer mentorship, and hands-on

classroom experiences, Rachel offers a macro-level perspective that grounds their learning in structured pedagogical theory, professional development, and institutional expectations.

Rachel modeled effective teaching through introspection and by drawing lessons from her own experiences. She spoke on how she focuses on creating an inclusive and adaptable teaching philosophy that reflects their understanding of diverse student needs. The WPA integrates diverse perspectives and cultural awareness into her teaching approach, recognizing the value of inclusivity and the role of representation in fostering an engaging and supportive learning environment. By connecting theoretical knowledge with practical applications, the WPA demonstrates how academic learning can have real-world relevance. This approach is especially effective in motivating students to engage with the material. The WPA advocates for peer mentorship and professional development opportunities, such as Teaching Circles, to foster collaborative learning among GTAs and support their growth as educators.

The WPA's reflective approach involves drawing on her past experiences to shape her teaching philosophy. She emphasized adaptability and inclusivity, ensuring her practices evolve based on personal growth and professional insights. Like the WPA, the participating GTAs often reflect on their experiences as students to inform their teaching. For instance, many GTAs draw from challenges they faced in education, such as a lack of supportive instructors, to adopt empathetic and understanding teaching practices. This reflection is particularly prominent among first-time GTAs who analyze their initial teaching challenges and refine their methods over time.

Additionally, Rachel focused on creating a compassionate teaching model, offering understanding and support for students' struggles while maintaining high standards. The

GTAs similarly strive for empathy. For instance, one GTA highlighted the importance of fostering solidarity with students by being transparent about their own academic struggles, which helped demystify the learning process and build rapport. The WPA models inclusivity by incorporating diverse perspectives and fostering a learning environment that values all voices. Her commitment to representation serves as a framework for new educators. Many GTAs resonate with this focus, especially those from underrepresented groups. For instance, one GTA, a young Black male, emphasized his goal of being a relatable and inspiring figure for students who might not see themselves reflected in academia. Furthermore, Rachel demonstrated adaptability by tailoring curriculum and pedagogy to meet students' varying needs and backgrounds. GTAs adapt similarly but often face a steeper learning curve. For example, a GTA who lacked formal training relied on trial and error to adjust their teaching methods, emphasizing student feedback and peer collaboration to improve their classroom strategies.

Rachel's support for Teaching Circles fosters peer mentorship and collaborative learning among GTAs. The participating GTAs also find these opportunities invaluable, as they allow for shared experiences and collective problem-solving. This collaboration often helps GTAs refine their teaching models through peer insights. Rachel balances authority with approachability, modeling a professional yet empathetic teaching persona. Many GTAs grapple with this balance, often leaning on relatability to connect with students while working to establish their authority. One GTA reflected on the challenge of teaching peers close in age and how they navigated this dynamic through shared learning experiences.

While there are many similarities between the participants, there are also several differences between them. For instance, Rachel's seasoned perspective enables her to model

best practices more consistently and confidently, whereas many of the GTAs, being earlier in their teaching journeys, often rely heavily on the WPA's guidance and their own limited experiences. Their teaching models are still in development, shaped by feedback and real-time adjustments. Additionally, the Rachel's approach benefits from a depth of formal training and experience, which allows her to offer structured guidance. Many GTAs expressed feeling underprepared for their teaching roles, with limited training emphasizing survival rather than pedagogical depth. As such, their teacher modeling often involves improvisation and learning "on the fly."

The WPA's professional identity is firmly established, which provides a clear framework for their teaching model. Contrasting this, the GTAs exist in a liminal space, juggling the dual roles of student and instructor. This transitional identity often complicates their ability to fully inhabit the role of teacher and impacts their confidence. Furthermore, the WPA consistently serves as a mentor, providing resources, guidance, and support to GTAs. While some GTAs embrace informal mentorship roles among peers, their primary focus remains on developing their own teaching model rather than guiding others. Finally, the WPA models a clear and established professional identity rooted in years of refinement. For GTAs, professional identity is an evolving concept. Some view teaching as a steppingstone, while others, inspired by their experiences, begin to see it as a long-term career path.

Rachel provides a stable and experienced model for GTAs to emulate, offering insights into effective teaching strategies, empathy, and professional behavior. However, GTAs' modeling experiences are more dynamic and exploratory, influenced by their dual roles, limited training, and varied personal backgrounds. This comparison underscores the importance of mentorship and structured development opportunities like Teaching Circles,

which bridge the gap between the WPA's expertise and the GTAs' emerging teaching identities.

Learning-Centeredness

Individual Perspectives: GTAs

The theme of Learning-Centeredness is evident in the teaching philosophies and strategies employed by the GTAs, emphasizing student engagement, adaptability, inclusivity, and collaboration. A common thread among their approaches is the prioritization of student engagement through relatability and empathy. For example, Julian's teaching philosophy centered around inclusivity and empathy, driven by his personal experiences of feeling unsupported during his earlier education. He consciously created an environment where students, particularly those who felt marginalized or disengaged, could thrive. By sharing his own struggles and dislike of English during his undergraduate years, Julian fostered solidarity with students who found the subject intimidating or irrelevant. This openness helped break down hierarchical barriers, allowing students to feel more comfortable expressing their difficulties and participating in discussions.

A significant part of his strategy was positioning himself as "a student too," underscoring the shared experience between instructor and learner. This perspective not only humanized him in the eyes of his students but also allowed them to perceive the classroom as a collaborative space rather than one governed by rigid authority. His students reportedly found comfort in the relatability of having a younger instructor. The approach dismantled the fear of failure and encouraged students to engage more deeply with the material, knowing they were not alone in their academic challenges. Julian shared his personal struggles with English, breaking down hierarchical barriers and fostering a supportive learning

environment. This openness helped students feel more comfortable and less intimidated, creating a sense of solidarity and encouraging engagement. By emphasizing empathy and acknowledging students' struggles, GTAs create an atmosphere of mutual respect. This balance between understanding and accountability allows students to view their instructors as approachable yet authoritative figures.

GTAs often reflected on their own academic challenges and use those experiences to better understand and support struggling students. By acknowledging that not all students excel in traditional classroom settings, GTAs develop adaptive strategies that prioritize individual growth. For instance, Diana spoke about her experiences as a writing tutor, which informed her teaching approach. She prioritized empathy and personalized instruction, recognizing that different students require different levels of support. The experiences of GTAs highlight the evolving nature of classroom management and student-teacher dynamics. Through reflection, peer collaboration, and direct engagement with students, GTAs cultivate inclusive, adaptable teaching environments that prioritize empathy, mutual respect, and professional growth. Similarly, Sasha emphasized the importance of balancing compassion with accountability, drawing parallels between teaching and parenting. She acknowledged the need to set clear boundaries while demonstrating empathy for students' challenges. Heidi, meanwhile, balanced approachability with authority to reduce student anxiety and encourage open discussions. By creating environments where students felt comfortable expressing their challenges, these instructors enhanced student comfort and willingness to participate, a key element of learning-centered teaching.

In addition to fostering emotional connections, several GTAs utilized active and creative learning strategies to engage students more deeply. Hannah embraced creativity and

interactive learning as essential tools for boosting engagement. Recognizing that traditional lecture formats often alienated students, she integrated collaborative exercises, group poetry activities, and storytelling prompts into her curriculum. These activities not only reinforced core writing techniques but also cultivated a sense of community in the classroom. By introducing creative writing elements into the composition curriculum, Hannah helped students break away from the rigidity of academic prose. This allowed for greater self-expression, which in turn increased investment in the learning process. She believed that fostering creativity encouraged students to see writing not as a chore but as an exploratory and enjoyable exercise, which positively impacted their willingness to participate in class discussions and assignments. Heidi mirrored the structure of creative writing workshops by incorporating peer reviews and group activities, which promoted active participation and collaborative learning. Owen focused on interactive lessons and student-led discussions, emphasizing problem-solving and critical thinking rather than passive learning. These strategies deviated from passive lecture-based teaching, reinforcing the idea that learning is most effective when students contribute actively rather than simply receiving information. By allowing students to take ownership of parts of the lesson, deeper engagement with course material was encouraged (Pytlik and Liggett).

Beyond responsiveness, the GTAs also worked to empower students by fostering agency and inclusion. Diana made it a priority to amplify student voices, creating an environment where students felt comfortable expressing their perspectives. She encouraged students to express themselves in writing or discussion, stating, “I want my students to feel like they can all have a voice.” This is reflected in the peer-driven nature of her classroom, where students are encouraged to lead discussions and co-develop writing prompts. Diana

emphasized the importance of personal connections with students as a means to enhance engagement. Drawing from her experiences shadowing family members who were educators, she highlighted the value of building rapport not just with students but also with their families. This holistic approach extended beyond the classroom, fostering an environment where students felt seen and supported on multiple levels. She frequently referenced the importance of creating a space where students' voices could be amplified. Diana aimed to ensure that every student felt their perspective was valued, which empowered them to contribute more actively. By promoting student agency and encouraging open dialogue, she cultivated a sense of belonging, resulting in increased participation and reduced classroom anxiety.

Additionally, Owen spoke on how they focus on critical thinking over rote learning. They regularly integrate open-ended questions and student-led teaching moments into their lesson plans. One example they cited involves asking students to design class activities based on their interests, making the curriculum more relevant to their lives. Owen believes that the best learning happens when students feel comfortable enough to take risks, emphasizing that "mistakes are part of the process-we learn from them together." Sasha, similarly, engaged students in decision-making regarding workload and pacing, cultivating a sense of shared responsibility for the learning process. By positioning students as active participants rather than passive recipients, these GTAs reinforced the idea that learning is most effective when students have ownership over their education.

Heidi highlighted the importance of collaborative learning environments as a key engagement strategy. They modeled their teaching style after creative writing workshops, using peer review sessions and group activities to foster active learning. This collaborative

format allowed students to learn from each other's insights, promoting a more engaging and less instructor-dominated classroom dynamic. They also acknowledged the significance of disarming students by maintaining casual conversations before and after class. By establishing a more relaxed and approachable presence, they created a space where students felt comfortable sharing personal challenges and participating more fully in class discussions. This balance between approachability and authority was crucial in encouraging sustained engagement throughout the semester.

Another significant aspect of learning-centeredness reflected in these GTA's philosophies is their adaptability and responsiveness to student needs. Julian stressed the importance of flexible lesson planning to accommodate varying student needs. His teaching philosophy rejected a one-size-fits-all approach, recognizing that different students engaged with material at different paces. Drawing from his background in rhetoric and personal experiences of overcoming academic hurdles, he frequently adjusted lessons mid-course to ensure that no student felt left behind. For instance, when students struggled with particular readings or writing exercises, he shifted the pacing to allow more time for class discussions and peer feedback sessions. This adaptability underscored his belief that effective learning required responsiveness to students' evolving needs rather than strict adherence to pre-determined schedules.

