THESIS

THE GTA PROJECT: GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONALIZATION AS EMERGING DISCIPLINARY SCHOLARS AND COMPOSITION INSTRUCTORS

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ABSTRACT

THE GTA PROJECT: GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONALIZATION AS EMERGING DISCIPLINARY SCHOLARS AND COMPOSITION INSTRUCTORS

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) constitute a large portion of the teaching population in Writing Studies and Composition (WSC) programs across the country. Although GTAs have many roles, in WSC they are most often employed as instructors of record in mandatory general education writing courses, including first-year composition courses. While composition GTAs are situated within the English department, they are further positioned as emerging scholars and professionals within a specific disciplinary area under the larger umbrella of English studies, such as creative writing, TEFL/TESL, English education, and literature. Consequently, as GTAs progress through their program and develop disciplinary and professional identities, it can be inferred that their pedagogical goals and approaches to the teaching of writing will develop as well. This study builds on research addressing the pedagogical experience and professionalization of GTAs within a context that is shaped by neoliberal values in higher education. This project addresses the two primary questions: (1) How does an English department GTA's disciplinarity and ecologies of influence affect their pedagogical goals and approaches to teaching first-year composition as they progress in their graduate program? (2) How do systems of power within the university impact GTAs' pedagogical goals and approaches to teaching first-year composition and their perception of self-efficacy and empowerment as instructors? To explore these questions, seven composition GTAs

participated in a qualitative study that included surveys, interviews, and voice memos. The goal of this study was to map the complex university systems and personal factors that impact composition GTAs' development as disciplinary scholars and composition instructors. Results indicate that as GTAs progress in their disciplinary programs, they begin to approach the teaching of writing from a disciplinary perspective that aligns their disciplinary writing practices with their pedagogical goals and strategies for first-year composition courses. These GTAs are heavily impacted by their disciplinary mentors, cohort, and the complex university systems that they must navigate as they fulfill their roles as graduate students, instructors of record, and emerging disciplinary scholars. WPAs and faculty should consider the critical role of mentoring that GTAs require as they develop into composition instructors in order to support and guide future scholars and instructors in the field of writing studies and composition.

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1. INTRODUCTION

When I began considering a return to graduate school after teaching secondary English, the offer of a GTA position at CSU was the deciding factor. I have a passion for education and my long-term goal for the past several years has been to teach college composition. The idea that this could be a reality – I could be an instructor of record for first-year composition (FYC) courses – while completing a graduate degree in Colorado felt like a perfect fit. Upon entering the program, I immediately immersed myself in the first-year composition instructor role. I threw myself into the GTA orientation and the subsequent practicum course that constituted the WPE (writing pedagogy education) program. In all my own courses as a graduate student in the writing studies and composition MA program, first-year composition was the lens through which I made sense of the theory and content I was exposed to. And it was during this first semester that my interest in first-year composition expanded to include the GTAs that teach so many sections of this important course.

Like many graduate cohorts, my GTA cohort became a closely-knit group during the Fall 2020 semester. We navigated the difficulties of teaching FYC courses while attending our own graduate-level classes together. The support and camaraderie were invaluable to many of us, especially during an unprecedented pandemic where the world felt strange and uncertain. It was through the development of these relationships that my interest in FYC expanded to include a curiosity about the professional identity of GTAs and the factors that influence their disciplinary development. My peers in the composition GTA program came from different English disciplinary programs – writing studies and composition, poetry, literature, TEFL/TESL, creative writing fiction and nonfiction, and English education – and we often discussed the impact of the different programs on our approach to writing and, consequently, to the teaching of writing. The

different perspectives in writing, theory, and pedagogy that these different disciplines provided added depth and complexity to our conversations about the FYC courses we were teaching. Indeed, the personal and professional experiences, educational backgrounds, and disciplinary knowledge of each GTA were distinctive and provided a multitude of perspectives in our cohort.

Of course, although many GTAs are new educators, they arrived at their position with their previously formed opinions and knowledges that stem from their time as students. The composition GTAs in my cohort, even though many had never taught a class before, were clearly excited and passionate about teaching writing in the FYC classroom. This was not a responsibility that any of us took lightly. However, that excitement informed by our own educational experiences and background. Education is such a unique field because everyone – really, everyone – has intimate knowledge of our education system filtered through their own experiences and thus has an opinion and stake in the conversations and controversies surrounding the field. Therefore, despite the general lack of formal experience as instructors, the GTAs had clear opinions on certain pedagogical strategies and instructional practices. Clearly, new educators – such as GTAs – must feel some affinity towards teaching in order to decide to transition from student to educator - to undergo the transformation from apprentice to professional. It is the moments within that transition that interest me, and, more specifically, how GTAs navigate that transition while juggling the multitude of roles they play in the university setting. However, it should also be noted that there are GTAs who participate in the composition GTA program primarily as a means of financial support while they complete their graduate education. This interest resulted in questions that would strongly shape my work on this project: What influences an educator to adopt certain pedagogical philosophies? What mentors, classes, or peers leave an imprint that could possibly go on to impact an educator's future students?

Where do GTAs go for support as they transition from student to instructor? How do prior experiences as a student influence a GTA's classroom environment?

These questions were further refined by examining my own positionality in the composition program as both a GTA employed as an instructor of record for first-year composition courses and as a master's candidate in the writing studies and composition program. The conversations and experiences I had with my fellow GTAs from across the disciplines in the English department continued to affect the way I viewed FYC courses and labor practices in the university. But these were informal conversations, held over late-night drinks after our practicum class. And our conversations often turned towards the uncertainty and frustration we felt over our liminal positions in the academy. Composition GTAs must perform as a student, an instructor, and an emerging disciplinary scholar throughout their graduate program. The conversations amongst the GTA cohort clarified the difficulty many of us experienced in transitioning between these different roles. However, this was a place to air our grievances and find support from our cohort. And yet, I was curious about how all of this could impact our approach to teaching writing in the first-year composition classroom. It seems inevitable that these foundational experiences in the academy would affect our interactions and relationships with our students, our professors, and, more generally, with the university systems. These conversations with my own composition GTA cohort further focused my interest in the experiences and professional development of composition GTAs: How do composition GTAs' different disciplinary programs impact their understanding of writing? How does liminal positionality of composition GTAs in the academy influence their approach to teaching writing?

Then I took a course in my second semester titled "Professional Issues in Writing Studies and Composition" that exposed me to scholarship focused on the administrative duties and

employment opportunities in the field of Writing Studies and Composition (WSC). The managerial services required of composition faculty and the inequitable labor practices that shape the experiences of composition GTAs and faculty members in contingent positions left me a bit stunned (Kezar et al., 2019; Samuels, 2017; Strickland, 2011). My cohort's interest in neoliberalism and academic capitalism provided conversation and a supportive framework for exploring these complex topics. The understanding of neoliberal ideologies and logics in this project is largely predicated on Samuels (2017) book *The Politics of Writing Studies* in which he examined work from prominent scholars in the field of WSC through the neoliberal lens. This lens provides a series of ideological assumptions that consider "the role higher education plays in the political economy of neoliberalism" (p. 10). Among these assumptions is the notion that liberal and progressive professors and administrators have constructed and maintain a system that prioritizes research over teaching and "individual rights over collective solidarity" (Samuels, 2017, p. 10). The assumption that progressive faculty has contributed to and continues to maintain this prioritization contradicts the idea that neoliberal systems have arisen solely out of the conservative politics that result in the defunding of public universities. These systems that continue to privilege research over teaching have resulted in hierarchies that shift the labor of teaching from tenured professors to contingent faculty. These assumptions and the resulting ideological lens of neoliberal systems therefore focus on the hierarchies that devalue teaching and service from tenure professors and move that labor to contingent faculty that include composition GTAs.

These ideological assumptions provide a foundation for understanding the neoliberal systems and logics in the university. As such, neoliberalism provided a theoretical context for our graduate cohort's conversations around the labor practices we experienced as composition

GTAs and graduate students. This focus on labor practices provided another lens through which I made sense of the theory I was exposed to in my courses. My experience as a composition GTA became the primary point of praxis for the scholarship in my courses and my interest in FYC courses was now secondary. Yet the neoliberal values that shape the systems of higher education that impact both composition GTAs and FYC courses remain pertinent to this project.

To further unpack the complexity of neoliberal systems in higher education, I will be using Saunders and Ramirez's (2017) work on resisting the neoliberalization of higher education. Neoliberalism has varying definitions that reflect the broad reach of capitalism within our world. It is, therefore, "because neoliberalism attempts to reshape and redefine most aspects of our society" that its reach extends to higher education and to the field of WSC (p. 190). It is as Downing (2014) stated:

"From the size of the class to the quality of the computer lab, to the costs of textbooks, to the demographics and the class schedules of the students, to the workload and the compensation of faculty assigned to teach them—it is just so easy to name a few of the obvious material factors signaling the neoliberal economy's affect on how we teach required service classes like research writing" (p. 39)

Indeed, neoliberalism and its effects on our teaching environments and practices are inescapable and must be confronted. GTAs in particular must navigate these systems while juggling multiple roles in the university. For example, they must consider the price of textbooks as a student who is assigned the course reading, as an instructor who assigns the reading, then as a scholar who must budget for reading that will further their scholarship. The experiences of these "new neoliberal subjects" (Archer, 2008) are thus institutionally situated within these systems of power in higher education that seek to commodify the educational experience.

While there is a general understanding around the concept of students as consumers of educational experiences; it is useful to explore the theory of consumption that legitimizes the neoliberal systems of the university by simply restating the notion of students as consumers (Saunders & Ramirez, 2017). This project seeks to understand consumption from the perspective of the composition GTA who navigates the spheres of higher education as both a student who is a consumer and an instructor who delivers, and perhaps supplies, the material for consumption. Indeed, studies on the pedagogical experiences of GTAs have shed light on the systems of institutional power relations and the resulting effects on GTAs' pedagogical development (Lowe & Pugh, 2007). As composition GTAs balance the responsibilities associated with their instructional role – including the instruction of FYC, grading and evaluating assignments, and conferencing with students – with the expectations of their student role – including taking courses, developing research, and participating in professional and disciplinary development – they are working to understand the culture of their institution and the expectations and regulations of the system they are participating in (Dotger, 2011; Madden, 2016). Consequently, as GTAs are developing their pedagogical and professional philosophies and goals, they are experiencing a neoliberal higher education system that consistently values research and credentialism over pedagogical experiences and expertise (Kezar et al., 2019; Samuels, 2017). Therefore, the liminal positionality of a composition GTA provides a unique perspective to question the ways in which these neoliberal systems value consumption. Consequently, the emphasis on neoliberal systems in higher education in my coursework provided new avenues for questions that further shape this project: How do GTAs learn to navigate these neoliberal systems? How do power dynamics and authority in the university impact GTAs' perceived constraints as instructors of record for FYC courses? How do GTAs find support in the

neoliberal university? What impacts a GTA's experienced efficacy as an instructor, as a student, and as an emerging disciplinary scholar in the academy?

All of this is to say that the road to becoming a disciplinary scholar in WSC is complicated and intricate in ways that I had not anticipated upon rejoining the academy as a composition GTA. My experiences with the university systems and exposure to scholarship in my courses prompted me ask questions such as those listed above. It should be noted that in asking those questions, there is certainly a degree of comfort to be found in the scholarship that works to unpack these systems and finds space for nuance and hope. I have enjoyed reading scholarship that values the development of GTAs and works to support their professional development as the future professoriate (Gallego, 2014; Lindemann & Anderson, 2001; Nyquist et al., 1999; Schwaller & Miller-Cochran, 2020). However, on a personal level, the internal dissonance between a love of WSC and a concern over my own professional development as an instructor and scholar has led me to more carefully consider the ways in which the field of WSC and the university at large view graduate students and participate in these neoliberal, market-driven tendencies. What sort of professional development is needed to become professionalized into this field? What services are expected of faculty in a university writing program? What supports do different university structures offer and how are they lacking? What freedoms and constraints are present as a member of the academy in the neoliberalized university?

Additionally, in WSC it is an unavoidable truth that GTAs are heavily relied upon to teach first-year composition courses, especially in universities with significant research activity (Schwaller & Miller-Cochran, 2020). These GTAs are often placed as instructors of record for mandatory general education writing courses while also acting as apprentice scholars in their discipline and as students in their graduate program. It seems intuitive that as GTAs progress in

their graduate program and are immersed in the disciplinary discourse community they are apprenticed in, their pedagogical approach to teaching a general writing course is likely to evolve. Consequently, a GTA in a creative writing MFA program will have a different pedagogical and theoretical approach to teaching writing in the first-year composition classroom than a GTA in a writing studies and composition MA program. My personal experience as a composition GTA and the informal conversations with my cohort seem to support as much. Yet much of the research pertaining to GTAs focuses on GTA training and efficacy and neglects to consider the disciplinary differences of composition GTAs (Prieto & Altmaier, 1994; Shannon et al., 1998; Williams & Rodrigue, 2016). While there is some literature that considers the professionalization of GTAs and, more broadly, graduate students (Gallego, 2014; Russell, 1991; Schwaller & Miller-Cochran, 2020), there is a dearth of scholarship when considering how the disciplinary focus of a composition GTA's graduate program might influence their approach to teaching FYC courses and their pedagogical development as emerging disciplinary scholars.

These conversations and curiosities have led me to this project. I have used this opportunity for research and writing to delve into the professionalization of composition GTAs. Drawing on the questions that I've considered since beginning to work as a GTA in this program, I developed two primary research questions:

1. How does an English department GTA's disciplinarity and ecology of influence (Staudt, 2021) affect their pedagogical goals and approaches to teaching first-year composition as they progress in their graduate program?
2. How do systems of power within the university impact GTAs' pedagogical goals and approaches to teaching first-year composition and their perception of self-efficacy and empowerment as instructors?

The objective of this project was to map the participants' ecology of influence (Staudt, 2021) in order to make visible how a GTA is impacted by the systems of power in the university and professionalized into a discipline. These experiences and situational factors were hypothesized to impact the GTA's approach to the teaching of writing, specifically in the FYC classroom.

Additionally, the professional and pedagogical development of composition GTAs is exigent to the field of writing studies and composition. For one, in most university structures the composition program houses the composition GTAs and is therefore charged with the training necessary for them to effectively teach the FYC courses in which they are the instructors of record (Samuels, 2017; Schwaller and Miller, 2020). There is significant research and conversation around the pedagogy practicum that is designed to guide new GTAs through their "initial teaching experience and provide an introduction to composition studies" (Estrem & Reid, 2012a, p. 449). These courses and other methods of Writing Pedagogy Education (WPE) – a term defined by Reid and Estrem (2012b) as "the ongoing education, mentoring, and support of new college-level writing instructors" (p. 223) – are consistent topics of scholarly inquiry for two primary reasons. First, GTAs teach a significant portion of FYC courses. These courses are considered general education classes and are a requirement for most students and, accordingly, bring most students in the university into contact with the composition program. As such, it is in the best interest of the program to produce engaging and effective writing instructors for those courses. Second, many GTAs, though not all, have long term goals that include continuing their education to become active members of the academy. Perhaps the title of Nyquist et al.'s (1991) edited collection, *Preparing the Professoriate of Tomorrow to Teach,* best summarizes the field of writing studies and composition's interest in this topic. Scholarship reiterates the fact that

many current instructors' pedagogy was shaped by their experiences as graduate students (Cassuto, 2015; Nyquist et al. 2010; Prieto & Altmaier, 1994). Despite the clear interest and exigence of GTAs' professional development in WSC, there is a dearth of research into the effects of GTAs' disciplinary development on their pedagogical practices in the FYC classroom.

This project contains several sections. Chapter 2, "A Feminist Approach," considers my own position in relation to this study and to the participants. This consideration – and a conversation with an advisor – led me to adopt a feminist methodology to formally frame my position and relationships to the participants, the literature, and the study itself. Chapter 3, "Methods," details the measures used to obtain information from participants about their experiences and the factors that shaped their work as GTAs and their development as scholars. A mixed-method approach was used for this project that includes surveys, voice memos, and interviews. The coding process included three categories that reference the frequency that participants refer to key themes. After the coding process, the data was separated into three streams to account for three English disciplines represented by the composition GTAs in this study: writing studies and composition, English education, and creative writing. Chapter 4, "Results and Discussion: Theme Frequency and Case Studies," provides the results from the coding process. This chapter also includes the case studies from six of the participants. These case study narratives were written using the results' data to shape the narratives by prioritizing themes from the two research questions. The discussion in this chapter is organized according to the two research questions that guide this project. Chapter 5, "Results and Discussion: GTAs' Interactions with University Activity Systems," uses activity theory (Engström, 1987; Leontiev, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). to discuss the results of the study. Chapter 6, "Final Thoughts and Next Steps," is a reflection on this study and details considerations for next steps for this project.

2. A FEMINIST APPROACH

As I approach the task of conducting a study on fellow Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in the English department, I find that I am experiencing discomfort with the potential of projecting my own experiences onto those of my peers. While the exigence for this project certainly stems from my own experiences, I am obligated – both by my conscience and my desire to conduct this study with fidelity – to represent the experiences of my fellow GTAs with care and respect. In this endeavor, I find that using the tools of feminist autoethnography helps me to make sense of my own positionality in relation to this research and the participants. In this chapter, I will define tools from feminist autoethnographic methodology and literature that I have reviewed on the topic of GTA positionality, development, and professionalization. These tools are then used to narratively map my own ecology of influence in this chapter.

As I consider a feminist autoethnographic method, I find it helpful to first understand these terms individually, then as a whole as a means to produce the necessary framework. Feminist autoethnography does not have a single definition and is instead caught in the midst of conflicting definitions and goals of feminism, ethnography, and autoethnography. To begin with feminist, it should be noted that feminism itself is not simply a theoretical framework, but a larger ideology that informs and guides our actions and research as a method to rectify inequalities (Davis & Hattery, 2018). In their discussion of feminist research methods, Davis and Hattery (2018) argued that feminist research is any research that seeks to increase "our empirical understanding of the processes through which inequality . . . are reproduced with an eye toward eradication of that inequality" (p. 50). Indeed, the pervasive neoliberal systems that perpetuate labor inequality in most universities and are examined in this project (Kezar et al., 2019; Samuels, 2017). These systems are investigated from the perspective of composition GTAs who

must navigate the contradicting values and goals of the overlapping neoliberal systems in the university (see chapter five). However, for the purposes of this feminist approach, it is important to note that feminist epistemology advocates for including both researchers and participants from diverse social locations and experiences in the production of knowledge to create a more inclusive story (Davis & Hattery, 2018). Since this project uses a convenience sample to recruit participants, the opportunity to purposefully include more diverse voices was limited by the reach of my personal network in the composition program.

Additionally, the participants in this study are my peers and, as such, this creates an opportunity for the co-creation of knowledge. I want to recognize that the co-creation of knowledge that occurs from myself and the participants is situated; and a feminist epistemology acknowledges this reality by expanding opportunities for such cocreation (Haraway, 1988). However, that recognition and situatedness of feminist epistemology is predicated on the understanding that GTAs do not identify their position in the university as being "deemed worthy of power" (Lowe and Pugh, 2007, p. 27). Consequently, the lack of perceived power in the situated positionality of composition GTAs lends itself to the feminist lens as feminist scholars have historically interrogated the "power relations which inform and shape academic cultures" (Archer, 2008, p. 265). A feminist lens draws attention to the co-creation of knowledge from myself and the participants and the inequitable power structures in the university systems that affect a GTA's perceived efficacy as a writing instructor and emerging scholar in the academy (Prieto & Altmaier, 1994).

This feminist approach is further refined when combined with tools associated with ethnographic inquiry. In addressing the reality of situated knowledges and the co-creation of knowledge between the researcher (myself) and the participants in this study, it must be

acknowledged that my presence in the study affected the participants' responses (Schrock, 2013). In considering ways in which my presence affected this research, I draw on Skegg's (2001) notion that "when we enter ethnography we enter it with all our economic and cultural baggage, our discursive access and the traces of position and history that we embody" (p. 437). Therefore, to "recognize, anticipate, and explore the ways in which [my] presence in the field affect[ed]" the participants' responses (Schrock, 2013, p. 54), it is necessary to turn my gaze inward and examine my positionality in relation to the research and scholarship that I have reviewed and that informs my approach to this topic.

As I turn this analytical gaze towards my own experiences and person, I find that Ettore's (2017) discussion of feminist autoethnography helps to ground myself in the theory that transforms my personal story into a political understanding of my social position from which knowledge can emerge. In differentiating the autoethnography from the autobiography, Ettore validated feminist autoethnography as a method through which the feminist autoethnographer can make contributions to knowledge. It is from this differentiation that the "I" first-person voice in the autoethnography allows the feminist autoethnographer to focus outward on "cultural aspects of personal experience; then inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). In this section, I take on the role of the feminist autoethnographer to explore the cultural aspects of my personal experiences in relation to the literature and scholarship on GTA positionality and professionalization. This helps me to better understand my own situated knowledge and, therefore, to meaningfully cocreate knowledge with my participants in this study with respect and care to their own experiences and knowledges.

In the process of explicating my positionality, I am also narratively mapping my ecology of influence. In the 2020 International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference, Emily Staudt introduced the concept of ecologies of influence in relation to graduate students. She defined ecologies of influence as means to map "the personal, professional, and situational factors, which, over time, influence [graduate students'] identity as instructors and their pedagogy in ways they might not be aware of" (2021). Staudt's presentation focused on using this definition in professional development sessions for graduate students in a university setting. She envisioned workshops focused on mentoring graduate students that use reflective questions to help graduate students recognize the different people, experiences, and institutions that affect their growth in a program and, consequentially, their pedagogy. While I believe there is significant merit to this use, I want to expand on this work by using this concept of GTAs' ecologies of influence to help map how different forces – such as disciplinary, social, and institutional factors – in a program affect their approach to teaching first-year composition courses and their relation to the neoliberal university systems. This process will support the later use of activity theory that helps to understand the contradictions and subsequent possibilities for growth between GTAs and the university system (Engström, 1987; Leontiev, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978).

As I focus on my ecology of influence, I want to emphasize portions of courses, opportunities, and mentors that influence the way I approach the instruction of writing and my participation in the field of WSC. This process of mapping the "physical, cultural and economic possibilities for social action and meaning" not only contributes to my understanding of my ecology of influence but refines the feminist lens I employ throughout this project (Skegg, 2001, p. 428). This narrative mapping will span roughly six years, beginning with my introduction to

the Shopneck Writing Center at the University of Denver and ending with my tenure as the Writing Center GTA at CSU.

Undergraduate Educational Experience

My formal introduction to the field of Writing Studies and Composition (WSC) began with my tenure as a writing consultant at the Shopneck Writing Center at the University of Denver in the summer of 2017. This opportunity was coupled with my departure from the field of biochemistry and commitment to participating in the 4+1 BA and MA program that would allow me to graduate with my BA in literary studies and MA in Curriculum, Instruction, Teaching from the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. Consequently, I felt completely removed from my mentors and friends in the sciences and was desperate for connection and guidance in this completely new field. The welcoming community of the Writing Center, combined with the graduate seminar in literacy instruction that was required of all new writing consultants, provided me with informal mentorship from current graduate students and formal mentoring relationships with the directors of the Writing Center. In her research on social apprenticeship models for writing expertise, Beaufort (2000) draws on Lutz's stages of socialization for newcomers to an organization: "the pre-arrival period, the initiation period, and the insider period" (p. 187). At the Writing Center, I was dropped into the initiation period where I had to quickly build writing skills that had atrophied from repetitive lab reports into the flexibly robust skill set and attention to the rhetorical situation that scholars in WSC employ. Much of this social apprenticeship took place by looking at style guides and attending planning and observation sessions with mentors (Beaufort, 2000).

This immersion into the field of WSC was furthered by my participation in the 2017 Colorado Wyoming Writing Centers Association Conference that I attended alongside my peers

at the Writing Center. At this conference, I presented my first conference paper. This presentation paper was remediated from a paper that was developed in the graduate literacy seminar that I participated in through the Writing Center. This paper had gone through several remediations - from a literature review, to a conference paper, to a poster session - and was heavily workshopped with mentors in the professoriate and graduate students in the Writing Center. The experience of writing alongside these scholars illustrates David Russell's (1991) notion that "apprentices in a discipline learn very gradually its written conventions as an active and integral part of their socialization in a community" (p. 16). Consequently, it is hard to overstate the importance of this paper in my professionalization into the discipline of WSC. This scholarship opportunity provided the opportunity to write alongside experienced writers and form relationships with graduate students and faculty in the writing program. I was exposed to formal opportunities that included the conference presentation, an undergraduate poster session at DU, and a submission to the Conference on College Composition and Communication's 2017 undergraduate poster session. This paper continues to shape my participation in professional communities and was most recently used in my application to the Writing Center GTA position which I held during the 2021-22 Academic Year. The writing center consultant position at the the Shopneck Writing Center served as an initial introduction and socialization period to the field of WSC and resulted in the completion of the newly minted Writing Studies minor at the University of Denver.

My participation in the new Writing Studies minor exposed me to classes, theory, peers, and professors that further immersed me in the field of WSC. As a primary influence during this time in my career, I was enrolled in a class termed "Theories of Writing" that was taught by Kara Taczak. As an eminent scholar in the field of WSC, Taczak's work focuses on reflective

practices in composition courses and transfer. This course exposed me to entirely new forms of pedagogy: Writing about Writing pedagogy, which has been popularized by Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle (2007), and the Teaching for Transfer curriculum, which has been designed and researched by Kathleen Yancey, Kara Taczak, and Lianne Robertson (2014). The early exposure to these pedagogical approaches shaped my development as a novice educator. My initial development as an apprentice to the field of WSC was furthered as I read work from Kathleen Yancey (Yancey, 1998), Walter J. Ong (Ong, 2012), and Joan Didion (Didion, 2009). These writers extended my perception of how writing is used to create and form new knowledge, and I thus became aware of WSC as a field of innovative research that extended beyond critical pedagogy. Suddenly, the Writing Minor that I was completing was no longer a matter of convenience, but an introduction into a discipline and discourse community that inspired my educational and professional pursuits.

After my participation in this course, I worked with Taczak to transition from my position as a writing consultant at the Shopneck Writing Center to a Writing Fellow; a position which allowed me to assist Taczak with the instruction of her first-year composition course. This experience included a lot of firsts – first time teaching college students, first time grading and evaluating student writing, first time conferencing with students outside of the writing center – but, most importantly, it was a transition from the position of a writing consultant where I worked as a peer collaborator to an assistant instructor. Again, drawing on Beaufort's (2000) social apprenticeship models for writing expertise, I was moving from the initiation period to insider in the field of WSC. According to this view of writing, the immersion in the field and discourse community of WSC revealed the values and goals of the field. Of course, this transition and new dynamic came with a fair amount of self-doubt, and I struggled with imposter

syndrome each time I sat down to provide evaluative feedback and construct lesson plans. Imposter syndrome, otherwise known as the imposter phenomenon, is defined as "the psychological experience of believing that one's accomplishments came about not through genuine ability, but as a result of having been lucky" (Langford & Clance, 1993, p. 495). The imposter phenomenon is common among young professionals in most fields, but it should be noted that women in professional positions are more vulnerable to the negative effects of the imposter phenomenon that include anxiety, self-doubt, and depression (Langford & Clance, 1993). Consequently, Taczak's mentorship was invaluable during this time as she not only supported and affirmed my burgeoning teaching skills and philosophies, but she explicitly introduced me to the field of WSC through invitations to conferences, reading recommendations, and insights into her research. Perhaps most importantly, Taczak introduced me to reflective practices in writing and made writing *difficult*.

Despite my circuitous route to WSC, writing had always felt intuitive. There were few times I felt the challenge of working in the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) while completing writing assignments. I was so uncomfortable being uncomfortable with writing that I was quick to transition the writing into something that was more familiar, often to the detriment of the project and my own growth (Vygotsky, 1978). In accordance with Vygotsky's notion of the ZPD, I relied on peer review and writing mentorship to move past my discomfort and accomplish these difficult writing tasks. Furthermore, in recent scholarship, Reid (2009) claimed that writing teachers need to experience the difficulty of writing in order to be more effective writing teachers. Experiencing the difficulty of writing allows new writing teachers to connect emotionally to their students and "gain clarity about how students learn to write better" (p. 201). Certainly, the multiple reflective journals, genre remediations, and developing my own theory of

writing pushed me to rethink how I approached writing in different contexts (Yancey et al., 2014). More specifically, coupled with my introduction to writing instruction, the reflective assignments often asked me to focus on the challenges I was experiencing as a writing student and as a writing teacher. This intentional reflection on my different roles in the university encouraged me to consider how I might translate my growing disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge to my instructional practice (Reid, 2009). The reflective journal that Taczak encouraged me to start has proven to be an invaluable resource in my development as an educator and my growth in the field of WSC. Gallego (2014) noted that a "reflective journal is a potential avenue for raising awareness and enhancing the practice of experienced teachers as well as advancing the professional development of novice teachers" (p. 97). Certainly, in her empirical study of 177 GTA journals, Gallego demonstrated the positive impact of reflective journaling on the professional development of GTAs. While I was initially resistant to the concept of a reflective journal as a means to bridge the theory I was exposed to and my practice as a writer-learner-teacher, it is a practice that I continue to this day.

During this time, I was also enrolled in graduate courses at the Morgridge College of Education. During a course termed "Theories of Education," I was introduced to a PhD candidate. This student, "David," was actively researching apprentice teachers and requested a short interview. As an introduction to formal research in a study, this interview asked poignant questions that prompted me to reflect on my goals in the MA program and my anxieties about entering the high school classroom as an apprentice teacher in the coming months. After the interview, David answered my own questions about his experiences and aided me in choosing which school I would be teaching at in the coming Fall semester. David would later reach out during my first-year as a high school English Language Arts teacher and formally ask me to be a

participant in a year-long study he conducted for his dissertation (Riordan, 2020). His methods included weekly voice memos, which is a method that I employ in this study. These voice memos, while initially awkward and strange, evolved to be an extension of my professional reflective journaling. Though David explained that the voice memos were meant to decrease some of the time the participants spent on his study by removing the burden of writing our reflections, the act of speaking to an invisible audience proved to be a cathartic process that I looked forward to at the end of each week. I believe these voice memos were more accurate tool to capture authentic reactions to situations and my resulting emotional state than a written statement would have been since they were less curated and revised. My participation in David's study certainly contributed to his own research, but it also served to critically reflect on my own practice and professional development in a new way. As I adapt this method to my own study, my goal is to capture participants' thoughts and reactions, but also to provide them with a means of critical reflection that has proved to be invaluable in my own practice as an instructor and emerging scholar. This co-creation of knowledge with my participants is a critical component of my approach in this study.

First Graduate Experience

A few months after my initial interaction with David, I began my apprentice teaching position working at a Title 1 pathways school in Denver Public Schools. As a pathways school, we served students who had been unsuccessful in traditional environments and who were generally a bit older, ranging from 15-21. I was excited to begin my first venture into the secondary classroom and was doubly pleased to see that I would have not one, but two mentors. The first was an older man with two graduate degrees and a leadership position. He had been teaching for upwards of 10 years but, from my first day, his cynicism was apparent. The second

was a younger woman who was only in her second year of teaching, but who had undergone the same teacher education program and achieved stellar evaluation scores in her first year. It didn't take long for both of my mentors to dutifully warn me about the shortcomings of the teaching profession. They spoke of the long hours, low salary, and the strange bureaucratic systems that governed every classroom and instructional move. The instructors in my courses in the graduate program echoed those sentiments as they prepared us for sleepless nights of grading and gave us advice on how to navigate different types of school administrations and federal, municipal, and district policies.