Owen took a tailored approach by providing advanced assignments for students who excelled while offering additional support to those who needed extra help. This flexibility underscored the importance of individualized pacing to support diverse learning styles. Reflecting on their experiences managing teams in the tech sector, they approached teaching with a similar mindset, recognizing that each student brought unique strengths and challenges

to the classroom. They actively assessed students' progress, adjusting their teaching style to better align with their competencies. For those who excelled, they provided advanced assignments to deepen their engagement, while offering additional resources and one-on-one support to students who needed extra help. This dual approach ensured that pacing remained flexible, preventing both under-stimulation and overwhelm.

Sasha's teaching approach involved constant iteration based on student feedback. Early in her teaching career, she described feeling as though she was "learning on the fly," which led to frequent adjustments to course pacing. Recognizing that overly dense assignments could lead to disengagement, she streamlined coursework to ensure that every task served a clear purpose. She regularly sought feedback from students regarding workload and pacing, adjusting her lesson plans accordingly. This process allowed her to strike a balance between challenging students and respecting their mental bandwidth. By demonstrating a willingness to adapt, Sasha cultivated a sense of shared responsibility for the learning process, fostering greater investment from her students.

Heidi spoke at length about balancing the need for academic rigor with empathy toward students' external challenges. As both a student and instructor, they understood the pressures of academic life, which informed their pacing decisions. To avoid overwhelming their students, they consciously designed assignments that were meaningful yet manageable. By minimizing busy work and focusing on high-impact activities, Heidi ensured that students could engage deeply with the material without feeling overburdened. This approach mirrored their broader teaching philosophy of fostering mutual respect and shared learning experiences.

Overall, the collective approaches of the GTAs reflect that Learning-Centeredness is not a static methodology but a dynamic, evolving process. Through engagement, adaptability, inclusivity, and collaboration, they created classrooms where students felt empowered, supported, and motivated. This shift from traditional authority-driven teaching toward student-driven learning ultimately fosters deeper academic engagement, stronger classroom relationships, and better learning outcomes. By prioritizing student engagement and adaptable pacing, the GTAs transformed their classrooms into spaces of collaboration, inclusivity, and shared growth. Their approaches reflect the evolving understanding that effective teaching is not about rigid control but about fostering environments where students feel empowered, supported, and motivated to take ownership of their learning. This focus on student-centered practices ultimately contributes to deeper learning experiences and stronger academic outcomes.

Individual Perspectives: WPA

Rachel offers an alternative perspective on GTA identity development under the theme of Learning-Centeredness by emphasizing adaptability, mentorship, and practical engagement in teaching. Her career trajectory (from a GTA to an adjunct instructor and eventually to a full-time WPA) has provided her with exposure to diverse teaching environments, institutions, and student demographics. This broad experience has shaped her understanding of different teaching strategies and learner needs, aligning with learning-centered teaching, which prioritizes relevance, engagement, and fostering student responsibility for their own learning.

A significant aspect of Rachel's perspective is her commitment to mentorship and structured support for GTAs. She critiques traditional orientation sessions that focus

primarily on research expertise and instead advocates for comprehensive peer mentorship and hands-on training in teaching practices. Recognizing the challenges GTAs face, especially those transitioning from literature or creative writing backgrounds into composition teaching, she emphasizes the need for practical engagement, structured guidance, and one-on-one teaching loads to help GTAs develop confidence and pedagogical competence. A common challenge identified was the insufficient preparation provided to participating GTAs before they assume their teaching responsibilities. While Rachel may be constrained by institutional policies or resources, she plays a key role in advocating for extended training periods or more robust orientation programs (Stancliff and Goggin). Rachel also provides many varied professional development sessions, such as rubrics discussions and collaborative grading exercises, to address specific training gaps. The WPA also facilitates the development of a support network among GTAs, recognizing the value of shared experiences and collective problem-solving. Encouraging open communication and collaboration helps mitigate feelings of isolation or imposter syndrome, common among new educators.

Rachel often serves as a mentor or example of teaching strategies, offering insight into classroom management, curriculum design, and student engagement. By guiding GTAs in the application of research-based practices, the WPA ensures alignment with institutional goals while also fostering innovation and adaptability in teaching. The WPA emphasized the need for teaching methods that prioritize learning-centeredness, inclusivity, and flexibility (Reid and Estrem, "The Effects of Writing Pedagogy Education on Graduate Teaching Assistants' Approaches to Teaching Composition"). This involves helping GTAs design assignments and activities that are accessible and engaging for diverse student populations.

Rachel's guidance on classroom management was instrumental in helping GTAs develop practical and reflective strategies for leading their classrooms effectively. For instance, Rachel provided clear frameworks for designing a structured yet flexible classroom environment. This included guidance on items like syllabus creation (she worked with GTAs to design syllabi that aligned with pedagogical goals while accommodating diverse student needs); lesson planning (GTAs were encouraged to create adaptable lesson plans that incorporated student input and feedback to maintain relevance and engagement); and managing logistical challenges (practical advice was given on handling attendance, grading, and communication, all of which contribute to a well-managed classroom).

Rachel helped GTAs navigate behavioral challenges in the classroom, emphasizing proactive rather than reactive strategies. These included setting clear boundaries and expectations early in the semester to prevent misunderstandings and using inclusive teaching methods to preempt disengagement, such as group discussions and alternative assignment formats that appeal to various learning styles. Rachel's focus on fostering strong student-teacher dynamics and effective classroom management provided GTAs with the tools and confidence needed to succeed as instructors. By modeling inclusive, adaptable, and reflective teaching practices, Rachel not only enhanced the GTAs' immediate teaching effectiveness but also contributed to their long-term professional growth as educators.

Rachel played a pivotal role in shaping how the participating GTAs understood and navigated student-teacher dynamics. For instance, Rachel facilitated discussions that helped GTAs explore the nature of authority in the classroom, shifting away from traditional, hierarchical models of control toward a model based on knowledge, passion, and communication skills. Through supporting the Teaching Circles and one-on-one mentorship,

Rachel encouraged GTAs to balance relatability with professionalism. This approach allowed GTAs to connect with students as peers while maintaining the respect needed to lead effectively. Rahcel also underscored the importance of inclusivity in student-teacher interactions, encouraging GTAs to create classrooms where all students felt seen, heard, and supported. By highlighting the diverse backgrounds of first-year composition (FYC) students, Rachel emphasized adapting teaching strategies to address varying levels of preparedness and engagement. This included advice on using open-ended questions, collaborative activities, and culturally responsive teaching methods to foster dialogue and participation. Rachel promoted the idea that strong student-teacher relationships are built on trust and mutual respect. She guided GTAs to approach students as collaborators in the learning process, rather than as subordinates. To strengthen these dynamics, Rachel encouraged transparency in teaching practices, such as clearly explaining grading criteria, assignment goals, and the purpose of classroom activities. This clarity helped GTAs create environments where students felt comfortable engaging and taking risks.

Rachel's belief in experiential learning is deeply influenced by her early involvement in a composition-focused service-learning project. This experience reinforced her commitment to active, participatory teaching methods that extend beyond traditional classroom settings. By integrating academic instruction with community service, she developed a learner-first approach that encourages students to engage with real-world applications of their learning, reinforcing the principles of learning-centered pedagogy. Despite her administrative role, Rachel navigates the challenges of liminality, recognizing the systemic constraints placed on contingent faculty. She acknowledges that institutional leadership plays a significant role in mitigating the difficulties GTAs face and advocates for

policies that support their professional development. However, she also contends with budget cuts and staffing shortages that limit the extent of training and mentoring she can provide. Even within these constraints, she remains dedicated to fostering student-centered approaches that boost GTA confidence and engagement, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all model does not work for GTA development.

Ultimately, Rachel's perspective highlights the importance of institutional support in shaping GTA professional identities. She argues that learning-centered approaches must integrate adaptability, engagement, and real-world applications to be effective. Her experiences underscore the necessity of structured mentorship, dynamic teaching models, and administrative backing to ensure that GTAs not only succeed in their immediate teaching roles but also develop into confident, capable educators prepared for the complexities of academia.

Liminality

Individual Perspectives: GTAs

GTAs simultaneously occupy the roles of student and teacher, which introduces complex challenges in time management and balancing responsibilities. This dual identity fosters professional growth but also amplifies stress and uncertainty. Julian, in his first semester of teaching, experienced significant stress stemming from a lack of preparation and minimal formal training. His reflections revealed the disorienting nature of stepping into an instructor role while still identifying as a student. "I was constantly juggling lesson plans, grading, and my own coursework." This liminal state resulted in "learning on the fly," where adaptability became essential for survival. Julian's approach to managing time was rooted in flexibility, adjusting lesson plans and focusing on critical thinking skills to reduce the rigidity

of their workload. Julian's liminality is underscored by the tension between authority and relatability. By embracing his identity as both a teacher and peer, he cultivated a classroom environment where students felt comfortable expressing challenges. This mutual understanding helped Julian manage his responsibilities more effectively by fostering empathy rather than rigid control.

Hannah's reflections highlight the emotional toll of trying to "do everything right." Initially, Hannah over-extended herself, dedicating excessive time to grading and lesson planning. This overcommitment stemmed from imposter syndrome where Hannah felt the need to prove her competence. "I was working harder, not smarter-it was taking me way longer to get through than some of the more experienced GTAs." Over time, observing senior GTAs helped her adopt more efficient grading methods and prioritize tasks that directly impacted student learning. For Hannah, liminality manifests as a balance between perfectionism and pragmatism. The realization that her workload was unsustainable marked a turning point. By accepting imperfection and embracing peer feedback, Hannah transitioned toward a more confident professional identity.

Diana's experiences reflect the anxiety that accompanies stepping into a teaching role with limited preparation. The week-long orientation was described as overwhelming, leaving Diana feeling ill-equipped to manage classroom responsibilities. This initial period of disorientation amplified feelings of imposter syndrome, reinforcing her liminal identity (Stancliff and Goggin 16). Diana frequently compared her performance to peers, intensifying self-doubt and contributing to the perception that they were "not doing enough." Diana's liminality is rooted in insufficient orientation and training. She advocated for a longer preparatory period to alleviate the stress associated with transitioning into a teaching role.

This highlights how external factors (such as orientation structure) can exacerbate the internal tensions of liminal experiences.

Sasha's reflections on time management were drawn from her experiences as a parent and a former retail manager. For Sasha, these prior roles provided a framework for handling the unpredictability of teaching. Her approach to time management emphasizes empathy and flexibility, balancing student needs with personal responsibilities. Sasha recognized the importance of setting boundaries while remaining approachable, reflecting the delicate negotiation of authority within the liminal space. Sasha's experience highlights the intersection between personal and professional identities. Parenting, retail management, and teaching share common threads of responsibility, adaptability, and relational dynamics. This overlap allowed Sasha to navigate her liminal identity with a greater sense of stability.

Heidi's reflections centered on the relational aspects of liminality. Their desire to build rapport with students often blurred the boundaries between instructor and peer. This dual identity, while fostering connection, also introduced complications regarding authority. Heidi spoke candidly about feeling like they were "pretending to be a teacher," a clear reflection of imposter syndrome and the uncertainty of their evolving professional identity. Heidi's experience illustrates the emotional complexity of liminality. By leaning into their identity as a fellow student, Heidi created a collaborative learning environment. However, their reflections suggest that ongoing self-doubt remains a defining feature of their experience. This highlights the importance of self-compassion and external validation in navigating liminal states.

Across all GTA reflections, imposter syndrome emerged as a recurring theme. The transitional nature of the GTA role inherently fosters self-doubt, often exacerbated by

insufficient training or high self-expectations. GTAs consistently developed adaptive strategies to manage responsibilities, whether through structured time blocking (Owen), flexible lesson planning (Julian), or peer observation (Hannah). These adaptations reflect the resilience and growth that emerge from navigating liminality. Balancing empathy with accountability was a critical aspect of GTA experiences. Many GTAs emphasized the importance of understanding student needs while maintaining professional boundaries, highlighting the relational dimension of liminal roles. GTAs often draw on personal experiences to inform their teaching philosophies. This blending of identities reinforces the multifaceted nature of liminality. Ultimately, the reflections of these GTAs underscore that liminality, while challenging, fosters adaptability, empathy, and long-term professional growth.

Individual Perspectives: WPA

Rachel, as the WPA, provides an alternative perspective on GTA identity development under the theme of Liminality by serving as both a mentor and institutional guide. Liminality represents a transitional phase where individuals navigate between two roles, such as student and teacher, leading to uncertainty, identity shifts, and adaptation. Rachel plays a critical role in supporting GTAs through this transition, recognizing the challenges they face in balancing their roles as both students and instructors. For instance, she provides initial orientation sessions and ongoing professional development opportunities, such as supporting the Teaching Circles, which create spaces for GTAs to share strategies, reflect on teaching practices, and receive mentorship (Stancliff and Goggin). While GTAs often experience imposter syndrome and self-doubt, Rachel serves as an anchor, helping them contextualize their experiences within broader academic and professional trajectories.

Despite these efforts, GTAs noted that initial training (e.g., week-long orientations) felt rushed and left them feeling underprepared. However, what many GTAs are unaware of is that the WPA operates within institutional constraints (such as limited resources and the administrative approval process) and these orientations involve several steps and different approvals to implement which can limit the depth and duration of training programs. Despite these limitations, she works to bridge the gap between GTA expectations and realities by providing ongoing guidance through professional development sessions, one-on-one mentorship, and structured discussions on topics like classroom management and pedagogical strategies. Furthermore, Rachel fosters a culture of shared learning, emphasizing peer mentorship as a tool for easing the burden of liminality. By encouraging open dialogue and collaborative problem-solving, she helps GTAs develop confidence and a sense of belonging within their academic community. Her role in shaping GTA identity development highlights the importance of institutional support in navigating liminal spaces, demonstrating that while the transitional nature of the GTA experience is inherently challenging, it can also be a powerful catalyst for professional growth.

Rachel plays a pivotal role in helping GTAs manage their liminal identities as both students and instructors. Through regular meetings and mentorship, the WPA provides reassurance and practical tools for balancing the competing demands of teaching and academic work. The participating GTAs noted their appreciation for WPA-led discussions on maintaining professionalism while also connecting with students empathetically, acknowledging the challenges of authority and relatability. Beyond teaching, the WPA creates opportunities for GTAs to reflect on their professional identity development. Teaching Circles and other initiatives allow GTAs to explore how their teaching experiences

contribute to their growth as educators and researchers. The WPA also encourages GTAs to integrate their personal teaching philosophies with institutional objectives, fostering a sense of agency and confidence over time.

Rachel fosters a culture of shared learning by emphasizing peer collaboration. This not only mitigates the isolation GTAs may feel but also leverages collective knowledge to address common issues, such as managing time effectively or navigating challenging classroom dynamics. Several GTAs noted that WPA-driven efforts to encourage open dialogue and group problem-solving were instrumental in helping them feel supported and capable in their roles. Rachel's influence is integral in shaping how GTAs navigate their liminal experiences. By providing mentorship, facilitating professional development, and fostering a supportive community, the WPA helps GTAs manage the demands of their dual roles and transition into more confident, competent educators. While challenges remain, such as the need for expanded training and tailored support, the WPA serves as a crucial anchor in helping GTAs transform the uncertainty of liminality into a foundation for professional growth.

Professional Identity Development

Individual Perspectives: GTAs

GTAs explore their professional identity development through self-reflection, storytelling, mentorship, teaching experiences, and aspirations for their future careers. Their development is a dynamic and continuous process shaped by past experiences, present reflections, and future ambitions. Storytelling plays a crucial role in this journey, as GTAs reflect on their struggles and growth by sharing their experiences in Teaching Circles or discussions with peers. For example, Julian shared how his negative experiences in high

school influenced his desire to become a compassionate and inclusive instructor, stating, “I remember struggling in school myself, so I try to be that teacher I wish I had.” Similarly, Hannah recognized gaps in her pedagogy after discussing her struggles in Teaching Circles, which led her to seek further professional development. She reflected, “I think everyone has a method that works, and there’s not necessarily a wrong one.” Storytelling allows GTAs to redefine their career aspirations; some, like Julian, initially viewed teaching as a temporary role but reconsidered after receiving positive student feedback.

Personal identity and background significantly influence GTA professional development. Many GTAs experience liminality which affects their confidence and perception of authority. Heidi described “acting” as an educator rather than fully inhabiting the role, highlighting the challenges of professional identity formation. Additionally, personal experiences, such as Julian’s emphasis on inclusivity as a Black educator, shape teaching styles and classroom dynamics. The sense of being in-between prompts GTAs to refine their teaching through trial and error, student feedback, and collaborative learning. Heidi acknowledged that teaching is an ongoing process of self-refinement, shaped by adapting to students’ needs and classroom realities. They explained, “Students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Similarly, Mason discussed how structured professional development activities, such as book clubs and AI workshops, influenced their evolving teaching identity, noting, “We had a great chat last week, and it gave me a couple of new things to try.”

Teaching Circles serve as a crucial space for professional growth by providing a collaborative and supportive environment where GTAs can share strategies, discuss challenges, and experiment with new teaching approaches. For Heidi, Teaching Circles were instrumental in developing confidence and refining classroom management techniques. They

emphasized, “Routine is the heartbeat of classroom management. When students know what to expect, it minimizes anxiety and maximizes engagement.” Peer discussions allow GTAs to gain different perspectives and feel validated in their struggles. Beyond immediate teaching experiences, many GTAs consider pursuing higher education, such as master’s or doctoral degrees, to advance their careers. Hannah, for example, is contemplating a Ph.D. after her MFA, recognizing how her GTA experience has solidified her academic aspirations. She mentioned how witnessing their students grow throughout the semester validated their decision to remain in academia. Sasha viewed teaching as a balance between personal growth and professional responsibility. While she initially approached teaching for financial reasons, the experience of guiding students and building community has deepened her commitment to higher education. She acknowledges the challenges of academia but remains optimistic about her long-term prospects. Some GTAs, like Owen, view their role as evolving into mentorship and leadership in education beyond just teaching.

Emotionally and psychologically, GTAs grapple with imposter syndrome, balancing responsibilities, and uncertainty about their career paths. The dual role of student and teacher creates anxiety but also fosters adaptability, as Hannah acknowledged: “I’ve found that blocking out specific hours for different tasks makes the workload feel less overwhelming.” Meanwhile, Diana expressed doubts about whether she wanted to continue in education or focus on creative writing, reflecting the complex nature of professional identity formation. She admitted, “Just coming up with more creative ideas for teaching... I kind of found myself in this rut where I’m like, I can’t even think of what to do.” Ultimately, GTAs explore their professional identity development through an ongoing process of reflection, mentorship, peer engagement, and experience-based learning. Their identities as educators are shaped by their

backgrounds, teaching experiences, storytelling, and career aspirations, making professional growth a fluid and evolving journey.

Individual Perspectives: WPA

Rachel, as a WPA, provides a distinct perspective on GTA identity development, particularly under the theme of professional identity formation and future career trajectories. Her own career path reflects the fluid and often unintentional nature of academic identity development. Initially pursuing literature, she transitioned into teaching composition out of necessity and through exposure to mentorship. This mirrors the experiences of many GTAs who begin teaching as a requirement of their graduate studies but gradually shape their professional identities through practice and reflection.

From an administrative standpoint, Rachel highlights institutional challenges that impact both GTAs and faculty, such as structural limitations and the undervaluation of teaching-focused roles. She notes that WPAs often face significant administrative responsibilities without sufficient recognition, which can particularly hinder career advancement from associate to full professor. These challenges illustrate the systemic hurdles that shape professional identity within academia, forcing individuals to negotiate their roles between teaching, research, and administrative duties.

A strong advocate for practical, student-centered pedagogical training, Rachel critiques traditional GTA training programs for focusing too heavily on theory while neglecting hands-on classroom experience. She emphasizes the importance of structured mentoring, one-on-one teaching loads, and employer-aligned training that prepares GTAs for a range of career trajectories. Her approach reflects a commitment to equipping GTAs with the confidence and skills necessary to navigate their evolving professional identities. Rachel also underscores the

liminality of GTA positions, wherein individuals exist between student and instructor roles. This transition is often marked by uncertainty, requiring GTAs to develop their identities through experience, mentorship, and self-reflection. Her own career path reflects this ongoing negotiation, as she balances teaching, administrative responsibilities, and expectations for research engagement despite institutional limitations.

Looking toward the future, Rachel's reflections offer GTAs insight into how adaptability, institutional support, and workload negotiation contribute to career development. She stresses the significance of interdisciplinary exposure, peer mentorship, and workload management in shaping long-term professional growth. Her perspective presents an alternative view of GTA identity development by framing professional growth as an iterative process that involves both intentional career planning and the ability to navigate unforeseen opportunities. Ultimately, Rachel's experiences as a WPA provide a valuable counterpoint to GTA perspectives, highlighting the structural, pedagogical, and professional complexities that define academic career trajectories.