At first, I felt grateful for their candor; but that gratefulness turned into exasperation and eventually frustration. I was holding tightly to these grand ideals of rhetorical agency and incorporating reflective practices and transfer into my curricula. I wanted to incorporate digital literacies and narrative through reflective e-portfolios in my curriculum (Taczak 2016, Cambridge & Yancey, 2009); I wanted to use Socratic seminars to encourage lively, but respectful, discussions about literature and current events (Adler, 1998); and I wanted to hold robust workshops where students could talk about their writing (Kostelnik, 2015). Clearly, there was plenty of naive idealism in my exasperation, but my experiences in the field of WSC contrasted significantly with my experiences in secondary education. I found myself returning to source material from WSC and looking forward to an eventual return to graduate school and the field of writing studies and composition.

So, I finished my apprentice teaching. I watched as both of my mentors struggled to teach within the prescribed curriculum that focused on preparing students for the tests that would determine the students', the teachers', and the school's competency. Both educators promised that they were going to quit and apply for other positions by November. And yet, when the year

ended, they renewed their contracts. But neither of them was happy nor fulfilled by their time spent teaching. They are intelligent and compassionate individuals and I know that they care deeply about their students, but they felt unable to teach according to their values due to district mandates, testing pressures, and administrative duties. As I engaged with my mentors and transitioned into an independent teacher, I found myself considering a return to the field of WSC where I hoped I could teach according to my pedagogical values and, hopefully, avoid the demoralization that has become commonplace in secondary education (Santoro, 2018).

Second Graduate Experience

I returned to graduate and school enrolled in the writing studies and composition program at CSU in the Fall of 2020. Fortunately, I was able to secure a GTA position teaching first-year composition. One of the benefits of the GTA program at CSU includes a week-long orientation, small mentoring cohorts, and a semester-long practicum course. This intense focus on Writing Pedagogy Education (WPE) offers incoming GTAs a substantial amount of support as immediate and future teachers of writing at the university. WPE, a term put forth by Reid and Estrem (2012b), defines an approach to GTA training that "encompasses the ongoing education, mentoring, and support of new college-level writing instructors" (p. 126). The intense focus on WPE is aligned with the Conference on College Composition and Communication's "Statement on Preparing Teachers of Writing" (2015) that principles "graduate programs [to] provide students with varied opportunities to cultivate and apply a theoretically informed writing pedagogy". The statement further outlines four required criteria for this principle that are summarized below:

- Coursework should encompass composition theory, research, pedagogy in regard to writing assessment, both formative and summative.

- Graduate coursework in teaching with technology; including learning management systems.
- Intensive and comprehensive TA training that could include pre-semester training, a one- or two-semester-long graduate composition theory course, and frequent workshops discussing aspects of composition pedagogy.
- Mentoring partnerships with experienced teachers of college writing, which should include regular formative assessments of teaching.

The criteria summarized above outline an intensive WPE for composition graduate students. WPAs and composition programs that align their WPE program with these criteria provide extensive support for their composition GTAs. This support includes a foundation in pedagogical theory that informs the field of WSC and faculty assistance and supervision of GTAs' teaching practices.

These criteria are necessary as composition GTAs are increasingly responsible for the instruction of undergraduate students, particularly at large research universities (Shannon et al., 1998; Samuels, 2017; Schwaller & Miller-Cochran, 2020). In composition programs, they are traditionally employed as instructors of record in mandatory writing courses, primarily the critical first-year composition course (Schwaller & Miller-Cochran, 2020). To account for the increasing reliance on GTAs as instructors in these courses, the required criteria from the CCCC's position statement encourages composition programs to invest in a rigorous WPE program to ensure effective writing instruction in general education writing courses. The necessity of effective instructors for FYC courses is a concern for WPAs who understand that most university students are underprepared for the rigorous writing that is required for most academic and professional careers. Since many universities require the majority of students to

enroll in a FYC course, these courses also bring most students into contact with the composition program. Thus, ensuring that these students are exposed to a rigorous and engaging class reinforces the composition program's support for a WPE program that produces effective composition GTA instructors to teach these FYC courses.

My cohort at CSU – comprised of graduate students enrolled in the writing studies and composition MA program, creative writing in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry MFA programs, literature MA program, English education MA program, and TEFL/TESL MA program – had varying degrees of teaching experience prior to their enrollment in graduate programs. Many of the incoming GTAs had taught languages abroad, taught mock trial courses in law school, worked as an undergraduate TA, and/or tutored. While formal education in pedagogy was not common in my cohort, every member had experience working with students in some form. Although formal pedagogical or instructional training is not always necessary, GTAs with more experience have reported higher levels of self-efficacy in the classroom (Prieto & Altmaier, 1994). To support new GTAs, the composition program requires all GTAs to participate in a week-long orientation prior to the fall semester, a semester-long practicum course, and participation in small mentoring cohorts as main components of its WPE program. This introduction and scaffolded approach to teaching writing reflects the understanding that "learning to teach (writing) is a protean and lengthy process, its uncertain and recursive progress often obscured by the myths of quick competencies on which learners, teachers, and institutions rely" (Estrem & Reid, 2012a, p. 450). Therefore, in its effort to support composition GTAs to be effective writing instructors, the composition program requires all incoming GTAs to participate in the WPE program. Indeed, as many scholars have noted, new teachers are not new to the

classroom, but just to the front of it (Sprague & Nyquist, 1989). The transition from student to instructor is difficult, despite the many myths that say otherwise.

A central component to the WPE program is the small group cohorts. These smaller cohorts are comprised of a faculty mentor and about four GTAs. It should be noted that this is not a unique component of the WPE program as most composition programs include a mentoring program for GTAs (Reid, 2008). These smaller groups met on a biweekly basis and provided the opportunity for collaboration outside of the primary GTA cohort. When I had trouble with a student or was uncertain when grading an assignment, I brought the issue to my small cohort mentor and discussed the issue with my peers in the group. Our small cohort was especially important when considering the need for regular feedback. Shannon and Moore (1998) noted that mentor feedback aids in GTA growth and increase in teaching efficacy. The small cohort aided in the socialization process into the university, but our large GTA cohort was still the primary source of socialization for me and many of the other GTAs. While this small mentor group was a significant support during the first semester, the regular meetings and check-ins did not continue after the Fall semester. For myself, this group was especially important due to the small size of my writing studies and composition cohort, which was two, including myself.

During this first Fall semester, an important course in my professional develop in the field of WSC proved to be “Theories of Composition.”. This course introduced key scholars in WSC, the concept of neoliberalism in the university, and introduced me to the current director of the university writing center. While I enjoyed my time in the writing center at the University of Denver, I had not anticipated any formal involvement during my time as a GTA at the larger Intermountain university. I was immensely enjoying my time as an instructor for FYC courses and the camaraderie of the composition GTAs. However, this instructor mentioned the writing

center GTA position and the unique opportunity the position offered. While I was comfortable as an instructor in front of the classroom, I had no formal experience with administrative tasks and management. Our discussions proved especially intriguing when I considered the possibility of working with new consultants since I was developing an interest in new educators. Eventually, I decided to apply and was accepted for the new position starting in Spring 2021.

The transition into this new position and professional community proved to be exciting and challenging. I felt an unexpected loss that came with no longer teaching but I was looking forward to working with new writing consultants and the writing center directors. This position also gave me a degree of separation from my GTA cohort since we were no longer regularly seeing one another in the GTA offices and informally discussing the challenges and triumphs of teaching FYC courses. It was during this Spring 2021 semester that I also began to develop the preliminary interests and plans for this GTA project. This interest led me to read relevant literature and start to wonder about the professionalization and disciplinary forces that impact a composition GTA's pedagogical approach to teaching those critical FYC courses. However, I was fortunately (and still am) unable to fully remove myself from the support and camaraderie in my composition GTA cohort and, therefore, must confront the inherent challenges that this study presents when considering my friends and peers as participants in this project. However, due to the nature of this project, there was certainly some distance between myself and the participants. The distance provided by my new role as the writing center GTA proved to be crucial when considering the disciplinary and pedagogical development of the participants.

In considering my role in the university as a GTA and a researcher who has asked my fellow GTAs to participate in a study, I find that it is of the utmost importance to honor the co-creation of knowledge this project enables. Using feminist autoethnographic tools have led me to

several important decisions in this project. The first of which is the inclusion of this chapter which examines my own history with the field of WSC and positionality in the GTA program. The second is the collaboration with my participants on their biographies and portrayal in this project. Each GTA has seen, reviewed, and, in some cases, provided input and feedback into their portrayal in this project. I have also taken measures to ensure the privacy of the participants due to the felt vulnerability of many GTAs. Each participant has a pseudonym in this project and I requested a two-year embargo to delay the release of this thesis project. Overall, I have immensely enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate with these participants. I have learned so much from this process and from their stories.

3. METHODS

As an IRB-approved study, this project explores two questions that can help those in the field of Writing Studies and Composition (WSC) understand the pedagogical philosophies and professionalization of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in a university composition program:

1. How does an English department GTA's disciplinarity and ecologies of influence affect their pedagogical goals and approaches to teaching first-year composition (FYC) as they progress in their graduate program?
2. How do systems of power within the university impact GTAs' pedagogical goals and approaches to teaching first-year composition and their perception of self-efficacy and empowerment as instructors?

This chapter describes and discusses the data collection methods, coding methods, and analytical tools and processes used to address these questions.

Researcher's Role

My role as a researcher in this study was complicated by my position in the composition program in which this study takes place. As a former composition GTA in this program, and like the participants in this study, I have taught first-year composition according to the common curriculum provided by the composition program. However, during my second year in my master's program, I was accepted for the writing center GTA role and left the composition GTA program. This lateral move separates me from my participants slightly, but I still considered the participants my peers and friends in the university.

Due to my status as a GTA, I occupied a liminal position since I was a graduate student, an assistant director in the writing center, and was apprenticed in the field of WSC. The administrative role in the writing center that I performed as the writing center GTA is one which requires discipline-specific knowledge. These different roles have provided a personal exigence for this project that is an extension of my interest in educator development. For more information on my positionality in this study, refer to Chapter 2, "A Feminist Approach."

Participants

Seven participants were recruited from four masters of arts (MA) and masters of fine arts (MFA) programs within the department of English: (1) writing studies and composition; (2) English education; (3) TEFL/TESL; and (4) creative writing. While literature is a graduate MA program that is offered at this university, it is worth noting that none of the composition GTAs enrolled in this program offered to participate in this study. The participants were recruited using convenience sampling from the author's personal contact reach at a large, Intermountain West, public university. As detailed in Chapter 2, all participants reviewed and, in some cases, provided input on their portrayal in this project. This study was conducted at the conclusion of the Fall 2021 semester and the beginning of the Spring 2022 semester. As such, this study focused on teaching activities that occurred in the Fall semester and beginning of the Spring semester.

Anne

Anne was a first-year GTA in the writing studies and composition MA program in Fall 2021 before transitioning to the English education MA program in Spring 2022. After switching her undergraduate major several times, Anne earned her BA degree in English literature from a

small state school where she served as an undergraduate teaching assistant in literature and composition courses for four semesters. In this role, she often led the class and facilitated discussion. However, she did not serve as the primary instructor for a course. Anne always knew she wanted to pursue a graduate degree, but she took some time away from higher education to "explore life." On returning to graduate school, Anne was unsure that literature would be the right fit, so she applied to the writing studies and composition program as it most closely aligned with her "values and aspirations."

June

June was a first-year GTA in the TEFL/TESL MA program in Fall 2021. She earned a BA in Linguistics and French at a small research university on the East Coast. At her undergraduate institution, June did not gain any formal experience as an instructor, but she did work one-on-one with writers at her university's writing center. June noted that "prior to being a GTA, I didn't have any real classroom experience." June began her master's program immediately after completing her undergraduate education.

Jill

Jill was a first-year GTA in the writing studies and composition MA program in Fall 2021. She earned a BA in journalism and professional writing at a large Midwestern university before starting her graduate education. At her undergraduate institution, Jill did not gain any formal experience as an instructor, but she served as a recitation facilitator for two years. In this role, she led the discussion groups attached to a larger lecture class and had the opportunity to work with first-year students. Jill mentioned that she began informally tutoring students in elementary school and had "a natural inclination [towards] teaching." She stated that teaching

first-year composition had been an enduring goal for her. Jill began her master's program immediately after completing her undergraduate education.

Rachel

Rachel was a first-year GTA in the English education MA program in Fall 2021. She earned a BA in English education at a large university in the Intermountain West. Her undergraduate degree involved a lot of practicum teaching. She explained that this experience "definitely helped [her to] be confident" that she wanted to be a teacher. Rachel had always wanted to pursue a graduate degree, but that goal felt out of reach due to various life circumstances. When the GTA opportunity arose – which would allow Rachel to earn a master's degree in English education with tuition remission and teach first-year composition – "it was a major accomplishment and milestone in [her] life." So after teaching middle school English for three years, Rachel began her master's program. In the GTA program, Rachel was excited about the opportunity to continue teaching and she hoped that her future career will continue to include teaching opportunities.

Sara

Sara was a second-year GTA in the creative writing MFA program with a focus on poetry in Fall 2021. She earned her BA in creative writing and violin performance at a small, private university in the Midwest before completing a master's of philosophy in creative writing in Ireland. Sara had a range of teaching experiences prior to her role as a GTA, though she emphasized that she had never acted as the instructor of record prior to her GTAship. She had substitute taught elementary classes, taught individual and sectional violin lessons, and

facilitated workshops for both undergraduate peers and adults. Sara identified as a "teaching artist" in her role as a GTA in the composition program.

Rebecca

Rebecca was a second-year GTA in the writing studies and composition program in Fall 2021. Rebecca earned her BA in English with a concentration in writing at a large Intermountain West university. After completing her undergraduate degree, Rebecca began a master's program in rhetoric and composition at the same university and completed one semester before leaving to pursue a law degree. During and subsequent to law school, Rebecca was a mock trial coach and instructor at her institution. After earning her JD, Rebecca worked for several years before returning to graduate school as a composition GTA at the same large Intermountain West university. She described herself as "a nontraditional returning graduate student."

Megan

Megan was a third-year GTA in the creative writing MFA program with a concentration in creative nonfiction in Fall 2021. Megan completed her BA in creative writing at a midsized research university on the East Coast. She has always enjoyed school as a student, even claiming that she was "one of those weird kids" who "loved high school." Megan had no formal experience as an instructor before her time as a GTA. She started her MFA program immediately after completing her undergraduate education.

Data Collection

Data was collected for each participant over a three-month period through two semi-structured interviews, two surveys, and four voice memos. Data collection began at the end of the Fall 2021 semester and concluded in February 2022. All the data was collected before I

began to code and analyze it. While I was present during the interviews, I did not review the surveys or voice memos prior to the transcription process, which began after the data collection portion of this study was concluded. The exception to this process was question 12 in the first survey, which will be discussed in the next section. This method allowed me to view the participants' data in its entirety rather than in a piecemeal fashion.

These questions were initially developed at the end of the 2021 Spring Semester for the research methods course required of writing studies and composition MA graduate students. The purpose of creating these questions was to operationalize the two research questions which were also developed during this course. My goal in creating these questions was to parse out specific themes in the primary research questions. I was also interested in the possibility of using certain questions that had been developed and used in other studies related to the professionalization and development of GTAs. As such, questions from Nyquist et al. (2010) and Ferris (1991) were included in the survey and interview portions of this study. As a testing measure, I completed the survey, interview, and voice memo prompts to consider what possible responses these questions may elicit.

Surveys

The surveys for this study served as an intake and outgoing measure. The first survey was sent via institutional email after the participant had returned their consent form. The goal of this first survey was to collect background information – such as program affiliation and educational background – and to introduce key themes of this study. These themes include GTA identity and education background, roles they perform in the university, and pedagogical approaches to the teaching of writing. The questions on the first survey included autobiographical questions that asked participants to provide their educational background. Subsequent questions delved into the

participant's identity in the university by asking them to consider the different roles – instructor, student, and member of the academy – that they perform as a composition GTA. This survey also asked participants to state their pedagogical goals for their FYC students and to identify pedagogical theories, scholars, or articles that have influenced their teaching practice. Finally, I included a question from Nyquist et al. (2010) that asked participants to consider their personal journey as a graduate student as they work towards their professional goals. Several of these questions, including the question from Nyquist et al., the identity questions, and the pedagogical goals questions, were asked again later in the study. This process was intended to allow the participants to reflect on these initial questions and themes in the study so they would be able to provide thoughtful responses to themes in this study over a period of time. While this study was not particularly long, the hope was to capture composition GTAs' evolving approaches to writing pedagogy.

The final question in this first survey was included in response to the unprecedented circumstances that the pandemic created for the composition GTAs. It is clear that the last few years have been abnormal and have taken a toll on our collective understanding of hope. In response to these circumstances and in a collaborative effort with scholars from the University of Denver, I developed this question to present this study in the Conference for Writing and Well-Being in January of 2022. At the conference, this question provided openings for discussion about the roles GTAs perform in the university and the different supports offered by composition programs across the nation with other scholars at this conference. This question also provided insight into how GTAs incorporate these strategies in performing their role as student, instructor, and emerging scholar in the academy.

The second survey in this study was sent to each participant via institutional email after the final interview. This final tool in the study had four questions that asked participants to respond to a measure of instructor comfort, reflection on identity in the university, and pedagogical goals for their students in FYC. The final question revealed Emily Staudt's (2021) definition of ecologies of influence and asked participants to consider how their own ecologies of influence may impact their approach to teaching writing in their FYC courses. This was the second time they were exposed to Staudt's definition. The first time they heard the term *ecologies of influence* was during the final interview since I wanted to capture their initial reaction to this term and definition. The goal of this final survey was to provide participants with the final opportunity to consider the major themes in this study and to respond directly to Staudt's concept of ecologies of influence.

<u>Survey #1</u>

1. Is this your first, second, or third year in your master's program?
    a. First
    b. Second
    c. Third
2. What discipline are you studying?
3. What is your comfort level as an instructor in the first-year composition classroom?
    a. 1-10 (1 being most uncomfortable, 10 being extremely comfortable)
4. Can you provide a quick instructor autobiography? What is your educational background?
5. Do you see yourself as an educator? As a student? As a member of the academy?
6. What do you want your students to leave your class knowing, thinking, and/or valuing?

7. What pedagogical theories inform your practice as an instructor of FYC? What personal and professional experiences inform your practice?
8. How would you describe yourself as a writer?
    a. As a writing instructor?
    b. As a student?
    c. As a member of the academy/scholar/researcher?
9. Please take a moment to review the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition. Using these guidelines, what changes might you make to the CO150 curriculum? What outcomes would you prioritize? What pedagogical or disciplinary theories inform these changes?
10. Is there a learning outcome or particular assignment that you would wish to change in the prescribed curriculum? What pedagogical theories or disciplinary practices inform these changes?
11. Take a few minutes to think about your personal journey as a graduate student, on your way toward your professional goals as a teaching scholar. How would you describe the process you've been going through? (Nyquist et al.)
12. According to Charles Snyder's (1994) theory of hope, maintaining a goal-oriented outlook, developing tools and strategies to achieve goals, and finding the motivation to achieve goals can have important cognitive and affective impacts on our individual perceptions of hope. How do you incorporate hope into your instructional practice? Your scholarly practices as a graduate student? Your personal goals?

<u>Survey #2</u>

1. What is your comfort level as an instructor in the first-year composition classroom?

    a. 1-10 (1 being most uncomfortable, 10 being extremely comfortable)
2. Do you see yourself as an educator? As a student? As a member of the academy?
3. What do you want your students to leave your class knowing, thinking, and/or valuing?
4. Is there a learning outcome or particular assignment that you would wish to change in the prescribed curriculum? What pedagogical theories or disciplinary practices inform these changes?
5. In the most recent IWAC conference, Emily Staudt introduced her definition of ecologies of influence as the "personal, professional, and situational factors which, over time, influence their identity as instructors and their pedagogy in ways they might not be aware of." Please take a moment and consider your own ecology of influence. What are some personal, professional, and situational factors that influence your identity as an instructor, a scholar, and a student and your pedagogy in the first-year composition course?

Interviews

The interviews were held either in person at a location of the participant's choosing or via Zoom, depending on the participant's preference due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The two interviews in this study were conducted in the Spring Semester of 2022. The first interview took place in the first week of the semester for all but one participant. Due to Anne's decision to move from the writing studies and composition program to the English education program, I was able to recruit Jill, another first-year GTA in the writing studies and composition program. Jill's first interview took place in the second week of the semester. However, Anne is still represented in this study as a graduate student in the English education MA program.

The first interview was meant to expose participants to the major themes of this study in a more direct manner. First, it asked participants to provide an "instructor autobiography" that

included their educational and teaching background. Following questions asked participants to describe the different roles they perform in the university as composition GTAs. They were also asked to define their own discipline of study as well as the discipline of writing studies and composition that they all participate in as writing instructors. The question "Do you have your own theory of writing?" was first introduced in this interview. This question was developed during my own experience in a class I took as a writing practices minor at the University of Denver. The course, titled "Theories of Writing" provided an introduction to the field of writing studies and composition (see chapter two). It also stressed the importance of the diverse theories of writing that exist in the world and I had the opportunity to develop my first theory of writing. This process has proved to be an invaluable tool as I developed as a scholar and educator. Over the years, my own theory of writing has changed to reflect my growth in the field of writing studies and composition. By exposing the participants of this study to this concept, I hoped to capture their disciplinary approach to writing. This question was revisited in a voice memo later in the study.

This first interview also asked participants to consider their support systems in the university and mentorship relationships. Questions from Ferris (1991) that asked GTAs to locate authority in the university were included. Finally, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences last semester. This question was intentionally a bit vague as it was worded "What went well last semester? What did not go well?" The intention was to see how GTAs initially responded: as a student, as an instructor, or as a member of the academy. Their answers were coded accordingly. This first interview ranged from 20 minutes to one-hour, depending on the participant. The primary purpose of this first interview was to begin mapping the participants' ecologies and influence and record their perceptions of power in the university.

The second interview was brief as it was meant to provide participants with an opportunity to respond to the major themes in this study. Participants were asked to describe the values of higher education and of graduate education. They were also asked to consider the role of the GTA in the academy. A question from Nyquist et al. (2010) was included. This question prompted the participants to define the values of priorities of a teaching scholar in the academy. The final question in this interview was the introduction of Emily Staudt's (2021) definition of ecologies of influence. This was the first time the participants were exposed to this concept since I wanted to capture their initial response. After this second interview, participants were provided in the final survey with another opportunity to respond to this concept in writing. The primary purpose of this second interview was to approach specific themes in the study directly. This second survey typically lasted between 10 to 30 minutes.

<u>Semi-Structured Interview #1:</u>

1. Opening Question: Can you provide a quick instructor autobiography? What is your educational and teaching background?
    a. Probe: Do you see yourself as an educator? As a student? As a member of the academy?
2. What do you want your students to leave your class knowing, thinking, and/or valuing?
    a. Probe: How do you want them to think about writing?
3. How would you describe your classroom environment? What are some pedagogical approaches that you employ as an instructor?
4. How would you describe your discipline? (Ferris)
    a. Probe: Where does that definition come from?
5. How would you describe the discipline of Writing Studies and Composition?

    a. Probe: Where does that definition come from?
    b. Probe: Have you taken any courses or professional development that have influenced your understanding of the discipline?
6. How do you relate to authority in the university as a GTA? (Ferris)
    a. Probe: Where do you locate that authority?
7. How do you relate to your students? (Ferris)
8. What pedagogical theories inform your practice as an instructor of FYC and where do those come from?
9. How would you describe yourself as a writer? As a writing instructor? As a student? As a member of the academy/scholar/researcher?
10. What practices do you value as a writer? Do you have your own 'Theory of Writing'?
    a. Probe: Does this influence your practice as a writing instructor?
11. Where do you go for support as an instructor? As a student?
    a. Probe: Do you identify with a specific mentor in your program? In the composition program?
    b. Probe: How available are those supports?
12. Do you feel that there are any constraints on your teaching practice?
13. What went well this semester? What did not go well??
14. What have been your most enjoyable moments as an instructor? As a student? As a member of the academy?
    a. Probe: What made those moments enjoyable?

<u>Semi-Structured Interview #2</u>

1. How would you describe the values of higher education?

2. How would you describe graduate education?
3. What is the role of the GTA in the academy?
4. How would you describe life in the academy as a teaching scholar? What are the values and priorities for such a role? (Nyquist et al.)
5. What will you change about the curriculum or your teaching practices this semester based on your experiences last semester?
6. In the most recent IWAC conference, Emily Staudt introduced her definition of ecologies of influence as the "personal, professional, and situational factors which, over time, influence their identity as instructors and their pedagogy in ways they might not be aware of." Please take a moment and consider your own ecology of influence. What are some personal, professional, and situational factors that influence your identity as an instructor, a scholar, and a student and your pedagogy in the first-year composition course?

Voice Memos

The voice memos for this study were produced every Friday for four weeks. Participants recorded their responses to the provided prompt using a phone application. I provided several options based on personal experience but left the final decision of how to record their memos to the participants. The voice memos were sent by the participants to my institutional email where I then downloaded them onto an external hard drive. The voice memos did not introduce any new questions. Each voice memo was created in response to a question that the participants had seen in either the first survey or in the first interview. A different question was provided for each voice memo (see below). These voice memos were meant to provide a space for participants to verbally respond to questions without my presence. The motivation for this method of data collection stems from my own participation in a longitudinal study where I recorded weekly

voice memos for slightly over a year (Riordan, 2020). This process proved to be reflective, cathartic, and I became extremely candid in my responses due to the reflective nature of the process. I hoped this process, though conducted over a much shorter timespan than my own participation, would prove to be equally cathartic for participants. I also hoped that without my presence they would feel more comfortable verbally responding in an authentic and candid manner.

Voice Memo Questions

1. Take a few minutes to think about your personal journey as a graduate student, on your way toward your professional goals as a teaching scholar. How would you describe the process you've been going through?
2. As you end the second week of the semester, consider what has been going well for you as an instructor and as a student. What do you intend to prioritize this semester? What are you most concerned about? What are you most excited about?
3. Do you have a personal 'Theory of Writing'? How would you describe the practice of writing? What informs your definition? How does this influence your own writing practices?
4. Please take a moment to review the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition. Using these guidelines, what changes might you make to the CO150 curriculum? What outcomes would you prioritize? What pedagogical or disciplinary theories inform these changes?

Transcribing

The interviews and voice memos were transcribed using a program called "Descript." This program allowed me to speed up the pace of the audio and it removed filler words such as

"uh" and "um" to allow for an easier transcription process. I also went through these transcriptions and either removed or coded identifying information such as names and background information. These transcriptions were then moved to Google Drive for the coding process. The audio files and any identifying information were subsequently moved to the external hard drive as a privacy measure. Finally, the transcripts were added to a single document that included the open ended responses to the survey questions. This resulted in a single document that included the entire body of written information from the interviews, surveys, and voice memos. This document was then used for the coding process.

Coding Process

The coding process began immediately following the conclusion of the data collection and subsequent transcription portion of this study. I waited until information from each participant had been collected in its entirety before beginning this process. This approach to coding allowed for me to go over each participant's body of information as a whole rather than in parts. After an initial reading of the collected information, I sorted participants' information by highlighting the relevant portions of their answers. Information was sorted according to the themes attributed to the three categories identified in Table 1. The frequency of these themes in participant data helped me to understand how GTAs prioritize their roles and concerns in the university setting. This frequency analysis was conducted on a third reading after the initial coding of the information. During this third reading, the pieces of information were analyzed for connections to other categories. These connections are used to help map the factors that influenced each GTA's approach to teaching FYC courses.

To operationalize the two primary research questions, I identified categories and sets of related themes. The first category refers to the first research question, the second category refers

to the second research question, and the third category documents the participants' approach to the FYC courses they teach and writing pedagogy in general. The data yielded was separated into four contrasting streams to account for GTA disciplinarity: (1) TEFL/TESL, (2) writing studies and composition, (3) creative writing, and (4) English education. However, due to the limited number of participants, these streams were reduced to three: writing studies and composition, English education, and creative writing. This reduction allowed for the information collected from two creative writing GTAs, two English education GTAs, and two writing studies and composition GTAs to be used for comparison. These three streams separated the data into the disciplines represented in the results and subsequent discussion. Once separated into the streams, the data was used to analyze the different disciplinary approaches to writing pedagogy.

It should be noted that Anne's decision to move from writing studies and composition to the English education MA program prompted the recruitment of another first-year GTA in the writing studies and composition program, Jill. Since Anne completed all the interviews and voice memos as an English education graduate student, her information is included in that stream.

For coding, the questions from the surveys, voice memos, and interviews were sorted into these categories. While the questions were designed to elicit responses that focused on specific areas, the responses often went beyond those areas. As a result, some participant responses to the questions include themes from multiple categories. Therefore, in the coding process, some participant answers contained information sorted into multiple categories. The themes and categories used for coding are listed below in Table 1:

Table 1

Categories for coding the frequency with which participants reference key themes across surveys, interviews, and voice memos.

Category	Themes
GTA professional and disciplinary identity	● Mentorship ● Support systems ● Goals of graduate education ● Identity & previous educational experiences ● Roles in the university ● Disciplinarity ● Theory of writing
GTA perception of power and authority in the university and the recognition of neoliberal values and systems	● Writing studies and composition as a discipline ● Efficacy as instructors ● Autonomy and empowerment as instructors ● Power and authority in the university ● Goals and values in the university
GTAs' approach to FYC and writing pedagogy	● Pedagogical strategies ● Pedagogical goals ● Pedagogical theories

Categories and Themes for Coding

After the initial coding process, the data was reviewed and the frequency of each theme's occurrence in the participant's responses was tabulated. This process provided data for a frequency measure that was used for constant comparative analysis. The frequency data were sorted into contrasting streams to allow for further comparative analysis.

The data was reviewed a final time and coded for connections between coding categories. For example, a participant discussing an influential teacher in their undergraduate experience may use similar pedagogical strategies in their own classroom. While this was initially coded as their educational background, there is a clear connection to their current pedagogical strategies. The connections between these categories help map the participants' ecologies of influence. As a method for operationalizing the second research question in this study, I used activity theory (Engström, 1987; Leontiev, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978) as a foundation for a grounded theory approach. This method allowed me to understand how the GTAs' work during their tenure as a GTA in the composition program is impacted by systems within the university. For this analysis, activity systems for the university, the English department, the composition program, and the disciplines of writings studies and composition, English education, TEFL/TESL, and creative writing were used in the model depicted in Figure 4. These activity systems were subsequently examined through Engström's (2001) matrix of expansive learning. This matrix helps make visible contradictions among these complex and interconnected systems to be made visible. Furthermore, this matrix can help reveal openings for learning and collaboration among the individuals and organizations in the systems that are being studied.

Activity Theory Methodology

The participants' ecologies of influence and the neoliberal systems in the university they interact with are well suited to the use of activity theory. Activity theory, also known as cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), provides a theoretical framework that can help us understand the contradictions and subsequent opportunities for growth. Activity theory was first conceptualized by Lev Vygotsky (1978) in the 1920s and 1930s and expanded upon by his peers, Alexei Leontiev (1978) and Sergei Rubinstein. In the first generation, as termed by Yrjö Engeström (2001), Vygotsky created the concept of *mediation*, which is graphically visualized in the famous triangular model (see Figure 1).

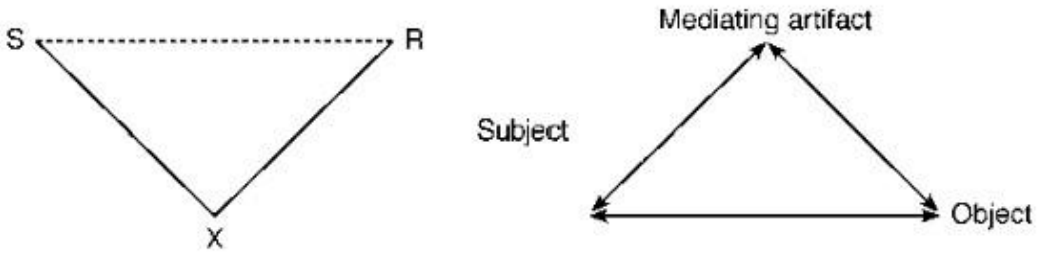

Figure 1
Vygotsky's model of mediated act and its common reformulation (Engeström, 2001, p. 134).