REFERENCES

Abdal-Haqq, I. *Constructivism in Teacher Education: Considerations for Those Who Would Link Practice to Theory*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, 1998, https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED426986.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "The Danger of a Single Story." *TED*, July 2009, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en.

Adler-Kassner, Linda. "2017 CCCC Chair's Address: Because Writing Is Never Just Writing." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 69, no. 2, 2017, pp. 317-40.

Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Elizabeth Wardle. "Threshold Concepts, Naming What We Know, and Reconsidering Our Shared Conceptions." *(Re)Considering What We Know: Learning Thresholds in Writing, Composition, Rhetoric, and Literacy*, edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, Utah State UP, 2019, pp. 3-13.

Ajani, O. A. "Understanding Teachers as Adult Learners in Professional Development Activities for Enhanced Classroom Practices." *AFFRIKA Journal of Politics, Economics, and Society*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2019, pp. 195-208.

Alcoff, Linda. "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique*, no. 20, 1991-1992, pp. 5-32.

Alsup, Janet. *Teacher Identity Discourses: Negotiating Personal and Professional Spaces*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2006.

Anderson, Virginia, and Susan Romano, editors. *Culture Shock and the Practice of Profession: Training the Next Wave in Rhetoric and Composition*. Hampton Press, 2006.

Anglesey, Leslie R. "Chapter 6: 'Survival is Insufficient': Reimagining TA Orientation as

Meaningful Threshold Boundaries." *Threshold Conscripts: Rhetoric and Composition Teaching Assistantships*, edited by William J. Macauley Jr., Leslie R. Anglesey, Brady Edwards, Kathryn M. Lambrecht, and Phillip K. Lovas, WAC Clearinghouse, 2023, pp. 167-84.

Ambrose, Susan A., et al. *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*. Jossey-Bass, 2010.

Ashton, Jennifer. "Using Teaching Circles Amongst Online Adjunct Faculty." *Journal of Instructional Research*, vol. 1, 2012, pp. 11-15, EBSCO, Accessed 17 Mar. 2024.

Austin, Ann. "Preparing the Next Generation of Faculty: Graduate School as Socialization to The Academic Career." *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 73, no. 1, 2002, pp. 94-122.

Babb, Jacob, and Courtney Adams Wooten. "Chapter 11: Traveling on the Assessment Loop: The Role of Contingent Labor in Curriculum Development." *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition*, edited by Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, Amy Lynch-Biniek, University Press of Colorado, 2017, pp. 169-82.

Bal, M. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. University of Toronto Press, 2017.

Ball, A., and C. Tyson, editors. *Studying Diversity in Teacher Education*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2011.

Ball, Diana L., and Deborah L. Forzani. "A Model for Professional Learning Communities." *Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 61, no. 5, 2010, pp. 1-11.

Bandura, Albert. "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change." *Psychological Review*, vol. 84, no. 2, 1997, pp. 191-215.

Barnhisel, Greg, Evan Stoddard, and Jennifer Gorman. “Incorporating Process-Based Writing Pedagogy into First-Year Learning Communities: Strategies and Outcomes.” *The Journal of General Education*, vol. 61, no. 4, Penn State University Press, 2012, pp. 461-87, JSTOR, Accessed 9 Apr. 2023.

Barr Ebest, Sally. *Changing the Way We Teach: Writing and Resistance in the Training of Teaching Assistants*. Southern Illinois UP, 2005.

Bartholomae, David. “Inventing the University.” *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 5, 1986, pp. 4-23.

Beaufort, Anne. *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. Utah State UP, 2007.

Beck, Evelyn. “From the Editor: What is a Fair Wage?” *Forum: Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2008, pp. A1-A3.

Bergmann, Linda, and Janet Zepernick. “Disciplinarity and Transfer: Students’ Perceptions of Learning to Write.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 31, no. 1-2, 2007, pp. 124-49.

Berlin, James A. “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class.” *College English*, vol. 50, 1988, pp. 477-94.

Berlin, James A. *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985*. Southern Illinois UP, 1987.

Bernhard, S. “Analyzing Meaning-Making in Network Ties—A Qualitative Approach.” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1-11, https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918787103.

Bettencourt, Patrick J. “Voicing Experience.” *In Our Own Voice: Graduate Students Teach*

Writing, edited by Tina Lavonne Good and Leanne B. Warshauer, Allyn and Bacon, 2000, pp. 2-18.

Bishop, Wendy. *Something Old, Something New: College Writing Teachers and Classroom Change*. Southern Illinois UP, 1990.

Bizzell, Patricia. "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty: What We Need to Know about Writing." *Pre/Text: A Journal of Rhetorical Theory*, vol. 3, no. 3, Fall 1982, pp. 213-43.

Bleach, J. "Developing Professionalism through Reflective Practice and Ongoing Professional Development." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2014, pp. 185–197. https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2014.883719.

Bly, Brian K. "Uneasy Transitions: The Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Composition Program." *In Our Own Voice: Graduate Students Teach Writing*, edited by Tina Lavonne Good and Leanne B. Warshauer, Allyn and Bacon, 2000, pp. 19-27.

Bogdan, R. C., and S. K. Biklen. *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. 5th ed., Pearson Education, 2007.

Brems, Christiane, Machael R. Baldwin, Lisa Davis, and Lorraine Namyniuk. "The Impostor Syndrome as Related to Teaching Evaluations and Advising Relationships of University Faculty Members." *Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 65, no. 2, 1994, pp. 183-93.

Breuch, Lee-Ann M. Kastman. "Post-Process 'Pedagogy': A Philosophical Exercise." *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory*, vol. 22, 2002, pp. 119–50.

Brewer, Meaghan. *Conceptions of Literacy: Graduate Instructors and the Teaching of First-Year Composition*. University Press of Colorado, 2020.

Brown, Eric D., and Savanna G. Conner. "Forty Years of Resistance in TA Education." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2019, pp. 65-70.

Brown, Stuart C., Paul R. Meyer, and Theresa Enos. “Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition: A Catalog of the Profession.” *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1995, pp. 240–327. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/466832.

Brown, Stuart C., Rebecca Jackson, and Theresa Enos. “The Arrival of Rhetoric in the Twenty First Century: The 199 Survey of Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric.” *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2000, pp. 233-42, JSTOR, https://www.jstor.org/stable/466170, Accessed 24 Aug. 2024.

Bruffee, Kenneth. “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind.’” *College English*, vol. 46, 1984, pp. 635-52.

Burmester, Beth. “Writing (into) the Academic Past, Present, and Future: Graduate Students, Curriculum Reform, and Doctoral Education in English Studies.” *Composition Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2000, pp. 113-35.

Camburn, E. “Embedded Teacher Learning Opportunities as a Site for Reflective Practice: An Exploratory Study.” *American Journal of Education*, vol. 116, no. 4, 2010, pp. 463-489, https://doi.org/10.1086/653624.

Carillo, Ellen. *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition: The Importance of Teaching for Transfer*. Utah State UP, 2015.

Casey, Kathleen. “The New Narrative Research in Education.” *Review of Research in Education*, vol. 21, 1995, pp. 211–53. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/1167282. Accessed 11 Dec. 2024.

“CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing.” *Conference on College Composition and Communication*, Nov. 2015, https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/statementonprep.

Chan, E., and V. Ross. “Examining Teachers' Knowledge on a Landscape of Theory, Practice, and Policy.” *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, vol. 11, no. 1 & 2, 2009, pp. 159-171.

Chase, Susan E. "Narrative Inquiry." *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3rd ed., SAGE, 2005, pp. 651-679.

Christie, Donald, Claire Cassidy, and Don Skinner. “Building Collaborative Communities of Enquiry in Educational Research.” *Educational Research and Evaluation*, vol. 13, no. 3, June 2007, pp. 263-278. https://doi.org/10.1080/13803610701632091.

Cicchino, Amy Teresa. “Notes Towards a Panoramic View: A National Portrait of GTA Writing Pedagogy Education Across Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition.” *The Florida State University*, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019.

Clandinin, D. Jean and F. Michael Connelly. “Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research.” *Educational Researcher*, vol. 19, no. 5, 2000, pp. 2-14. JSTOR, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1176100. Accessed 6 Mar. 2024.

Clandinin, D. Jean and Michael Connelly. “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry.” *Educational Researcher*, vol. 19, no. 5, 1990, pp. 2–14. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1176100.

Clandinin, D. Jean and Michael Connelly. *Teachers as Curriculum Makers: Lives, Stories, and the Narrative of Experience*. Teachers College Press, 1992.

Clandinin, D. Jean, and F. Michael Connelly. *Teachers as Curriculum Planners: Narratives Of Experience*. Teachers College Press, 1992.

Clandinin, D. Jean and Michael Connelly. *Teacher Education: The Core Issues*. Teachers College Press, 1995.

Clandinin, D. Jean, and F. Michael Connelly. “Teachers’ Professional Knowledge

Landscapes." *Educational Researcher*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1996, pp. 24–30. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1176665.

Clary-Lemon, Jennifer, Derek Mueller, and Kate Pantelides. *Try This: Research Methods for Writers*. WAC Clearinghouse and University Press of Colorado, 2022.

Cochran-Smith, M., and K. Zeichner, editors. *Studying Teacher Education: The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005.

Cody, Kevina, and Katrina Lawlor. "On the Borderline: Exploring Liminal Consumption and The Negotiation of Threshold Selves." *Marketing Theory*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2011, pp. 207-228.

Colby, Richard, and Rebekah Shultz Colby. "Chapter 4: Real Faculty But Not: The Full-Time, Non-Tenure-Track Position as Contingent Labor." *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition*, edited by Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, Amy Lynch-Biniek, University Press of Colorado, 2017, pp. 57-70.

Composition Theory for Writing Teachers. Edited by Peter Vandenberg, Sue Hum, and Jennifer Clary-Lemon, National Council of Teachers of English, 2006.

Craig, Cheryl J. "Parallel Stories: A Way of Contextualizing Teacher Knowledge," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 11, no. 5, 1995, pp. 457–466. https://doi.org/10.1016/0742-051X(94)00041-8.

Craig, Cheryl J. "The Relationships Between and Among Teachers' Narrative Knowledge, Communities of Knowing, and School Reform: A Case of 'The Monkey's Paw'." *Curriculum Inquiry*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2001, pp. 303-331, https://doi.org/10.1111/0362-6784.00199.

Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth. *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing*

Among Five Approaches. 4th ed., Sage Publications, 2018.

Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 2nd ed., SAGE, 2003.

Crowley, Sharon. *The Methodical Memory: Invention in Current-Traditional Rhetoric*. Southern Illinois UP, 2010.