In this model, we see the conditioned connection between stimulus (S) and response (R) which is extended from a mediated act (X). This concept of cultural mediation is often reformulated as the triad of subject, object, and mediating artifact. Leontiev expanded upon Vygotsky's work in the second generation by recognizing the limitation of Vygotsky's individually focused unit of analysis. Leontiev saw a difference between individual action and a collective activity. His theory was never graphically visualized into a model of a collective activity system until Yrjö Engeström created the structure of a human activity system (see Figure 2).

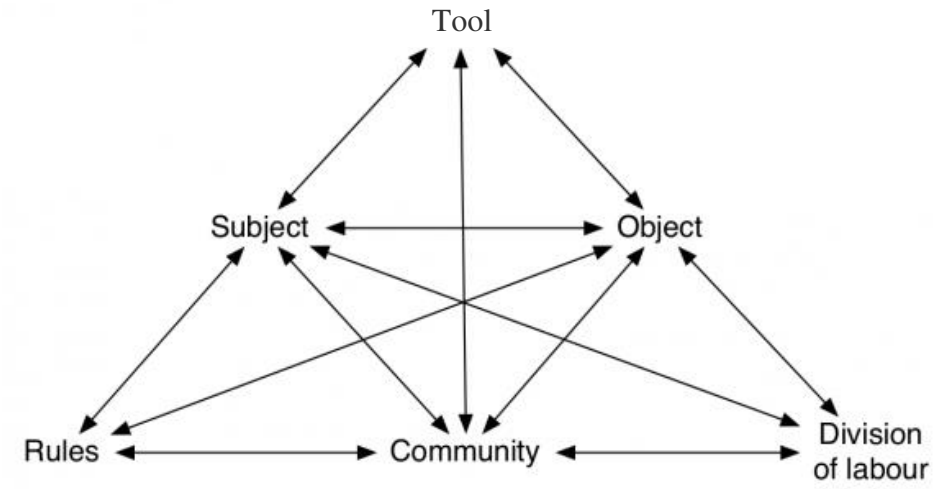

Figure 2
The structure of a human activity system (Engeström, 1987, p. 78)

This model expands Leontiev's work to account for cultural and historical factors that shape an activity system.

The third generation of activity theory includes Engeström's expansion of Leontiev's work and the subsequent efforts to apply the theory to complex, socially mediated actions and decision making (Engeström, 1987; 2001). This iteration stemmed from a need to develop conceptual tools to understand multiple perspectives and networks of interacting activity systems. Due to its ability to analyze collective action, activity theory has been used by scholars in writing studies and composition (Bazerman & Russell, 2003; Bradbury et al., 2023; Evans, 2003; Ketter & Hunter, 2003; Palmquist, 2022), education (Abdullah, 2014; Burke, 2020; Cartaut & Bertone, 2009), and other diverse fields such as instructional technology, software development, and human computer interaction.

For the purposes of this project, I have found Engeström's use of multiple activity systems and subsequent matrix of expansive learning (see Figure 3 and Table 2 respectively) to be a generative framework to understand how GTAs and their personal activity systems –

ecologies of influence – interact with systems in the neoliberal university. After finding connections between categories during the coding process, the connections and frequency of themes was used to map the GTAs ecology of influence. This ecology of influence was then used to understand how GTAs interact and move between the different activity systems in the university. In applying activity theory, overlapping systems that include the neoliberal university systems and departmental structures are visualized as overlapping activity systems that impact a GTA's teaching practice and professional development in the university (Figure 4).

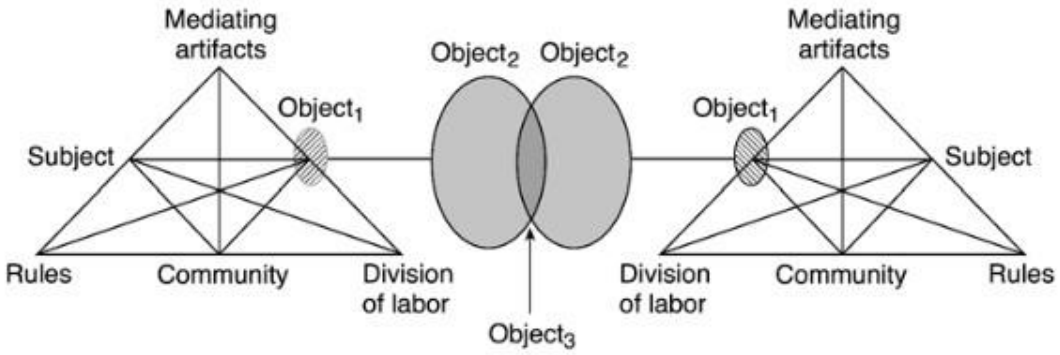

Figure 3
Two interacting activity systems as a minimal model for the third generation of activity theory (Engeström, 2001, p. 136).

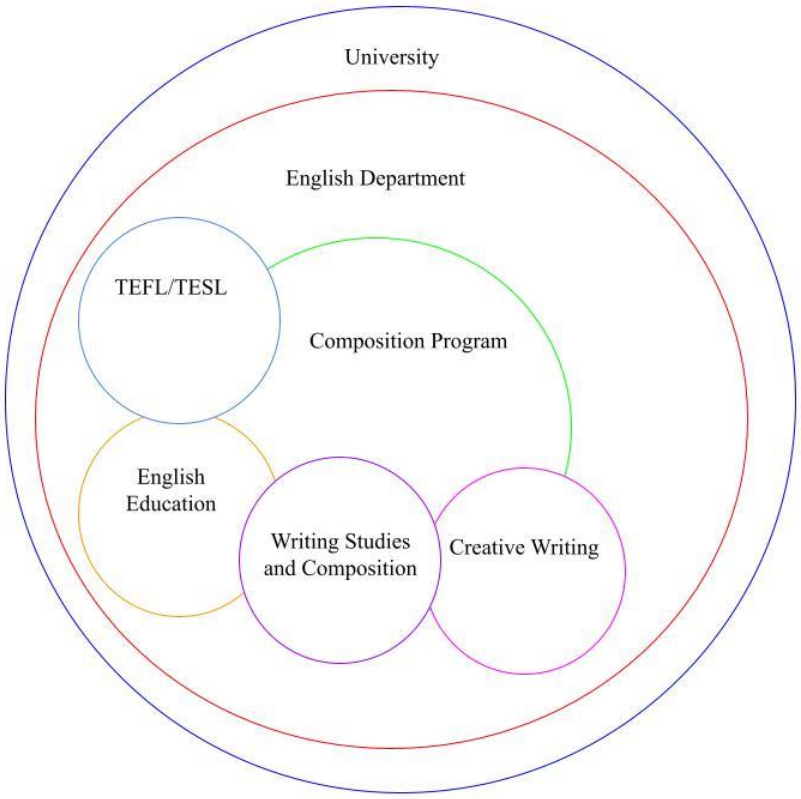

Figure 4
Overlapping activity systems that impact GTAs' development as disciplinary scholars and composition instructors.

Table 2
Engeström's (2001) matrix of expansive learning

	Activity system as a unit of analysis	Multi-voicedness	Historicity	Contradictions	Expansive Cycles
Who are learning?					
Why do they learn?					
What do they learn?					
How do they learn?					

Potential Threats to Validity and Reliability

This is a small study that was conducted at an Intermountain West research university. Since this is not a replication, there are no other studies with which to compare the results. While the small number of participants in this study work against generalization, some scholars might find that it transfers to their specific contexts. The goal of this study, as a result, is to provide a foundation on which to build further research and understanding about the role of disciplinarity

in the development of GTAs' disciplinary identity and professionalization into the academy throughout their tenure in a master's program in English Studies. This study may be transferable since the methods used to obtain data – interviews, survey responses, and voice memos – can be mapped by readers to their experiences in other contexts. Since all data will be collected and coded by a single investigator, who will follow procedures strictly, stability should be reasonably high.

There are certainly threats to validity in this study. Since this is a single study comprised of case studies pertaining to students at a single university, there is little diversity in the practicum experience of participants. Furthermore, it should be noted that GTAs often arrive at this program with varying degrees of teaching experience. As a result, I considered GTA background experience as a key intervening factor during the analysis.

Limitations

A significant limitation to this study is its small sample size. While the small sample size is conducive to the qualitative research methods and development of case study narratives, this certainly impacts the results of the study since there is not a broad range of case studies to draw on. The small sample size also limits the diversity among the participants in the study. All participants are female-identifying and native English speakers. A significant focus of this project explored how composition GTAs' identity impacts how they interact with systems in the university. The small sample size and lack of gender diversity certainly limit the scope of the findings in this study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: THEMES FREQUENCY AND CASE STUDIES

In this chapter, I present the findings of this study. This chapter is organized around the two research questions discussed in chapters one, two, and three. During the process of organizing the information from participants, it made sense to review the results by examining the two research questions that drive this project sequentially. The first research question – How does an English department GTA's disciplinarity and ecology of influence affect their pedagogical goals and approaches to teaching first-year composition as they progress in their graduate program? – is primarily manifested in the first coding category, which is discussed in greater detail below. The second research question – How do systems of power within the university impact GTAs' pedagogical goals and approaches to teaching first-year composition and their perception of self-efficacy and empowerment as instructors? – is primarily manifested in the second coding category, which is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. The data was first organized by participants, which directly informed how each participant's narrative case study was constructed. The frequency with which each participant referred to specific themes was considered and prioritized during the writing process for the case study narratives (Table 3, Table 4, Figure 5, Figure 6, and Figure 7). The numerical value of each theme refers to the frequency in which each participant referred to key concepts within that theme across all the surveys, interviews, and voice memos collected in this study.

The data was then placed into three contrasting streams in order to compare the effects of disciplinarity on GTAs' approach to teaching FYC courses. These three contrasting streams correspond to the GTAs' disciplinarity: writing studies and composition, creative writing, and English education. Finally, the data collected from the third coding category focuses on GTAs' approach to teaching FYC courses. This third category references the frequency with which the

participants reference their pedagogical goals, strategies, and theories. This category is used throughout the analysis to explore find connections between GTA's ecologies of influence and their pedagogical approaches to the teaching of writing.

Category One: Impact of Disciplinarity and Ecology of Influence on Pedagogical Goals and Approaches to Teaching

Frequency of Reference to Themes

The first coding category, which refers to the first research question in this study, emphasizes the importance of GTAs' support systems, mentorship in graduate school, disciplinarity, and identity/previous educational experiences (Table 3, Figure 5, and Figure 6). The purpose of this category is to narratively map GTAs' ecologies of influence in order to discern what experiences and external factors impact their pedagogical approach to teaching FYC courses. This first category operationalizes key concepts for the first research question by identifying the frequency in which each participant refers to certain themes across all of their interviews, surveys, and voice memos (Table 3). The different themes in this category refer to experiences, situations, and influences that impact GTAs' emerging disciplinarity and practice as composition instructors. This information is then visualized in the bar graphs in Figures 5 and 6.

From this data, is it clear that participants' identity and educational background are significant factors that impact their pedagogical approaches to teaching writing. Participants regularly refer to past educational experiences, including classes they took as high school and undergraduate students, as meaningful. These GTAs are also influenced by their discipline in the English department as it relates to the practice of writing. Each GTA, when asked to provide a theory of writing, relied on concepts often associated with their own discipline. From the table below, it is noteworthy that Megan and Sara, the two creative writing MFA students, refer to

their discipline more frequently than the other participants. The connections between this third category and the first two categories are critical to consider how composition GTAs' disciplinarity and perception of university systems impact their pedagogical approach to teaching writing.

Table 3

Category 1: Participant references to themes.

Theme	Anne	Jill	June	Megan	Rebecca	Sara	Rachel
1.1 Mentorship	3	3	1	4	5	4	4
1.2 Support systems	2	4	2	3	2	4	2
1.3 Goals of graduate education	3	1	1	4	1	1	1
1.4 Identity & previous educational experiences	24	19	18	17	14	15	12
1.5 Roles in the university	7	4	5	3	5	3	3
1.6 Disciplinarity	5	5	2	7	2	7	3
1.7 Theory of Writing	3	3	2	2	4	3	2

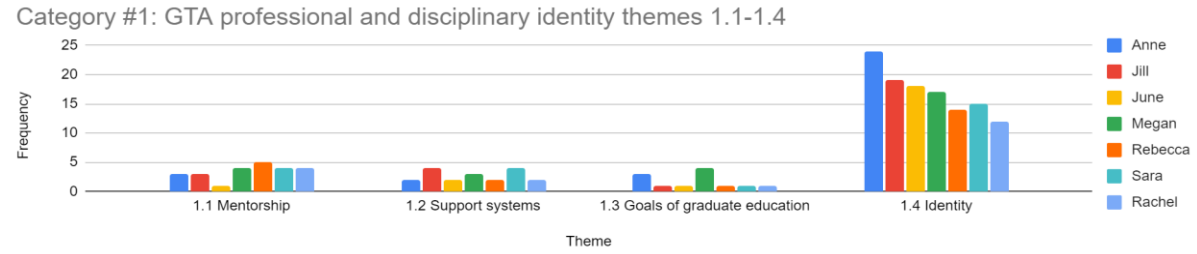

Figure 5

Category 1: Participant references to GTA professional and disciplinary identity (themes 1.1-1.4).

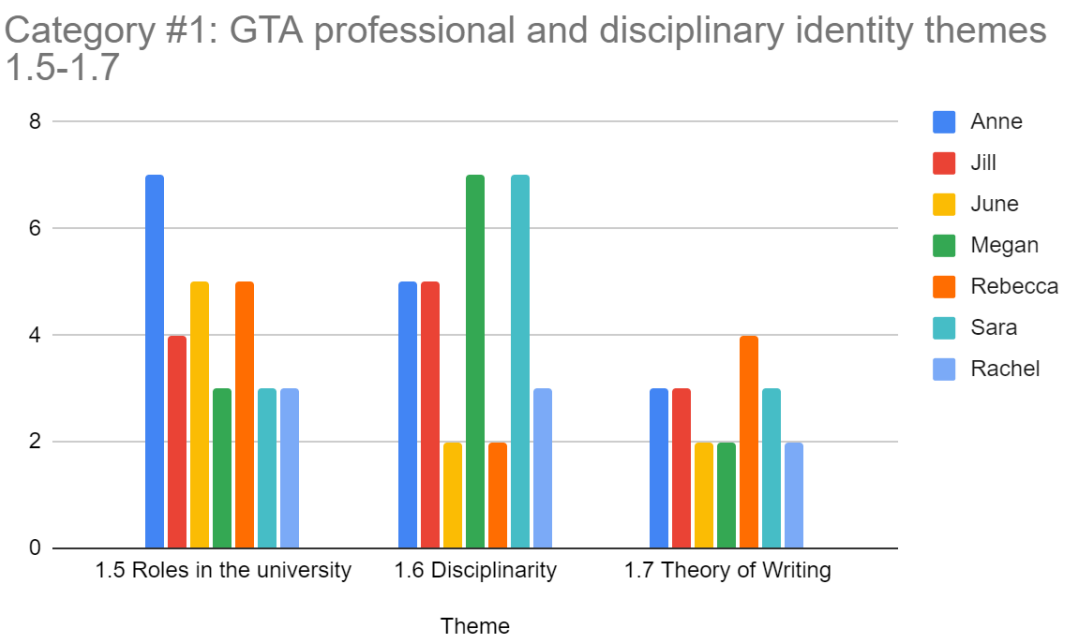

Figure 6
Category 1: Participant references to GTA professional and disciplinary identity (themes 1.5-1.7).

Case Studies: The Influence of Disciplinarity on GTA Identity: Anne, Sara, and Jill

The case studies presented in this section illustrate the influence of GTAs' disciplinary studies on their performance as composition instructors. These case studies were constructed using the data above to prioritize the factors that impact these participants' teaching practices in the composition classroom. It is clear from Table 3 and Figure 5 that the participants' identity and educational background significantly impact their performance as students in their disciplinary MA and MFA programs and their approach to teaching; particularly as it pertains to the construction of the classroom environment they seek to create as instructors and how they relate to their students. For example, Anne identified as a student who holds herself to high expectations. This inspired her to hold her own students to high expectations and promote a

culture of achievement and rigor in her classroom. Similarly, Sara identified as a musician. This identity influenced the emphasis she placed on listening as a mode of learning in her classroom. Jill's identity as a person with disabilities affected the emphasis she placed on accessibility for students with different abilities and needs in her classroom.

These case studies also exemplify the manner in which the participants' increasing disciplinarity as they progress in their graduate programs influences their pedagogical approaches to teaching writing. For example, as a first-year writing studies and composition MA student, Jill did not provide extensive grammar instruction. In contrast to Jill's approach, Anne, as a first-year English education MA student, decided to incorporate a focus on rhetorical grammar into her teaching practice. Sara, as a second-year graduate student in the creative writing MFA program, was motivated by her experience with the intimate writing workshops in her program to provide extensive peer review processes for her students. These phenomena are explained in more detail in the case studies below.

Anne

Anne was a first-year GTA in the writing studies and composition program in Fall 2021 before transitioning to English education in Spring 2022. Anne earned her BA degree in English literature from a small state school where she served as an undergraduate teaching assistant in literature and composition courses for four semesters. In this role, she often led the class and facilitated discussion. However, she never served as the primary instructor for a course. Anne always knew she wanted to pursue a graduate degree, but she took some time away from higher education to "explore life."

On returning to graduate school, Anne was unsure that literature would be the right fit, so she applied to the writing studies and composition program as it most closely aligned with her

"values and aspirations." Anne saw herself as a student and an educator at the university. However, she explained: "To say I am a student first is not to suggest that I think my literal position at CSU as a student is more important than my position as an educator, but rather acknowledges my belief that the best educators are also learners and see themselves that way." This perspective that the best educators are learners is reflected in her approach to teaching her sections of first-year composition. In discussing the pedagogical theories that inform her practice, Anne referred to Peter Elbow and his book *Writing Without Teachers* as a primary influence. Anne valued pedagogical theories that empower students to continue learning independent of formal educational experiences. She was also very open with her students that she identified as a learner and was continually in the process of learning alongside them. As such, she was "most compelled by theories that center process and value other ways of knowing." Anne was introduced to Elbow during the GTA practicum course that is required for all composition GTAs.

As a primary pedagogical strategy, Anne also emphasized the importance of holding her students to high expectations. Anne's experience as a high-achieving student who was put onto the writing track at an early age influenced the way she approached her students who may not identify as writers themselves. As a student, she wanted her instructors to see her as an exceptional student. As such, she was always prepared to talk about the readings for class. Early in her second semester as a GTA, Anne was experiencing difficulties with classroom management. Most of her students were neglecting to complete the readings prior to class, making class discussion and activities difficult. Anne expressed her frustration and the subsequent challenge of classroom management. However, she did note that she was proud of her ability to "pivot and make sure that [she] didn't waste a bunch of course time and was [still

able] to get the material in." This incident illustrated one of Anne's priorities as a FYC instructor, which was to "usher all 38 of [her] students to a successful completion" of the course. Anne noted that this goal aligns with the university's values that include ensuring the academic success and completion of general education courses for students.

As a graduate student, Anne stated that she does not have a mentor in her graduate program. She did highlight a professor from her undergraduate institution who has moved into a more friendly role. This professor had a background in writing studies and encouraged Anne to pursue a graduate degree. While Anne did not identify a mentor in her graduate program, she did emphasize the importance of her GTA cohort as a support system, particularly her office partner. Alongside her office partner – Rachel, who is another participant in this study as an English education GTA – Anne was piloting a rhetorical grammar unit in her first-year composition course. As a primary pedagogical goal for her students, Anne wanted her students to see writing as a tool that could help them accomplish goals outside of the classroom. Writing as a necessary tool for social mobility and communication is drawn from Anne's own experiences as a working student. During her undergraduate degree, Anne noted that she worked full time and, consequently, understood that many of her students need to find jobs: "They can't just be students, they have to work." Anne worked to help her students see writing as a means to accomplish necessary goals, such as securing a job. By emphasizing rhetorical grammar, Anne hoped to give her students the tools they needed to respond to the variety of situations and contexts they will see outside of the classroom. Anne did align the emphasis on rhetorical grammar with the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (2014) that she was introduced to during the GTA practicum course and that were referenced explicitly in a voice memo and survey.

Anne's willingness to put in extra work to meet the needs of her students is often complicated by her role as a GTA. It is significant that every participant in this study recognized that the labor of acting as an instructor often outweighed the labor they were able to put into their own graduate studies. Anne emphasized this unbalanced workload has a negative impact on her work as a graduate student: "There were several days where I couldn't work on anything outside of [teaching]... That has me a little frustrated." The GTA workload, though it is often portrayed as a part-time 20 hour per week commitment, is rarely only 20 hours: "I could never do my GTA job in just 20 hours a week." Furthermore, due to the low stipend extended to composition GTAs, Anne had to pick up another job tutoring students in the athletics department. While Anne appreciated that this opportunity deepens her teaching experience, she recognized the time commitment leaves her overextended. Due to her love of teaching and commitment to her students, Anne's own graduate work was often compromised.

Though Anne saw herself as a part of the university as a student and educator, she did not see herself as a member of the academy. She explained that it's "not an identity I am comfortable claiming." This discomfort with the academy is tied to her felt vulnerability as a GTA. When discussing her role in the university, Anne stated that she "is very aware that [she] is expendable in some ways." Though she generally rated herself as comfortable as an instructor in the classroom – a seven or eight on a scale of one to ten – Anne was consistently careful and strove to be "somebody who is fully engaged to make sure that this opportunity that I have isn't taken away from me." Due to this felt vulnerability, Anne was very aware of power structures in the university and located authority in university systems and, subsequently, in the composition department. While acknowledging that the university values the success of its students, she also recognized that these systems are "turning students into consumers and less into learners who

can just be there to expand themselves." This perspective was informed by readings for her writing studies concentration before her switch to English education and by her identity as an "English person" who has felt the pressure of the "what are you going to do with an English degree" questions.

Anne described her experience in graduate school as "tumultuous." While she stressed that she "love[s] teaching even more than I thought I would," she did not feel that writing studies and composition was the right discipline for her. While the values of the writing studies program at the university aligned with her social justice goals for institutional change in our education systems, she decided to move to the English education program after the first survey in this study. This shift in programmatic focus affirmed Anne's interest in the "psychology of learning" that is a primary are of study in English education. As she found a way to balance her duties as a composition instructor and her own graduate coursework, Anne is reaffirmed by the positive feedback she received from her students in her course evaluations. She noted that "they do feel like I supported them" and further explained that "I also got good feedback about my feedback." It is clear that Anne valued her students' feedback, but she also needed feedback from mentors in the composition program. As a student, Anne expressed true excitement about her current courses: "They're different than anything I've had the opportunity to take in the past. And so that's really exciting." Despite acknowledging her role as an educator and a student in the university, Anne did not see herself as a member of the academy. She explained that she didn't feel comfortable claiming that position since she "doesn't have access to the same opportunities as… full teaching scholars." This differentiation between her role as a GTA and the role of a teaching scholar means Anne also realized that the constraints on her teaching practice as a GTA inhibit her from meeting her students where they were and she didn't "have the freedom to

[decide] ‘I need to rework this. I need to backtrack.’ We need to talk more about what an… audience is because clearly [my students] don’t have that foundation.” Anne’s self-proclaimed humanist approach means she adopted a student-center classroom. As such, when the curriculum seemed unable to meeting her students where they were, she was frustrated.

Anne’s desire to support her students goes beyond ensuring that they simply pass her course. She stated that she wanted her students “to feel like there is utility in this course. No matter how they feel about writing, I want them to leave with the understanding that writing is a process, it’s a learning tool, it’s a technology that can be used to great effect across situations in their lives.” As a new educator, Anne was still in the process of finding ways to accomplish her pedagogical goals. It is clear that Anne values and needs the support of her mentors and GTA cohort as she navigates the many roles and duties of a GTA.

Sara

Sara was a second-year GTA in the creative writing program with a focus on poetry in Fall 2021. Sara earned her BA in creative writing and violin performance at a small, private university in the Midwest before completing a master’s of philosophy in creative writing in Ireland. Sara brought a range of teaching experiences to her work as a GTA, though she emphasized that she had never acted as the instructor of record prior to her GTAship. She had substitute taught elementary classes, taught individual and sectional violin lessons, and facilitated workshops for both undergraduate peers and adults. Sara identified as a “teaching artist” in her role as a GTA in the composition program.

Sara’s first teaching experiences were in music; a medium that continued to shape her identity and practice as a GTA in the university. She described music as “the fundamental craft and discipline for me” and explained that “being around a specific kind of pedagogy that was

very focused on listening as a mode of learning and as a way of moving towards expression… translates into the composition classroom." Sara's approach to writing was interdisciplinary in that it relies on music and movement as a way of understanding how we navigate the world. In tying writing to movement, Sara encouraged her students to take time away from the desk and acknowledge that writing is a process. While Sara did not explicitly name Peter Elbow or Donald Murray as pedagogical inspirations, her approach to writing as a process aligned with their expressivist notion of writing as student-centered and of valuing process work. It should be noted that readings from Murray and Elbow are included in the GTA practicum curriculum.

As a creative writer in the poetry program, Sara valued both her poetry cohort as well as her GTA cohort as support systems. She described the process of working towards an MFA in poetry as "an education in empathy" that is amplified by the intimate nature of the poetry workshops. These workshops facilitated the close-knit community of writers in her MFA program. There is also an element of play that Sara encountered in the poetry workshops that she wanted to bring into the FYC classroom. These practices, along with her foundation in music, inspired Sara to establish the importance of community and collaboration among her students: "I feel that this collaborative approach provides an authentic framework for greater inclusivity in the classroom." The poetry workshops also motivated Sara to consider the importance of the peer review process. She mused that she was still "trying to figure out how to most effectively have [her students] peer review." It is clear that Sara's own positive experiences with peer review inspired her to implement similar practices in her composition class.

Sara also highlighted the importance of her mentor as a support for both her disciplinary work and instructional practices. In the Spring 2022 semester, Sara was co-teaching a disciplinary course with her advisor. This experience, while not a direct translation to the

composition classroom, provided Sara with the instructional support of her advisor while deepening her disciplinary practices as a poet. The opportunity to work so closely with this advisor made the advisor "more of [her] go-to than the composition faculty" for questions or concerns that arose in her instructional practice. Sara's interdisciplinary approach to writing also took her outside of the English department and into the dance department in the university. For the Spring 2022 semester, Sara enrolled as a student in a dance course. This move brought her into contact with an instructor from another department with whom she was able to discuss pedagogical approaches towards creating community, such as the instructor's decision to spotlight the university's principles of community on the first day. Sara was also able to converse with this instructor as a colleague in a manner that affirmed her role as an instructor in the university.

As a second-year GTA, Sara acknowledged that the experience she gained in her disciplinary MFA program and her instructional practices gave her confidence in her efficacy as a composition instructor. She noted that in her first semester teaching composition as a GTA she was "primarily concerned with how to present and be… an authoritative figure in the classroom." As she was now in her fourth semester teaching, she felt "more herself in the classroom" and rated her comfort as a nine out of ten. She was also able to sense a "correspondence between a greater openness and vulnerability in the classroom and this opening in [her] artistic practice." This alignment between her artistic practice as a poet and her instructional practice as a composition instructor was evident in the self-assured way Sara presented herself and her pedagogical goals for her students. She emphasized that she wanted her students to think of themselves as writers and she "hope[d] they will continue to see their life experiences as valuable sources of meaning." Alongside this hope that her students will see

writing as a means of moving through the world, Sara also wanted to provide her students with a "toolkit" so they "have agency [and] feel empowered when they encounter different writing contexts." Sara's investment in her students' growth stems from the support of her violin teacher saying that "the goal of our time together is that you are able to become a teacher to yourself." The empowerment and agency that Sara felt in the university inspired Sara to adopt these pedagogical goals for her students.

Jill

Jill was a first-year GTA in the writing studies and composition program in Fall 2021. She earned a BA in journalism and professional writing at a large Midwestern university before starting her graduate education. At her undergraduate institution, Jill did not gain any formal experience as an instructor, but she served as a recitation facilitator for two years. In this role, she led the discussion groups attached to a larger lecture class and had the opportunity to work with first-year students. Jill mentioned that she began informally tutoring students in elementary school and had "a natural inclination [towards] teaching."

Jill began her master's program immediately after completing her undergraduate education. She had her first introduction to teaching as a recitation facilitator at her undergraduate institution. The format of the class was centered around dialogue and conversation; a practice and value that Jill carried with her as a composition instructor: "I always want my students talking to each other and talking with me." This emphasis on conversation is paired with the pedagogical goal to create a collaborative community of writers in her classroom. Jill stated that she gave her students "every opportunity to work together because [she] believe[d] that… collaboration helps not only their writing but their sense of community as well." At the end of her first semester as an instructor, Jill received several letters of thanks and positive

course evaluations from her students who appreciated the classroom community she established. The positive feedback from Jill's students reaffirmed the importance of these teaching practices for Jill and her efficacy as a composition instructor.

As a new instructor, Jill noted that the practicum course and orientation for composition GTAs "was everything that oriented me to who I am in the [FYC] classroom." From the practicum course, Jill learned not to prioritize grammar instruction. For Jill, the practice of valuing rhetorical knowledge over grammatical correctness was the most impactful pedagogical goal imparted during the practicum course. She explained that she didn't "care if [my students] can't spell. I want them to be able to impart an impact through a message. I want them to be able to achieve a purpose." Another benefit of the practicum course for Jill was the time spent with her GTA cohort. When reflecting on her support systems in the university, Jill explained that "every moment with the GTA cohort is enjoyable in some way. I love my cohort… and I'm so grateful that I'm in this cohort… they made a huge impact on me."

Considering her identity as an instructor in the composition classroom, it is clear that Jill valued inclusivity and empathy. She sought to humanize her students and, as a GTA, saw herself as a mentor to them. She wanted to be relatable and approachable in a way that other professors may not be. Jill identified as a person with disabilities; an identity that influenced the pedagogical theories she values as an instructor. For example, she mentions she was inspired by Ella Browning's work "Disability Studies in the Composition Classroom." She acknowledged the way in which her identity informs her teaching practices: "My teaching philosophy draws from my experiences as a student and student-teacher navigating academia through the lens of disability and queerness… Carrying the weight of several marginalized identities has cemented my pedagogy in decolonization, emancipation, and the joy of writing as a social act." As a

graduate student in the writing studies and composition program, Jill's approach to writing as a social act was attributed to the discipline of WSC through the work of Erika Lindemann's *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers.* These pedagogical theories and identity work reinforced Jill's commitment to creating an inclusive and collaborative classroom environment for her students.

While Jill did primarily see herself as a student in the university, she was quick to recognize that her "educator duties outweigh [her] student needs" as a GTA. She explained that "I tend to put my teaching over my studenting. I'm the only one I have to depend on and I'd rather let myself down than other people down." By prioritizing her teaching role in the university Jill often found herself struggling to juggle her own graduate studies. This challenge was not simply due to the overwhelming workload for a new GTA but was compounded by the emotional labor of being a new graduate student in a challenging discipline. Switching between those roles was difficult: "Sometimes I couldn't stop being a student was a was supposed to be [an] instructor." When reflecting on the role of the GTA in the university, Jill noted that the role of a GTA can feel like "cheap, contingent labor." This perspective is augmented by the conviction that the university values "products and producers over the spirit of education." Despite this somber view, Jill also believed that GTAs are "magic… We have feet in both worlds." Jill saw the potential of composition GTAs that occupy roles as both an instructor and a student in the university. This duality allows GTAs to empathize with their students and be a more relatable presence in the university than more seasoned instructors who are further removed from the student role. Jill clearly valued her place in the university and explained that she felt "very lucky and privileged" to be a GTA.