Crowley, Sharon. *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998.

Czajka, Charles, and David McConnell. "Strategies for Preparing Graduate Teaching Assistants as Effective Instructors of Undergraduate Science Courses." *Journal of College Science Teaching*, vol. 45, no. 6, 2016, pp. 74-81.

Danielewicz, Jane. *Teaching Selves: Identity, Pedagogy, and Teacher Education*. SUNY Press, 2005.

Deans, Thomas Anthony. "Community-Based and Service Learning College Writing Initiatives in Relation to Composition Studies and Critical Theory." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1998.

DeMarrais, K. "Qualitative Interview Studies: Learning Through Experience." *Foundations for Research: Methods of Inquiry in Education and the Social Sciences*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2004, pp. 51-68.

Denecker, Christine, and Casie Moreland. *The Dual Enrollment Kaleidoscope: Reconfiguring Perceptions of First-Year Writing and Composition Studies*. Utah State UP, 2022.

Dembo, Myron H., and Sherri Gibson. "Teacher's Sense of Efficacy: An Important Factor in School Improvement." *Elementary School Journal*, vol. 86, no. 2, 1985, pp. 173-84.

De Piero, Zack K., and Jennifier K. Johnson. "Chapter 8: Doorways to Disciplinarity: Using

Threshold Concepts to Bridge Disciplinary Divides and Develop Theory-Practice Praxis." *Threshold Conscripts: Rhetoric and Composition Teaching Assistantships*, edited by William J. Macauley Jr., Leslie R. Anglesey, Brady Edwards, Kathryn M. Lambrecht, and Phillip K. Lovas, WAC Clearinghouse, 2023, pp. 209-36.

Dewey, John. *How We Think*. DC Heath and Co. Publishers, 1910.

Dobrin, Sidney I., editor. *Don't Call It That: The Composition Practicum*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2005.

Dondardt, Tracy, and Sarah Layden. "Chapter 12: Adjuncts Foster Change: Improving Adjunct Working Conditions by Forming an Associate Faculty Coalition (AFC)." *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition*, edited by Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, Amy Lynch-Biniek, University Press of Colorado, 2017, pp. 183-98.

Downs, Douglas, and Elizabeth Wardle. "Teaching About Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)envisioning 'First-Year Composition' as 'Introduction to Writing Studies.'" *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 58, no. 4, 2007, pp. 552-84.

Downs, Doug, Jessie Moore, and Jeffrey Ringer. "Researching Transfer: Addressing the Challenges of Knowing What Works." *Conference on College Composition and Communication*, Kansas City, MO, March 18, 2018.

Driscoll, Dana Lynn. "Connected Pedagogy and Transfer of Learning: An Examination of Graduate Instructor Beliefs vs. Practices in First-Year Writing." *Journal of Teaching Writing*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2013, pp. 50-81.

Dryer, Dylan B. "At a Mirror, Darkly: The Imagined Undergraduate Writers of Ten Novice

Composition Instructors." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 63, no. 3, Feb. 2012, pp. 420-52.

Ducharme, M., and E. Ducharme. "A Study of Teacher Educators: Research from the USA." *Journal of Education for Teaching*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1996, pp. 57-70.

Duffelmeyer, Barb Blakely. "Not Just Showing Up to Class: New TAs, Critical Composition Pedagogy, and Multiliteracies." *WPA*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2005, pp. 31-56.

Duffey, Suellynn, Ben Feigert, Vic Mortimer, Jennifer Phegley, and Melinda Turnley. "Conflict, Collaboration, and Authority: Graduate Students and Writing Program Administration." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2002, pp. 79-87.

Ebest, Sally Barr. *Changing the Way We Teach: Writing and Resistance in the Training of Teaching Assistants*. Southern Illinois UP, 2005.

Edgington, Anthony, and Stacy Hartlage Taylor. "Invisible Administrators: The Possibilities and Perils of Graduate Student Administration." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 31, no. 1-2, 2007, pp. 150-70.

Elbaz-Luwisch, Frema and Deborah Pritzker. "Writing Workshops in Teacher Education: Making a Space for Feeling and Diversity." *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2002, pp. 277-89, https://doi-org.proxy.library.umkc.edu/10.1080/1359866022000048420.

Elbaz-Luwisch, Frema. *Teachers' Voices: Storytelling and Possibility*. Information Age, 2005.

Elbow, Peter. "The Cultures of Literature and Composition: What Could Each Learn from the Other?" *College English*, vol. 64, no. 5, 2002, pp. 533-34, https://doi.org/10.2307/3250752.

Estrem, Heidi, and E. Shelley Reid. “What New Writing Teachers Talk About When They Talk about Teaching.” *Pedagogy*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2012, pp. 449-80.

Estrem, Heidi, and E. Shelley Reid. “Writing Pedagogy Education: Instructor Development in Composition Studies.” *Exploring Composition Studies: Sites, Issues, and Perspectives*, edited by Kelly Ritter and Paul Kei Matsuda, Utah State UP, 2012, pp. 223-40.

Eyler, J. *How Humans Learn: The Science and Stories Behind Effective College Teaching*. West Virginia University Press, 2018.

Farris, Christine. *Subject to Change: New Composition Instructors’ Theory and Practice*. Hampton, 1996.

Fassinger, Polly A., Nancy Gilliland, and Linda L. Johnson. “Benefits of a Faculty Writing Circle-Better Teaching.” *College Teaching*, vol. 41, no. 2, 1992, pp. 53-56. EBSCO, Accessed 20 Mar. 2024.

Fedukovich, Casie, and Megan Hall. “GTA Preparation as a Model for Cross-Tier Collaboration at North Carolina State University: A Program Profile.” *Composition Forum*, vol. 33, 2016, http://compositionforum.com/issue/33/ncsu.php.

Finn, Kali A. Mobley. “Chapter 3: ‘Adapting, Not Resisting: A Preliminary Understanding of TAs Relationships With Writing Pedagogy Education.” *Threshold Conscripts: Rhetoric and Composition Teaching Assistantships*, edited by William J. Macauley Jr., Leslie R. Anglesey, Brady Edwards, Kathryn M. Lambrecht, and Phillip K. Lovas, WAC Clearinghouse, 2023, pp. 89-112.

Fisher, Ruth Overman. “Theory in a TA Composition Pedagogy Course: Not If, but How.” *Don’t Call It That: The Composition Practicum*, edited by Sidney I. Dobrin, National Council of Teachers of English, 2005, pp. 200-213.

Flannery, Kathryn. “The National Prose Problem.” *The Emperor’s New Clothes: Literature, Literacy, and the Ideology of Style*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995.

Fleming, David. *From Form to Meaning: Freshman Composition and the Long Sixties, 1957 1974*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011.

Fulkerson, Richard. “Composition Theory in the Eighties: Axiological Consensus and Paradigmatic Diversity.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 41, 1990, pp. 409-29.

Garcia, Leonor Margalef. “Encouraging Teachers’ and Students’ Innovation with the Support of Teacher Learning Communities.” *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2018, EBSCO, Accessed 25 Apr. 2024.

Gee, James Paul. “The New Literacy Studies and the ‘Social Turn.’” *The Norton Book of Composition Studies*, edited by Susan Miller, Norton, W. W. Norton & Company, 2009, pp. 1293-1310.

Gere, Anne Ruggles, Hannah Van Doren, Naomi Silver, and Melanie Yergeau. “Mutual Adjustments: Learning from and Responding to Transfer Student Writers.” *College English*, vol. 79, no. 4, Mar. 2017, pp. 333-57.

Giberson, Gregory A. “Institutionalized on the Margins: An Organizational History of the Preparation of Teachers of College Composition.” *USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations*, 2004, https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/1046. Accessed 24 Aug. 2024.

Goldblatt, Eli. *Because We Live HERE: Sponsoring Literacy Beyond the College Curriculum*. Hampton, 2007.

Goodson, I. F. “Storying the Self: Life Politics and the Study of the Teacher's Life and Work.” *Curriculum*, Routledge, 2014, pp. 3-20.

Gramer, Rachel. “Chapter 1: ‘Putting Learning First: Challenges and Possibilities for New Writing Teacher Research.’” *Threshold Conscripts: Rhetoric and Composition Teaching Assistantships*, edited by William J. Macauley Jr., Leslie R. Anglesey, Brady Edwards, Kathryn M. Lambrecht, and Phillip K. Lovas, WAC Clearinghouse, 2023, pp. 39-64.

Graven, M. “Changing the Story: Teacher Education Through Re-Authoring Their Narratives.” *Routledge International Handbook of Teacher and School Development*, Routledge, 2012, pp. 127-38.

Gravett, K. “Story Completion: Storying as a Method of Meaning-Making and Discursive Discovery.” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 18, 2019, pp. 1-8, https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919893155.

Grayson, Mara Lee. “To Teach or Not to Teach First-Year Composition.” *Writing on the Edge*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2020, pp. 42-60, JSTOR, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27095077. Accessed 8 Mar. 2024.

Grbich, C. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Introduction*. SAGE, 2007.

Grouling, Jennifer. “Resistance and Identity Formation: The Journey of the Graduate Student Teacher.” *Composition Forum*, vol. 32, 2015.

Gunersel, A. B., P. Barnett, and M. Etienne. “Promoting Self-Authorship of College Educators: Exploring the Impact of a Faculty Development Program.” *The Journal of Faculty Development*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2013, pp. 35-44.

Haston, Warren. “Teacher Modeling as an Effective Teaching Strategy.” *Music Educators Journal*, vol. 93, no. 4, 2007, pp. 26–30, JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/4127130. Accessed 19 Feb. 2025.

Hesse, Douglas. “Teachers as Students, Reflecting Resistance.” *College Composition and*

Communication, vol. 44, no. 2, 1993, pp. 224-231.

Hesse, Douglas. "The Place of Creative Writing in Composition Studies." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 62, no. 1, 2010, pp. 31-52.

Heyink, J. W., and T. J. Tymstra. "The Function of Qualitative Research." *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1993, pp. 291–305. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27522699. Accessed 31 Jan. 2025.

Hassel, Holly, and Cassandra Phillips. *Materiality and Writing Studies: Aligning Labor, Scholarship, and Teaching*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2022. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=e000xna&AN=3402401&scope=site.

Huntley, Lu Ellen. "Finding Myself Lost in the Composition Practicum Course." *Don't Call It That: The Composition Practicum*, edited by Sidney I. Dobrin, National Council of Teachers of English, 2005, pp. 284-300.

Ignelzi, M. "Meaning-Making in the Learning and Teaching Process." *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, vol. 2000, no. 82, 2000, pp. 5-14.

Jakubowski, Lisa Marie, and Patrick Burman. "Teaching Community Development: A Case Study in Community-Based Learning." *Teaching Sociology*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2004, pp. 160–76. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3211458. Accessed 19 Feb. 2025.

Johnson, Jennifer K. "Chapter 3: Disciplinarity, Enculturation, and Teaching Identities: How Composition and Literature TAs Respond to TA Training." *Standing at the Threshold: Working Through Liminality in the Composition and Rhetoric TAship*, edited by William J. Macauley Jr., Leslie R. Anglesey, Brady Edwards, Kathryn M. Lambrecht, and Phillip Lovas, University Press of Colorado, 2021, pp. 60-84.

Johnson, J. C., C. Avenarius, and J. Weatherford. “The Active Participant-Observer: Applying Social Role Analysis to Participant Observation.” *Field Methods*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2006, pp. 111-134.

Johnson, B., and L. Christensen. *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches*. 2nd ed., Pearson Education, 2004.

Josselson, R. “The Ethical Attitude in Narrative Research: Principles and Practices.” In D. J. Clandinin, editor, *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*, SAGE, 2007, pp. 537-566.

Journet, Debra. “Narrative Turns in Writing Studies.” *Writing Studies Research in Practice: Methods and Methodologies*, edited by Lee Nickoson and Mary P. Sheridan, Board of Trustees, Southern Illinois University, 2012.

Kawulich, B. B. “Participant Observation as Data Collection Method.” *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2005, http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/466/996.

Kinneavy, James L. *A Theory of Discourse*. W.W. Norton & Co., 1980.

Kinney, Kelly, Thomas Girshin, and Barrett Bowlin. “The Third Turn Toward the Social: Nancy Welch’s Living Room, Tony Scott’s Dangerous Writing, and Rhetoric and Composition’s Turn Toward Grass-roots Political Activism.” *Composition Forum*, vol. 21, 12 Oct. 2013, compositionforum.com.

King, P. M., and R. Siddiqui. “Self-Authorship and Metacognition: Related Constructs for Understanding College Student Learning and Development.” In C. Hoare, editor, *The Oxford Handbook of Reciprocal Adult Development and Learning*, Oxford UP, 2011, pp. 113–131.

Kitchen, J., C. D. Parker, and D. Pushor. *Narrative Inquiries into Curriculum Making in Teacher Education*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2011.

Klein, S. R. "Holistic Reflection in Teacher Education: Issues and Strategies." *Reflective Practice*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2008, pp. 111-121. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623940802005384.

Klipfel, K. M., and D. B. Cook. *Learner-Centered Pedagogy: Principle and Practice*. ALA Editions, 2017.

Korthagen, F. A. "In Search of the Essence of a Good Teacher: Towards a More Holistic Approach in Teacher Education." *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2004, pp. 77-97. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.10.002.

Kraus, W. "The Narrative Negotiation of Identity and Belonging." *Narrative Inquiry*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2006, pp. 103-111. https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.16.1.14kra.

Lakshmi, B. "Reflective Practice Through Journal Writing and Peer Observation: A Case Study." *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2014, pp. 189–204. doi:10.17718/tojde.21757.

Lambrecht, Kathryn M. "Chapter 6: From Imposter to 'Double Agent': Leveraging Liminality as Expertise." *Standing at the Threshold: Working Through Liminality in the Composition and Rhetoric TAship*, edited by William J. Macauley Jr., Leslie R. Anglesey, Brady Edwards, Kathryn M. Lambrecht, and Phillip Lovas, University Press of Colorado, 2021, pp. 134-151.

Latterell, Catherine G. "Training the Workforce: An Overview of GTA Education Curricula." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1996, pp. 7-23.

Levine, Thomas H. "Tools for the Study and Design of Collaborative Teacher Learning: The

Affordances of Different Conceptions of Teacher Community and Activity Theory." *Teacher Education Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2010, pp. 109–30. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23479301. Accessed 11 Dec. 2024.

Lindholm, J. A. *The Quest for Meaning and Wholeness: Spiritual and Religious Connections In the Lives of College Faculty*. John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

Longaker, Mark G. *Rhetorical Analysis: A Brief Guide for Writers*, edited by Jeffrey Walker, Person, Nov. 2020.

Louis, Karen Seashore, Susan D. Kruse, and Helen M. Marks. "Does Professional Learning Community Affect the Classroom? Teachers' Work and Student Experiences in Restructuring Schools." *American Journal of Education*, vol. 106, no. 4, 1998, pp. 532-75.

Lugg, Jaquelyn Davis. "Chapter 2: 'The Gift of Authenticity': Writing Center Pedagogy and Integrated Identity Work in TA Education." *Threshold Conscripts: Rhetoric and Composition Teaching Assistantships*, edited by William J. Macauley Jr., Leslie R. Anglesey, Brady Edwards, Kathryn M. Lambrecht, and Phillip K. Lovas, WAC Clearinghouse, 2023, pp. 67-86.

Lynn, Steven. *Rhetoric and Composition: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2010. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=cat09210a&AN=umkc.oai.edge.umsystem.folio.ebsco.com.fs00001083.c5a85d43.b368.574a.ba40.e544cc2e5f6c&scope=site.

Macauley Jr., William J. "Conclusion: Mapping the Space Between." *Graduate Writing*

Across the Disciplines: Identifying, Teaching, and Supporting, edited by Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Elena G. Garcia, Soo Hyeon Kim, Katie Manthey, and William J. Macauley, Jr., University Press of Colorado, 2015, pp. 21–28.

Macauley, William J. "Introduction: 'Begin as You Intend to Finish: Considering the Multiple Liminalities and Thresholds of RCTAships." *Threshold Conscripts: Rhetoric and Composition Teaching Assistantships*, edited by William J. Macauley Jr., Leslie R. Anglesey, Brady Edwards, Kathryn M. Lambrecht, and Phillip K. Lovas, WAC Clearinghouse, 2023, pp. 3-34.

Macauley Jr., William J. "Introduction: The Space Between." *Graduate Writing Across the Disciplines: Identifying, Teaching, and Supporting*, edited by Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Elena G. Garcia, Soo Hyeon Kim, Katie Manthey, and William J. Macauley, Jr., University Press of Colorado, 2015, pp. 1–14.

Magolda, Marcia B. Baxter. "Three Elements of Self-Authorship." *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2008, pp. 269-284. doi:10.1353/csd.0.0016.

Magolda, Marcia B. Baxter and Patricia M. King. *Learning Partnerships: Theory and Models of Practice to Educate for Self-Authorship*. Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2004.

Manning, J., and A. Kunkel. "Making Meaning of Meaning-Making Research: Using Qualitative Research for Studies of Social and Personal Relationships." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2014, pp. 433-441. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407514525890.

Marshall, Margaret J. "Teaching Circles." *Pedagogy*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2008, pp. 413-431. EBSCO, PED83_03-Marshall.pdf (umkc.edu), Accessed 18 Mar. 2024.

Maxwell, J. A. *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. SAGE Publications,

Inc., 2013.

McCarthy, Lucille Parkinson. “A Stranger in Strange Lands: A College Student Writing Across the Curriculum.” *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1987, pp. 233-265.

McAdams, D. P., R. E. Josselson, and A. E. Lieblich. *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative*. American Psychological Association, 2006.

McLaughlin, M. W., and J. E. Talbert. *Building School-Based Teacher Learning Communities: Professional Strategies to Improve Student Achievement*. Teachers College Press, 2006.

McLean, K. C. “The Emergence of Narrative Identity.” *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2008, pp. 1685-1702. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2008.00124.x.

Meyer, Jan H. F., Ray Land, and Caroline Baillie, editors. *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*. Sense, 2010.

Micciche, Laura R. “More Than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work.” *College English*, vol. 64, no. 4, Mar. 2002, pp. 432-458.

Miller-Cochran, Susan K., Veronica Pantoja, Shelley Rodrigo, and Duane Roen. “The Composition Practicum as Professional Development.” *Don’t Call It That: The Composition Practicum*, edited by Sidney I. Dobrin, National Council of Teachers of English, 2005, pp. 82-97.

Miller, Susan K., Rochelle (Shelley) Rodrigo, Veronica Pantoja, and Duane Roen. “The

Composition Practicum as Professional Development." *Don't Call It That: The Composition Practicum*, edited by Sidney I. Dobrin, National Council of Teachers of English, 2005, pp. 82-97.

Miller, Thomas P. "Why Don't Our Graduate Programs Do a Better Job of Preparing Students for the Work That We Do?" *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2001, pp. 41-58.

MLA Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession. "Professional Employment Practices for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members: Recommendations and Evaluative Questions." 2011, apps.mla.org/pdf/clip_stmt_final_may11.pdf.

Modern Language Association. "Education in the Balance: A Report on the Academic Workforce in English." *Report of the 2007 ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing*, 10 Dec. 2008, mla.org/content/download/3255/81374/workforce_rpt03.pdf.

Mohammad, H. "Understanding the Impact of a Reflective Practice-Based Continuing Professional Development Programme on Kuwaiti Primary Teachers' Integration of ICT." PhD diss., Exeter University, 2014.

Moore, Sharon, Sherri L. Wallace, Gina Schack, M. Shelly Thomas, Linda Lewis, Linda Wilson, Shawnise Miller, and Joan D. Antoni. "Inclusive Teaching Circles: Mechanisms for Creating Welcoming Classrooms." *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 14-27. EBSCO, EJ882122.pdf (ed.gov), Accessed 15 Mar. 2024.

Morgan, Meg. "The GTA Experience: Grounding, Practicing, Evaluating, and Reflecting." *The Writing Program Administrator's Resource: A Guide to Reflective Institutional Practice*, edited by Stuart C. Brown and Theresa Enos, Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002, pp. 700-728.

Morse, J. M., and L. Richards. *Read Me First for a User's Guide to Qualitative Methods*. SAGE, 2002.

Moustakas, C. *Phenomenological Research Methods*. SAGE, 1994.

Nelms, Gerald, and Ronda Leathers Dively. "Perceived Roadblocks to Transferring Knowledge from First-Year Composition to Writing-Intensive Major Courses: A Pilot Study." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 31, no. 1-2, 2007, pp. 214-240.

Nickoson, Lee. "Revisiting Teacher Research." *Writing Studies Research in Practice: Methods and Methodologies*, edited by Lee Nickoson and Mary P. Sheridan, Board of Trustees, Southern Illinois University, 2012.

Nicolas, Melissa. "(E)Merging Identities: Authority, Identity, and the Place(s) In-Between." *(E)Merging Identities: Graduate Students in the Writing Center*, edited by Melissa Nicolas, Fountainhead Press, 2008, pp. 1-8.