Category Two: Impact of Systems of Power with the University on GTA Pedagogical Goals and Approaches to Teaching and on GTA Perception of Self-Efficacy and Empowerment as Instructors

Frequency of Reference to Themes

The second coding category, which refers to the second research question in this study, emphasizes how GTAs understand power, authority, and values in the university. This category also looks at how the GTAs in this study perceive their own efficacy and autonomy as writing instructors in the university (Table 5, Figure 7). The purpose of this category is to understand how GTAs perceive the university systems that impact their practice as writing instructors. In this second category, the second research question was operationalized by identifying the frequency in which key concepts and themes in the participants' responses appeared across all their interviews, surveys, and voice memos. This information is recorded in Table 5 and visualized in the bar graph in Figure 7.

From this data, it is clear that GTAs are cognizant of university structures and values – particularly as they relate to what GTAs are able to teach and how resources are distributed – their own value in the university, and their autonomy as composition instructors. When asked to define the goals and values of higher education, every GTA referred to the monetary value of higher education and the consequent emphasis on academic consumerism. It is also clear that each GTA is impacted by the constraints on their teaching practice due to university structures that include the English department and composition program. These constraints include the time dedicated for a FYC course, the heavy workload that GTAs bear, and the common curriculum prescribed by the composition program. These phenomena are examined in the following case studies of Rachel, Rebecca, and Megan.

Table 4

Category 2: Participant references to themes related to perception of power and authority in the university and the recognition of neoliberal values and systems (themes 2.1-2.5).

Theme	Anne	Jill	June	Megan	Rebecca	Sara	Rachel
2.1 Writing Studies and Composition	6	5	2	4	3	3	3
2.2 Efficacy as an instructor	4	2	2	1	2	2	1
2.3 Autonomy and empowerment as an instructor	6	3	1	3	3	5	3
2.4 Power and authority in the university	9	5	2	1	3	-	1
2.5 Goals and values in the university	9	3	1	1	1	3	1

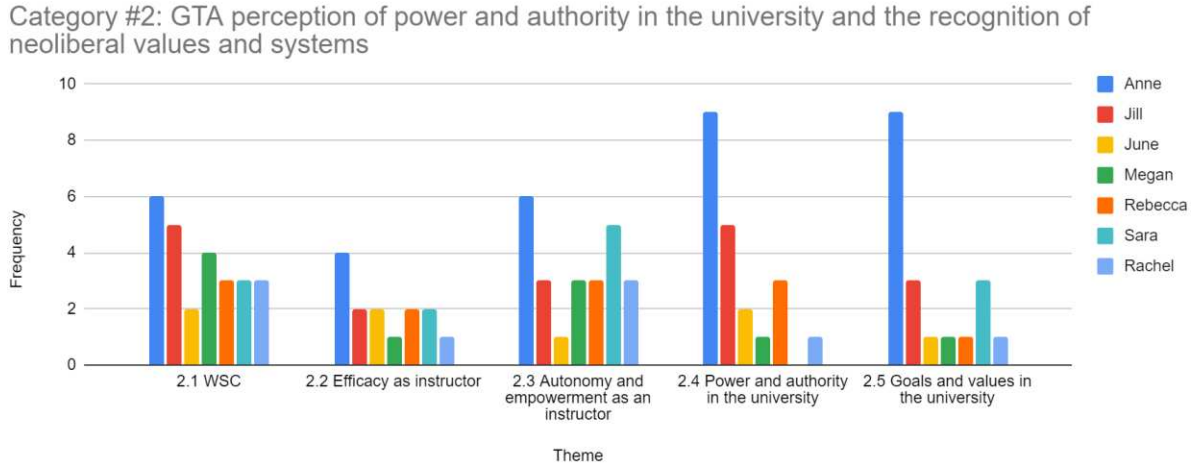

Figure 7

Category 2: Participant references to themes related to perception of power and authority in the university and the recognition of neoliberal values and systems (themes 2.1-2.5).

Case Studies: The Impact of Systems of Power: Rachel, Rebecca, and Megan

The case studies presented in this section illustrate the impact that systems of power in the university have on GTAs' performance as students in their disciplinary programs and as composition instructors. These case studies were constructed using the data above to prioritize the factors that impact these participants' teaching practices in the composition classroom. It is clear from Table 5 and Figure 7 that the participants' perceived autonomy as instructors is impacted by their understanding of university systems and goals.

The participants' awareness of neoliberal university goals and values impacted their perceived value and consequent empowerment in the university. It is worth noting that each participant mentioned the significance of funding as a primary value of the university and higher education. For example, Rebecca noted the "millions of dollars flowing" through the university while Rachel immediately identified money as a primary value of the university. The awareness of these values influenced the participants' felt contingency in the university system. This awareness was informed by the resources allocated to the composition program and to their roles as transient labor in the university. For instance, Megan pointed out the necessity of the funding a GTA position provides while also noting that the provided stipend is not enough to live on; prompting many GTAs to seek additional employment and funding opportunities. The low but necessary stipend contributes to GTAs' felt vulnerability in the composition program.

In addition to the neoliberal values and goals of the university, participants also noted the role of the composition program in the university and its impact on their teaching practices in the FYC classroom. While the participants expressed gratitude for the composition programs' writing pedagogy education program, they also acknowledged the constraints of the common curriculum. Rebecca emphasized the incredible amount of support a common curriculum

provides. She stated that “coming up with your own syllabus would be a huge nightmare.” However, Megan and Rachel both expressed concern that the common syllabus was lacking in some supports for students. As a result, Rachel sought to incorporate rhetorical grammar into her curriculum and Megan encouraged her students to practice creative writing in their personal journals and WTL activities. The following case studies illustrate the impact these systems of power have on the participants’ approach to teaching composition.

Rachel

Rachel was a first-year GTA in the English education program in Fall 2021. She earned a BA in English education at a large university in the Intermountain West. Her undergraduate degree involved a lot of practicum teaching. She explained that this experience “definitely helped [her to] be confident” that she wanted to be a teacher. Rachel always wanted to pursue a graduate degree, but that goal felt out of reach due to various life circumstances. When the GTA opportunity arose – which would allow Rachel to earn a master's degree in English education with tuition remission and teach first-year composition – “it was a major accomplishment and milestone in [her] life.” So, after teaching middle school English for three years, Rachel began her master’s program. In the composition GTA program, Rachel was excited about the opportunity to teach FYC courses and she hoped that her future career will continue to include teaching, though she is not yet sure if that will be in secondary or post-secondary institutions.

Rachel’s experience in her BA program in English education informed her pedagogical strategies in the FYC classroom. She mentioned that in her BA program there was an emphasis on “giving students [the] opportunity for informal writing.” This approach to teaching writing transferred to her practice as a composition instructor when she assigned writing-to-learn activities. Rachel’s interest in writing-to-learn was influenced by her belief that “writing is a skill

that is practiced" and process work is critical to student growth. In reflecting on pedagogical theories that influence her teaching practice, Rachel named Donald Murray's "Teaching Writing as a Process Not Product." She also mentioned literacy scholars Penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher's emphasis on the theory that writing must be practiced informally. Rachel encouraged her students to write to discover their thoughts. This process includes multiple drafts, time spent revising, and, overall, a recursive composing process.

Rachel also mentioned the importance of grammar education in primary and secondary education. She explained that grammar is best taught "in context and not simply as worksheets… that we [should] help students interact with writing and writers and see how they use these mechanics and grammar functions to achieve their purpose in writing." This perspective was informed by her experience in secondary education and, consequently, Rachel considered grammar instruction to be a critical component of writing instruction in FYC courses. In the Spring 2022 semester, Rachel was integrating rhetorical grammar instruction into the first-year composition curriculum. These curriculum adjustments were approved through the composition program and is not an endeavor Rachel was attempting by herself. Rachel's office mate, Anna – another participant in this study – was using the adjusted curriculum as well. This adjusted curriculum was developed with the support of the composition program. While she was excited about these curricular changes, Rachel recognized that making these changes required a lot of work. She explained that the curriculum provided by the composition department "is well scaffolded," but "that there is a lot of room for change… Making those changes suddenly means [that] you're on your own or you have to do some extra work." Rachel aligned her integration of rhetorical grammar instruction to the WPA Outcome Statement for First-Year Composition (2014) that includes "Develop knowledge of linguistic structures, including grammar,

punctuation, and spelling, through practice in composing and revising" as a primary learning outcome for FYC courses. While this shift in the curriculum meant more work for Rachel, she was excited about the opportunity: "We are just experimenting a little bit and that makes things more fun; that we get to teach and improve on things." Rachel's willingness to take on more work showed the care she had for her students. It was also indicative of her confidence as an instructor. At the end of her first semester as a GTA, Rachel rated her comfort as an instructor as a nine out of ten.

Rachel saw herself as both an educator and a student in the university. She pointed out that occupying those roles required "a shift of thinking as I move between my teaching persona and attending my own classes." She also recognized her development as a GTA "has something to do with learning to transition between that space of being a student into being an instructor." As a GTA, she recognized that the duality she performs in the university allowed her to relate more closely to her students than other faculty members. However, she does see herself as "more on the level of professors." She mentioned an instructor for one of her current graduate classes "strives for stronger relationships with [their] students in grad school because [they] think of them more as colleagues than students." Rachel appreciated this new collegiality from her professors, but she admitted that it can be "a little bit intimidating."

As an educator, Rachel explained that her teaching practices are greatly impacted by the mentors and teachers that she interacted with as a student and professional: "a lot of how I am shaped as an instructor and scholar comes down to the teachers that I interacted with." She mentioned colleagues who "fought for equity" and prioritized professional development as primary influences. These interactions with dedicated educators also encouraged her to apply for graduate school. As a GTA, she recognized that she is affected by the "network of amazing

GTAs" that she is a part of. As previously mentioned, Rachel was collaborating with a fellow GTA on the integration of rhetorical grammar instruction into the first-year composition curriculum provided by the composition program. As a student, Rachel was constantly thinking about how the things she was learning from her research and classes could be applied to her teaching practice. A personal practice that Rachel integrated into her instructional practices was the importance of conversation. She encouraged her students to take advantage of her office hours and of their peers to talk through the writing process: "talking… is something that really helps me and obviously helps my students." Rachel's dedication to her students and improving herself as an educator was evident in her commitment to her own development as a writing instructor.

Rebecca

Rebecca was a second-year GTA in the writing studies and composition program in Fall 2021. She earned her BA in English with a concentration in writing at a large Intermountain West university. After completing her undergraduate degree, Rebecca began a master's program in writing studies and composition at the same university and completed one semester before leaving to pursue a law degree. During and subsequent to law school, Rebecca was a mock trial coach and instructor at her institution. After earning her JD, Rebecca worked for several years before returning to graduate school as a GTA at the same large Intermountain West university. She describes herself as "a nontraditional returning graduate student."

When reflecting on her decision to return to the writing studies and composition program at this university, Rebecca emphasized the support and mentorship of the faculty. She explained that she is "very personally attached to the faculty and some of them are still on campus. So that was certainly a factor that drew me back." Incidentally, upon her return to the writing studies and

composition program, Rebecca did not recognize the connection between composition and teaching. She explained that "I didn't know that composition was naturally a teaching discipline." Despite her initial surprise, Rebecca did reveal that the teaching has "been [her] favorite element" of the GTA position. Due to her experience in law school and as a professional lawyer, Rebecca recognized that compared to many GTAs who were just starting their teaching careers she was much more comfortable in the classroom. She attributed this comfort to her background in public speaking and the emphasis she placed on conversation in the classroom. Rebecca rated her comfortability as an instructor in the composition classroom as a nine out of ten.

At the beginning of her tenure as a GTA, Rebecca was surprised at the level of responsibility assigned to the composition GTAs. Though she had served as a research assistant and teaching assistant before, she had never served as an instructor of record for a course. She acknowledged that she "just didn't realize how complex the role of the GTA was." For Rebecca, some of that complexity comes from the intense workload of a GTA, but it also stemmed from her conviction that "there's a special responsibility that comes with the teaching of writing. And I think I've really grown to appreciate that." This felt responsibility is derived from Rebecca's belief that writing "has a fundamental power to it." In her composition courses, Rebecca emphasized students' engagement through conversation and dialogue in the classroom. She explained that this emphasis on conversation comes from the pedagogical belief that "the most important thing that teachers can give students is a knowledge that their voice matters. Whether it is a spoken voice or… a written voice." She further explained: "I think students' ability to establish and feel agency in the classroom is important. So I try to emphasize conversation, continuing dialogue in the classroom, and mutual respect." As a foundation for this pedagogical

approach, Rebecca drew on Wallace and Ewald's (2000) concept of mutuality. This text was assigned in its entirety in the GTA practicum curriculum. As another a primary influence on her teaching pedagogy, Rebecca cited Adler-Kassner and Wardle's *Naming What We Know* (2015), another text that is taught in the GTA practicum course.

As a writer, Rebecca understood the inherent difficulty of writing. As an instructor, she empathized with her students who also experienced this difficulty. In considering her theory of writing, Rebecca mused that writing "is incredibly difficult… I think it's one of the hardest things ever to do." As she worked with her students, Rebecca tried to break down the process of writing; stating that she wanted to be clear and direct in her own work and in explaining the process of writing to her students. As an educator, Rebecca also recognized that "writing is a method of learning… there's probably no better way to learn a topic or to grasp the subject matter." However, Rebecca also empathized with her students who may not want to be in her class or who struggle with writing. She explained: "[Writing is] something that people are uncomfortable with… or they think it's going to be the most boring thing they've ever done in their entire life. But… I even felt that way when I was an undergraduate." Certainly, Rebecca's empathy and desire to form genuine connections with her students were evident in her commitment to her students' success.

Due to her experience with public speaking and her status as a professional with a terminal degree, Rebecca noted that she had confidence in her authority in the composition classroom from the start of her first semester as a GTA. Unlike many GTAs, she did not struggle to find her authority as an instructor in the university. She also expressed gratitude for the curriculum provided by the composition instructors; pointing out that it's "a huge benefit when you're first starting because coming up with your own syllabus would be a huge nightmare." She

also saw the effort in the curriculum to meet the learning outcome stipulated in the WPA Outcome Statement for First-Year Composition (2014). As an instructor, Rebecca was interested in focusing on current events and discussing campus life in the classroom. However, she did not want to change any of the major assignments. She explained that "the people that wrote the curriculum know more about college composition than I do."

When asked to reflect on the values of higher education, Rebecca quickly noted that "there [are] millions of dollars" and "tens of thousands of students" in the university. She understood that there is a practical need to make sure that what students are learning in the classroom correlates "to them actually being able to get a job when they graduate." However, despite recognizing these more neoliberal values, Rebecca also realized that "to be in education, or to be an academic, you kind of have to have faith in the greater purpose or in a higher calling in order to stick it out." While Rebecca did not identify as a member of the academy, stating that her current lack of a Ph.D. excludes her from that title, she did aspire to earn her doctorate in the field of communications and civic engagement.