North, Stephen M. *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field*. Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1987.

Nowacek, Rebecca. *Agents of Integration: Understanding Transfer as a Rhetorical Act*. Southern Illinois UP, 2011.

Nystrand, Martin. *What Writers Know: The Language, Process and Structure of Written Discourse*. Academic, 1982.

Obermark, Lauren, Elizabeth Brewer, and Kay Halasek. "Moving from the One and Done to a Culture of Collaboration: Revising Professional Development for TAs." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2015, pp. 32-53.

Olsen, Brad, and Rebecca Buchanan. "'Everyone Wants You to Do Everything':

Investigating the Professional Identity Development of Teacher Educators." *Teacher Education Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2017, pp. 9-34. JSTOR, https://www.jstor.org/stable/90003616. Accessed 11 Dec. 2024.

Patel, Vimal. "Graduate School Debt Is Raising Questions about Degrees' Worth." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 17 Mar. 2014.

Patton, M. Q. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 3rd ed., Sage Publications, Inc., 2002.

Pawlowski, Madelyn, and Brad Jacobson. "Chapter 7: Shifting Roles and Negotiating Identities: TA Learning in Landscapes of Practice." *Threshold Conscripts: Rhetoric and Composition Teaching Assistantships*, edited by William J. Macauley Jr., Leslie R. Anglesey, Brady Edwards, Kathryn M. Lambrecht, and Phillip K. Lovas, WAC Clearinghouse, 2023, pp. 187-205.

Perl, Sondra. "Introduction: A Shining Moment." *Landmark Essays on Writing Process*, edited by Sondra Perl, Hermagoras, 1994.

Phelan, J., P. J. Rabinowitz, and R. Warhol. *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*. The Ohio State University Press, 1914.

Pinnegar, Stefinee, Eliza Pinnegar, and Celina Dulude Lay. "Using Story to Understand Teacher Knowledge." *LEARNing Landscapes*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2018, pp. 55-59. EBSCO, 946-Article Text-975-1-10-20180709.pdf, Accessed 6 Mar. 2024.

Pizzolato, J. E. "Developing Self-Authorship: Exploring the Experiences of High-Risk College Students." *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 44, no. 6, 2003, pp. 797-812. doi:10.1353/csd.2003.0074.

Pizzolato, J. E., and C. C. Ozaki. "Moving Toward Self-Authorship: Investigating Outcomes

of Learning Partnerships." *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2007, pp. 196-214. doi:10.1353/csd.2007.0019.

Powell, Katrina M., Peggy O'Neill, Cassandra Mach Phillips, and Brian Huot. "Negotiating Resistance and Change: One Composition Program's Struggle Not to Convert." *Preparing College Teachers*, edited by Betty P. Pytlik and Sarah Liggett, Oxford UP, 2001, pp. 121-134.

Powell, Mary Ann, and Judy Harrington. "Effective Teaching Circles: Support for Math Anxious Students." *NADE Digest*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2011, pp. 24-33. EBSCO, EJ1097617.pdf (ed.gov), Accessed 15 Mar. 2024.

Pratt, A. "Teacher Perspectives of Professional Learning Community Teams with Respect to Their Collective Inquiries: A Case Study." PhD diss., Liberty University, 2014.

Prior, Paul. *Writing/Disciplinarity: A Sociohistoric Account of Literate Activity in the Academy*. Erlbaum Associates, 1998.

"Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing." *National Council of Teachers of English*, NCTE, 28 Feb. 2016, https://ncte.org/statement/teaching-writing/. Accessed 26 Oct. 2024.

Pytlik, Betty P., and Sarah Liggett, editors. *Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices*. Oxford UP, 2002.

Randall, Beth. "Narrating Our Professional Selves: Autobiography and Inquiry in GTA Preparation." *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration*, edited by Courtney Adams Wooten, Laura Micciche, and Kate Navickas, Utah State University Press, 2020, pp. 57–68.

Rankin, Elizabeth. *Seeing Yourself as a Teacher: Conversations with Five New Teachers in a University Writing Program*. National Council of Teachers of English, 1994.

Reed, Meridith. "Enacting Bricolage: Theorizing the Teaching Practices of Graduate Writing Instructors." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2020, pp. 107-128.

Reid, E. Shelley. "Anxieties of Influencers: Composition Pedagogy in the 21st Century." *WPA: Writing Pedagogy Education*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2007, pp. 241-250.

Reid, E. Shelley. "On Learning to Teach: Letter to a New TA." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2017, pp. 129-145.

Reid, E. Shelley. "Teaching Writing Teachers Writing: Difficulty, Exploration, and Critical Reflection." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 61, no. 2, 2009, pp. W197-W221.

Reid, E. Shelley, and Heidi Estrem, with Marcia Belcheir. "The Effects of Writing Pedagogy Education on Graduate Teaching Assistants' Approaches to Teaching Composition." *WPA: Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2012, pp. 32-73.

Reid, E. Shelley, and Heidi Estrem. "The Effects of Disciplinarity on TA Preparation in Rhetoric and Composition." *The Writing Program Interrupted: Making Space for Critical Discourse*, edited by Donna Strickland and Jeanne Gunner, Boynton/Cook, 2009, pp. 223–234.

Reid, E. Shelley, and Heidi Estrem. "What New Writing Teachers Talk About When They Talk About Teaching." Pedagogy, vol. 9, no. 3, 2009, pp. 317–340. Duke University Press, https://doi.org/10.1215/15314200-2009-003.

Reiff, Mary Jo, and Anis Bawarshi. "Tracing Discursive Resources: How Students Use Prior

Genre Knowledge to Negotiate New Writing Contexts in First-Year Composition." *Written Communication*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2011, pp. 312-337.

Reiff, Mary Jo, Anis Bawarshi, Michelle Ballif, and Christian Weisser. *Ecologies of Writing Programs: Program Profiles in Context*. Parlor Press, 2015.

Reither, James A. "Writing and Knowing: Toward Redefining the Writing Process." *College English*, vol. 47, 1985, pp. 620–628.

Relations, Locations, Positions: Composition Theory for Writing Teachers, edited by Peter Vandenberg, Sue Hum, and Jennifer Clary-Lemon, National Council of Teachers of English, 21 Mar. 2006.

Restaino, Jessica. *First Semester: Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground*. Southern Illinois UP, 2012.

Restivo, P. "Teachers' Participation in an Online Professional Learning Community and the Influence on Self-Efficacy and Instruction." PhD diss., Walden University, 2012.

Rodgers, C. "Seeing Student Learning: Teacher Change and the Role of Reflection." *Harvard Education Review*, vol. 72, no. 2, 2002, pp. 230–254. doi:10.17763/haer.72.2.5631743606m15751.

Rodrigue, Tanya K. "Listening Across the Curriculum: What Disciplinary TAs Can Teach Us about TA Professional Development in the Teaching of Writing." *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2013, pp. 33-41.

Rodrigue, Tanya, and Andrea Williams, editors. "Teaching Assistants and Writing Across the Curriculum." *Special Issue, Across the Disciplines: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Language, Learning, and Academic Writing*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2016, pp. 1-5.

Roen, Duane, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Jennifer Clary-Lemon. “Teaching of Writing and Writing Teachers Through the Ages.” In *Handbook of Research on Writing: History, Society, School, Individual, Text*, edited by Charles Bazerman, Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007, pp. 425-447.

Rounsaville, Angela, Rachel Goldberg, and Anis Bawarshi. “From Incomes to Outcomes: FYW Students’ Prior Genre Knowledge, Meta-Cognition, and the Question of Transfer.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 32, no. 1-2, 2008, pp. 97-112.

Salgado, J., and H. J. Hermans. “The Return of Subjectivity: From a Multiplicity of Selves to the Dialogical Self.” *EJAP*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2009, pp. 3-13.

Saur, Elizabeth, and Jason Palmeri. “Letter to a New TA: Affect Addendum.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2017, pp. 146-153.

Savvidou, C. “Exploring Teachers’ Narratives of Inclusive Practice in Higher Education.” *Teacher Development*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2011, pp. 53-67. https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2011.555224.

Schlein, C., and G. Schwartz. “Teacher as Curriculum.” *Guide to Curriculum in Education*, Sage, 2015, pp. 153-159.

Sheridan, Mary P. “Making Ethnography Our Own: Why and How Writing Studies Must Redefine Core Research Practices.” *Writing Studies Research in Practice: Methods and Methodologies*, edited by Lee Nickoson and Mary P. Sheridan, Board of Trustees, Southern Illinois University, 2012.

Schoettler, Megan, and Elizabeth Saur. “Chapter 7: Beyond ‘Good Teacher’/‘Bad Teacher’: Generative Self-Efficacy and the Composition and Rhetoric TAship.” *Standing at the Threshold: Working Through Liminality in the Composition and Rhetoric TAship*, edited

by William J. Macauley Jr., Leslie R. Anglesey, Brady Edwards, Kathryn M. Lambrecht, and Phillip Lovas, University Press of Colorado, 2021, pp. 152-177.

Shulman, Lee S. *The Wisdom of Practice: Essays on Teaching, Learning, and Learning to Teach*. Jossey-Bass, 2005.

Sikula, J., T. Buttery, and E. Guyton, editors. *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education: A Project of the Association of Teacher Educators*. Macmillan, 1996.

Singer, J. A. "Narrative Identity and Meaning Making Across the Adult Lifespan: An Introduction." *Journal of Personality*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2004, pp. 437-460.

Sizer, Jennifer. "Textography: Narrowing the Gap Between Text and Context in Ethnographic Explorations of Situated Academic Writing." *Ethnographies of Academic Writing Research: Theory, Methods, and Interpretation*, edited by Ignacio Guillén-Galve, Ana Bocanegra-Valle, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2021.

Skorczewski, Dawn. "From Playing the Role to Being Yourself: Becoming the Teacher in the Writing Classroom." *Teaching Composition: Background Readings*, edited by T. R. Johnson, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008, pp. 99-116.

Slater, Jarron, and Jeremy Rosselot-Merritt. "The Technical Communicator as Artist: Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Form in the Workplace." *Technical Communication*, vol. 71, no. 2, May 2024, pp. 58–71. EBSCOhost, https://doi-org.proxy.library.umkc.edu/10.55177/tc547418.

Smagorinsky, Peter, Amy Alexandra Wilson, and Cynthia Moore. "Teaching Grammar and Writing: A Beginning Teacher's Dilemma." *English Education*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2011, pp. 262-292.

Song, Huan. "The Role of Teachers' Professional Learning Communities in the Context of

Curriculum Reform in High Schools." *Chinese Education & Society*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2012, pp. 81-95. EBSCO, Accessed 25 Apr. 2024.

Stancliff, Michael, and Maureen Daly Goggin. "What's Theorizing Got to Do with It? Teaching Theory as Resourceful Conflict and Reflection in TA Preparation." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2007, pp. 11-28.

Stapleton, K., and J. Wilson. "Telling the Story: Meaning Making in a Community Narrative." *Journal of Pragmatics*, vol. 108, 2017, pp. 60-80. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2016.11.003.

Stenberg, Shari J. *Professing and Pedagogy: Learning the Teaching of English*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2005.

Strayhorn, T. L. "Making a Way to Success: Self-Authorship and Academic Achievement of First-Year African American Students at Historically Black Colleges." *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 55, no. 2, 2014, pp. 151-167. doi:10.1353/csd.2014.0011.

Style in Rhetoric and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook, edited by Paul Butler, Bedford/St. Martin's, 16 Mar. 2009.

Taggart, Amy Rupiper, and Margaret Lowry. "Cohorts, Grading, and Ethos: Listening to TAs Enhances Teacher Preparation." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2011, pp. 89-114.

Takacs, David. "How Does Your Positionality Bias Your Epistemology?" *Thought & Scholarship*, 2003, pp. 27-38. viewcontent.cgi (uclawsf.edu), Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.

Tanaka, G. *The Intercultural Campus: Transcending Culture & Power in American Higher Education*. Peter Lang, 2005.

Taylor, Marcy, and Jennifer L. Holberg. "Tales of Neglect and Sadism: Disciplinarity and the

Figuring of the Graduate Student in Composition." *College Composition Pedagogies*, vol. 50, no. 4, 1999, pp. 607-625. doi: 10.2307/358483.

Tims, Frederick. "Experiential Learning in the Music Therapy Curriculum." *Music Therapy Perspectives*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1989, pp. 91–92. https://doi.org/10.1093/mtp/7.1.91.

Trimbur, John. "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning." *College English*, vol. 51, 1989, pp. 602–616.

University of South Carolina. "Teaching Resource Development Grant for GTAs." 2021, https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/cte/programs/grants/gta_teaching_resources_grant

Valle, Antonio, Ramón G. Cabanach, José C. Núñez, Julio González-Pienda, Susana Rodríguez, and Isabel Piñeiro. "Multiple Goals, Motivation, and Academic Learning." *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 73, no. 1, 2003, pp. 71-87.

Van Lankveld, Thea, Judith Schoonenboom, Monique Volman, Gerda Croiset, and Jos Beishuizen. "Developing a Teacher Identity in the University Context: A Systematic Review of the Literature." *Higher Education Research & Development*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2017, pp. 325–342. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1208154.

Villegas, D. F. M., W. H. Varona, and A. G. Sanchez. "Student Teachers' Identity Construction: A Socially-Constructed Narrative in a Second Language Teacher Education Program." *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 91, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103055.

Wardle, Elizabeth. "Creative Repurposing for Engaged Learning in a Culture of Fear and

Loathing." *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, Utah State University Press, 2015, pp. 321–326.

Wardle, Elizabeth. "Intractable Writing Program Problems, Kairos, and Writing about Writing: A Profile of the University of Central Florida's First-Year Composition Program." *Composition Forum*, vol. 27, 2013, compositionforum.com/issue/27/ucf.php.

Wardle, Elizabeth. "Understanding 'Transfer' from FYC: Preliminary Results of a Longitudinal Study." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 31, nos. 1-2, Fall/Winter 2007, pp. 65-85.

Wardle, Elizabeth. "You Can Learn to Write in General." *Bad Ideas About Writing*, edited by Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe, Digital Publishing Institute, West Virginia University Libraries, 2017, pp. 30–35.

Waronker, S. "Teacher Teams and Refined Praxis: An Investigation of Teacher Perceptions in Schools." PhD diss., Harvard University, 2016.

Warwick, Nicole. "Chapter 13: From Deficit to Asset: Rethinking Graduate Student Narratives." *Threshold Conscripts: Rhetoric and Composition Teaching Assistantships*, edited by William J. Macauley Jr., Leslie R. Anglesey, Brady Edwards, Kathryn M. Lambrecht, and Phillip K. Lovas, WAC Clearinghouse, 2023, pp. 339-363.

Welch, Nancy. "Resisting the Faith: Conversion, Resistance, and the Training of Teachers." *College English*, vol. 55, no. 4, 1993, pp. 387-401.

Wenger, Etienne. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge UP, 1998.

Wisniewski, Carolyn A. "Looking through Narrow Windows: Problem-Setting and Problem

Solving Strategies of Novice Teachers." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2018, pp. 36-55.

Wittrock, M. C., editor. *Handbook of Research on Teaching*. Macmillan, 1986.

Wooten, Courtney Adams. "Chapter 11: The Pursuit of (Un)happiness in Composition and Rhetoric TA's Experiences." *Threshold Conscripts: Rhetoric and Composition Teaching Assistantships*, edited by William J. Macauley Jr., Leslie R. Anglesey, Brady Edwards, Kathryn M. Lambrecht, and Phillip K. Lovas, WAC Clearinghouse, 2023, pp. 289-310.

Wright, Allison Laubach. "Chapter 17: The Rhetoric of Excellence and the Erasure of Graduate Labor." *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition*, edited by Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, Amy Lynch-Biniek, University Press of Colorado, 2017, pp. 271-278.

Writing About Writing, edited by Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs, 5th ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2023.

Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges. Southern Illinois UP, 1984.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. *Teaching Literature as Reflective Practice*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2004.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. "The Professionalization of TA Development Programs: A Heuristic for Curriculum Design." *Preparing College Teachers of Writing*, edited by Betty P. Pytlik and Sarah Liggett, Oxford UP, 2001, pp. 63-74.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. "The Visible, the Invisible, and the Remix: New Teachers and the Curriculum." *The Locations of Composition*, edited by Christopher J. Keller and Christian R. Weisser, State University of New York Press, 2007, pp. 15–50

Yancey, Kathleen Blake, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak. *Writing Across Contexts:*

Composition, Transfer, and Sites of Writing. Utah State UP, 2014.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake, Rob Cole, Amanda May, and Katelyn Stark. "Chapter 4: 'Coming to Teaching: Moving Beyond a Blank-Slate Model of Developing Pedagogical Expertise.'" *Threshold Conscripts: Rhetoric and Composition Teaching Assistantships*, edited by William J. Macauley Jr., Leslie R. Anglesey, Brady Edwards, Kathryn M. Lambrecht, and Phillip K. Lovas, WAC Clearinghouse, 2023, pp. 115-134.

Yilmaz, Kaya. "Constructivism: Its Theoretical Underpinnings, Variations, and Implications for Classroom Instruction." *Educational Horizons*, vol. 86, no. 3, 2008, pp. 161-172. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/42923724. Accessed 19 Feb. 2025.

York-Barr, J., W. Sommers, G. Ghere, and J. Montie. *Reflective Practice to Improve Schools: An Action Guide for Educators*. Corwin, 2016.

Young, Richard Emmerson, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth Lee Pike. *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*. Harcourt, 1970.

Zhou, Yalun. *The Lived Experiences of L2 Chinese Graduate Students in American Higher Education: A Phenomenological Narrative Inquiry*. University of Missouri-Kansas City, PhD diss., 2010.

Zittoun, T., and S. Brinkmann. "Learning as Meaning Making." In *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning*, edited by N. M. Seel, Springer, 2012, pp. 1809-1811. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1428-6_1851.

VITA

Kristin Nicole Schmidtlein was born in Kansas and attended Catholic school from kindergarten through high school. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Education from Emporia State University in 2017 and a Master of Arts in English from Emporia State University in 2019. Prior to her graduate studies, Ms. Schmidtlein became licensed to teach English Language Arts from grades six through twelve at the secondary level. While working towards this licensure, she taught as a student teacher for a year under the assessment of Emporia State University, primarily focusing her apprenticeship at the high school level. During Ms. Schmidtlein's studies towards her master's degree, she served as a Graduate Teaching Assistant at Emporia State University, teaching first- and second-year composition and rhetoric. She also served as Emporia State University's Director of Composition's Graduate Assistant towards the end of her master's program, within which she kept track of assessment scores for the department, tracked student progress, helped obtain material for the director's upcoming book in composition, as well as assist in any other miscellaneous tasks for the department.

Ms. Schmidtlein was also part of the Composition Committee at Emporia State University and assisted in editing a new composition textbook as well as took part to orchestrate a workshop created by said sub-committee that she was involved in. Additionally, she was a member of the Memorial Union Board of Directors at Emporia State University as well as a member of the sub-committee which maintained the expenses of students living on campus. In the spring of 2018, Ms. Schmidtlein was awarded the "Graduate Teaching Assistant University Award for Excellent Teaching." During her enrollment at Emporia State University, she was a member of Sigma Alpha Lambda National Leadership & Honors, as

well as a member of Sigma Tau Delta International Honors English Society. She participated in various volunteer opportunities with these organizations to help the community and met many friends along the way.

After completion of her master's degree, Ms. Schmidtlein continued teaching as an Instructor of English at Kansas State University and has held that position for going on five and half years now. After being accepted into the Interdisciplinary PhD program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Ms. Schmidtlein continued in her position at Kansas State University while dually working as a GTA once again, serving in this position for three years before transitioning into the position Graduate Instructor, teaching first-and second-year composition and rhetoric. Ms. Schmidtlein has been a doctoral student at the University of Missouri-Kansas City since 2020. She is currently a member of the Golden Key International Honors Society, which only allows entry via invitation as well as only permits admittance to the top fifteen percent of performing students.

Ms. Schmidtlein presented at Johnson County Community College Cavalier Conference on Writing and Literature in 2018, serving on a panel with the project "Bridging the Gaps between High School and College research and Writing" with accordance to the conference theme "Researching: Teach, Do, and Share". This presentation aimed to inform and purpose potential solutions to close the rhetorical and academic gap evident between secondary and post-secondary education. She also presented at the University of Missouri-Kansas City's Interdisciplinary Spring Symposium in 2021, presenting a piece titled, "Kusuriuri is a *Kami*." This work aimed to prove how the character Kusuriuri within the animated series *Mononoke* was actually a Japanese god, otherwise known as a *kami.*

Upon completion of her degree requirements, Ms. Schmidtlein plans to expand outward into other teaching positions for writing studies, building on her foundation in composition and rhetoric. She is dedicated to advancing the field of writing studies through innovative pedagogy, research, and program development. She seeks to apply her expertise in composition and rhetoric to higher-level teaching and leadership roles, contributing to the growth and evolution of writing programs and student learning initiatives.