Megan

Megan was a third-year GTA in the creative writing MA program with a concentration in creative nonfiction in Fall 2021. Megan completed her BA in creative writing at a midsized research university on the East Coast. She had always enjoyed school as a student, even claiming that she was "one of those weird kids" who "loved high school." Megan had no formal experience as an instructor before her time as a GTA. She started her MFA program immediately after completing her undergraduate education. Megan attributed her decision to enroll in the creative writing MFA program to her positive undergraduate experience. In the creative writing department at her undergraduate institution, Megan explained that "I felt like I had a great

network of professors that I was really comfortable with." It was in her undergraduate creative writing program that Megan first identified as a creative writer. She was awarded scholarships, achieved publications, and received awards for her work. These external affirmations of her ability as a creative writer encouraged Megan to consider working towards an MFA. Her professors encouraged her, but they also cautioned her against working on an MFA degree without a GTA position. She acknowledged that an MFA in creative writing is "more or less a degree that is about working on your art rather than advancing your career options." She also noted that "teaching was never at the forefront of my mind. I just knew I needed the GTAship because I needed those funds. Like a lot of us [GTAs], we wouldn't be able to afford grad school if we weren't GTAs." While teaching may not have been a primary goal for her, Megan did reflect that "being a [FYC] instructor has made me really happy. And interacting with students has been the highlight of my grad school experience." Megan identified first as a student in the university, then as an educator. She was candid when explaining that she didn't feel like a member of the academy due to her status as a creative writer. She stated that "creative writers are notoriously overlooked as academics…. I'm constantly having to prove myself." Megan further explained the contradiction of creative writers in composition:

"In a professional setting, people always feel shocked to hear me and other creative writers say we feel like we're not good enough, or we don't feel on par with… other scholars and teachers. But also, we don't teach creative writing in any capacity in anything we [as composition instructors] do. So it's almost like they're telling us that 'your degree is valuable, your area of study is valuable, but it's not valuable in this setting.' So that's a really confusing contradiction."

Megan didn't see her values as a creative writer reflected in the FYC curriculum; and yet when she discussed the pedagogical strategies she used in the composition classroom, she spoke with authority and confidence. She expressed an interest in redesigning the curriculum to include a social justice focus while still aligning to the learning outcomes in the WPA Outcome Statement for First-Year Composition (2014): "I think [the learning outcomes] are exactly what students deserve out of a first-year composition course." Megan clearly placed the needs of her students at the center of her instructional goal and practices.

When she began her position as a composition GTA, Megan revealed that she "didn't feel prepared to teach" first-year composition courses. She pointed out that her peers in her GTA cohort who were enrolled in the literature and composition MA programs had a distinct set of values and goals to change classroom pedagogy and "redefine what it means to be in composition." In comparison to her peers in those programs, Megan saw her own discipline of creative writing devalued in the composition curriculum. As a creative writer, Megan saw the low stakes writing assignments and WTLs as embodying creative writing practices. However, in the curriculum, these exercises are never formally aligned with those creative practices. As such, Megan saw her discipline consistently undervalued in the more education-oriented discipline of writing studies and composition.

As a third-year composition GTA, Megan revealed that as an instructor she valued pedagogical practices that incorporate group work and discussion. She explained that "I try to uphold a class climate of honesty, empathy, and social justice. My pedagogical theories—specifically inclusion and autonomy— favor conversational dialogues and reflective exercises; metacognition [and] peer review." Megan's theory of writing was heavily predicated on the idea that "the practice of writing is the practice of reading." She emphasized the importance of critical

thinking as a learning outcome for her students and that reading is a tool for accomplishing that outcome. She also recognized that the rhetorical strategies in the FYC curriculum – such as the rhetorical situation and audience appeals – were also valuable tools for critical thinking. Megan also stated that she wants her students to "finish each semester feeling like they have the confidence to think critically, participate, and ask for help. If they become better, more capable writers then that's great, too. But communication and confidence are always my priority." Megan understood that a single semester is often too short of a time period to transform students into completely different writers. However, she did hope to give her students the tools they needed to think critically and communicate effectively.

In the composition program, Megan explained that she felt she had the space to grow and learn. In the English department, Megan felt isolated. She revealed that she did not have a mentor in her program and asked the assistant director of the GTA program to support her in her thesis work. The lack of support and community in her own program prompted Megan to lean heavily on the composition department. She stressed that the composition director's support and mentorship were invaluable and showed a "level of care" that she did not experience in her own program. While she may not have gone into the GTA program with teaching aspirations, Megan did stress how grateful she was to have this teaching experience. She disclosed that "in a shocking turn of events," teaching had "made me the happiest throughout this time."

Discussion: Mapping GTA's Ecologies of Influence and Approaches to Teaching Writing as Composition Instructors and Disciplinary Scholars

In this section, the voices of all six GTA participants come together to narratively map a cohesive ecology of influence for composition GTAs and its effect on their pedagogical approach to teaching FYC courses. This process is guided by the coded streams that account for

the frequency of key terms and themes across all interviews, surveys, and voice memos. These streams are divided by participant disciplinarity: creative writing, writing studies and composition, and English education. This data, visible in Table 6, Figure 8, Table 7, Figure 9, Table 8, and Figure 10, guide the discussion by prioritizing the themes discussed. More consequential for this discussion is the guiding outcome of pedagogical goals, strategies, and theories that each participant uses in their practice as a composition instructor. These outcomes are informed by the data visible in Table 6 and Figure 8 below. This third coding categories documents the frequency that participants referenced the specific pedagogical goals, strategies, and theories that inform their approach to teaching writing. In this discussion, connections between the first two coding categories and this third coding category are analyzed to explore how GTAs' ecologies of influence impact their teaching practices in the FYC classes they teach. From this data, it is apparent that the GTAs in the English education program are more cognizant of the specific pedagogical goals and strategies that they employ and the theories that inform those practices. This may be in part due to their growing disciplinarity in the English department and the program's emphasis on literacy education that is then informing their approach to teaching composition. This is evident in the different pedagogical theories that Anne and Rachel, as graduate students in the English education MA program, mention as influencing their pedagogical approach to teaching. For example, Rachel mentions a book from Penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher (2018), two influential literacy scholars in secondary education, that impacts her belief that students need to practice writing by continuously writing. In contrast, the other participants rely solely on scholarship introduced in the GTA practicum course, such as Peter Elbow (1973), Donald Murray (1982), David Wallace and Helen Rothschild Ewald (2000), and Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle (2015).It is also notable that all the participants think

deeply about the learning outcomes and pedagogical goals for their students in the FYC classroom. Their perspective is heavily influenced by the fundamental "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition" (2014) that are introduced in the GTA practicum course. The State Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are aligned to the WPA statement. These learning outcomes are included on all the syllabi for FYC courses taught by composition GTAs and are covered extensively in the GTA practicum course. The authoritative presence of this document clearly impacts how composition GTAs approach the task of teaching FYC courses and was explicitly referenced in both the first survey and final voice memo in this study. In the following discussion, the voices of these six GTAs are put into conversation to find commonalities and dissonances between the different disciplines represented in this study. The data collected during this study and represented in Table 6, Figure 8, Table 7, Figure 9, Table 8, and Figure 10 inform the direction of the discussion represented in this text.

Table 5

Participant references to themes related to approaches to FYC and writing pedagogy by discipline (themes 3.1-3.3).

Theme	Creative Writing	Writing Studies and Composition	English Education
3.1 Pedagogical goals	15	11	26
3.2 Pedagogical strategies	9	7	16
3.3 Pedagogical theory	5	5	10

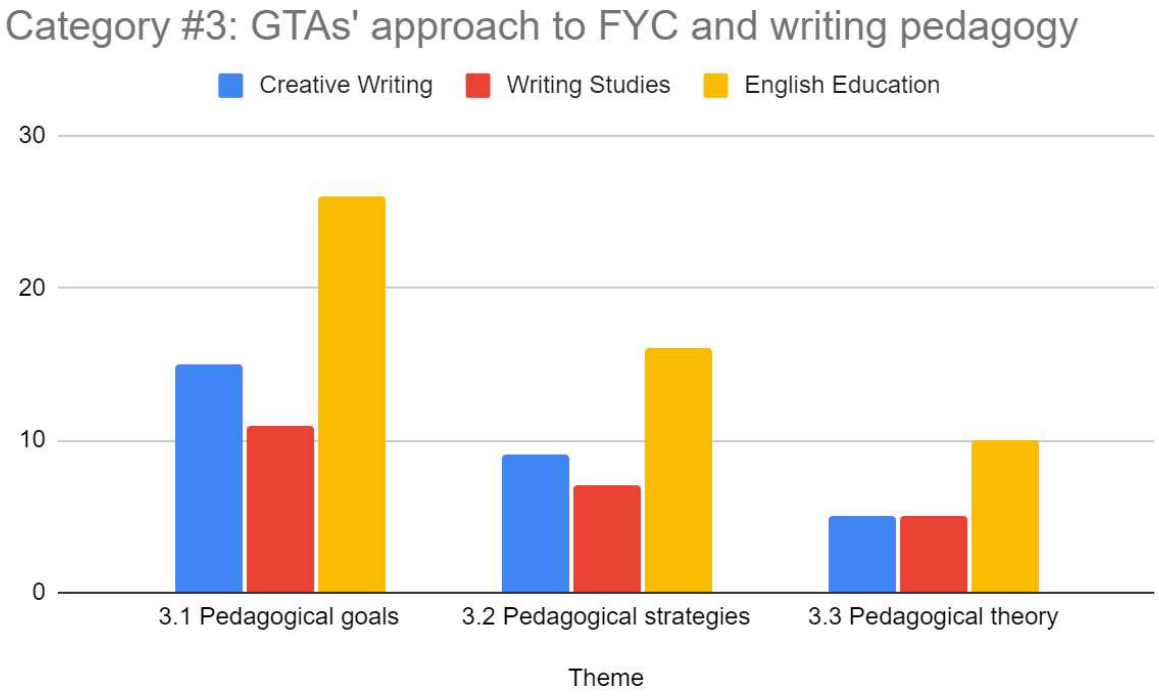

Figure 8
Participant references to themes related to approaches to FYC and writing pedagogy by discipline (themes 3.1-3.3).

Disciplinarity

As composition GTAs progress in their discipline-specific MA programs, their understanding of writing and, consequently, their approaches to the teaching of writing, become grounded in their discipline. In Table 6 and Figure 8, it is clear that while all GTAs are influenced by their emerging disciplinarity in their practice as composition instructors. However, the composition GTAs in creative writing MFA programs in this study see their disciplinary approaches to writing as more divergent from the discipline of writing studies and composition than the composition GTAs in the writing studies and composition and English education MA programs. This may be in part because English education and writing studies and composition

are both teaching disciplines while the creative writing MFA program is, as explained by Megan, an "art degree." For writing studies and composition and English education GTAs, this seems to create a more natural alignment between teaching FYC courses and their MA discipline. For example, Sara – a second-year GTA in the creative writing MFA program – viewed writing as a means of moving through the world and creating connections. As such, she stated her pedagogical goal as helping her students "see their life experiences as valuable sources of meaning." Sara hoped this approach to teaching writing would provide her students with a "toolkit" so they "have agency [and] feel empowered when they encounter different writing contexts." Similarly, Anne – a first-year GTA in the English education MA program – connected with the concept of writing as a utility that her students need to be able to use to accomplish goals outside of the classroom setting. Both Sara and Anne used the term *tool* to describe their approach to teaching writing and expressed the pedagogical goal of providing their students with the resources to apply the different "tools" they learn to various writing contexts. However, Anne approached this pedagogical goal by incorporating instruction on rhetorical grammar into her curriculum while Sara focused on the physical process of writing that she valued in her own creative process. Though it should be noted that both Sara and Anne placed emphasis on the expressivist theory of writing instruction that writing is a process. This foundation is likely due to readings in the GTA practicum curriculum that include Peter Elbow and Donald Murray.

As a third-year GTA in the creative writing MFA program, Megan was clear that she saw creative writing undervalued in the FYC curriculum provided by the composition department. She identified specific writing exercises, such as writing-to-learn, as primarily creative writing practices. However, these exercises are kept separate from creative writing by the terminology used in the provided FYC curriculum. In considering changing the curriculum, Megan

envisioned a FYC course that heavily incorporates creative writing practices as ideal. However, as Rachel mentioned, changing the curriculum is a lot of work on top of the heavy GTA workload. Megan did admit to changing the curriculum slightly to align with her pedagogical and social justice goals, but she did not make any formal changes to the curriculum. Similarly, Jill, a first-year writing studies and composition GTA, also believed the FYC curriculum should include an emphasis on creative writing. Jill stressed the importance of supporting her students in understanding their own rhetorical situation. From Jill's perspective, "the curriculum really only emphasizes the importance of the situation in regards to understanding another text, and not one that we create ourselves." Therefore, Jill saw incorporating creative writing into the FYC course as a pedagogical strategy that encouraged students to use writing as a means to understand their own identity and experiences. Both Megan and Jill viewed creative writing as a valuable practice in the FYC classroom that aligned with their social justice goals.

In contrast to Megan and Jill's perspective that creative writing was intentionally and erroneously excluded from the FYC curriculum, Anne and Rachel felt the curriculum is lacking support for grammar instruction. Rachel explained that due to her training in her BA degree in English education and her experiences in secondary education, she valued explicit grammar instruction and understood strategies for effective grammar instruction. As English education GTAs, Anne and Rachel successfully petitioned the composition program to allow them to integrate rhetorical grammar instruction in their FYC courses. In opposition to Anne and Rachel's perspective on grammar instruction, Jill's approach to grammar aligns with the composition program's stance that focused grammar instruction is unnecessary for FYC courses. As a first-year writing studies and composition GTA, Jill claimed that this approach to grammar was the largest takeaway from the GTA practicum course. She explained that she didn't care

"whether [her students] can spell… I want them to be able to impart an impact." Rebecca, a second-year writing studies and composition GTA, had a slightly different perspective. She explained that when she began teaching composition as a GTA, she didn't focus on grammar instruction at all. However, when she began grading, she realized how prevalent common grammar issues were in her students' writing and how it would impede her ability to understand their work. Rebecca's approach to grammar initially aligned with the composition program's curriculum but evolved to more closely align with the English education approach due to her experience with student writing.

In considering their personal theories of writing, it is clear that writing studies and composition GTAs more closely aligned their theories of writing with their pedagogical approach to the teaching of writing (Table 7, Figure 9). This alignment may be in part due to the emphasis on the teaching of writing that is inherent to the writing studies and composition MA program. Rebecca explained that prior to her time in the program, she had not realized the emphasis placed on teaching in the field. Megan, while not initially anticipating enjoying her time spent teaching, emphasized that teaching has been a distinct highlight of her graduate career. She stated that while her career goals do not involve teaching full-time, she was grateful she had this teaching experience. Megan's reluctance to commit to a teaching career is linked to her perspective that creative writing is consistently undervalued in the field of writing studies. Because Megan did not see her discipline of creative writing aligned as valued in the teaching of composition, she was unable to envision a fulfilling career as a composition instructor.

From these narratives, it is clear that each participant's discipline within the English department affects their approach to teaching writing as a composition GTA. Megan and Sara, as graduate students in the creative writing MFA program, generally saw the curriculum as

undervaluing distinct creative writing practices. Both Megan and Sara integrated their discipline informed approach to writing in small ways as composition instructors. For example, Sara placed emphasis on the physical process of writing as an instructor and Megan encouraged her students to read creative works and complete creative writing exercises that were not included in the composition curriculum. Rachel and Anne, as graduate students in the English education MA program, were concerned with the lack of formal grammar instruction in the composition curriculum. They formally petitioned for, and then piloted, a rhetorical grammar unit that aligned with their pedagogical goals. Jill and Rebecca, as graduate students in the writing studies and composition program, were generally unconcerned with their students' grammatical errors in their writing and focused instead on higher concerns in the hierarchy of rhetorical concerns. Both Jill and Rebecca emphasized the role of audience for their students and thus stated that their students' writing needed to be comprehensible to that audience.

While the participants in this study expressed differently pedagogical goals that aligned with their graduate discipline, it should be noted that they all expressed great care and consideration for the students they teach. This care is exemplified by the additional labor they continually exert in thinking about, aligning, and modifying the composition curriculum to their pedagogical values and goals (Table 6, Figure 8).

Table 6

Category 1: Participant references to professional and disciplinary identity by discipline (themes 1.1-1.7)

Theme	Creative Writing	Writing Studies and Composition	English Education
1.1 Mentorship	8	8	7

1.2 Support systems	7	6	4
1.3 Goals of graduate education	5	2	4
1.4 Identity & previous educational experiences	32	33	36
1.5 Roles in the university	6	9	10
1.6 Disciplinarity	14	7	8
1.7 Theory of Writing	5	7	5

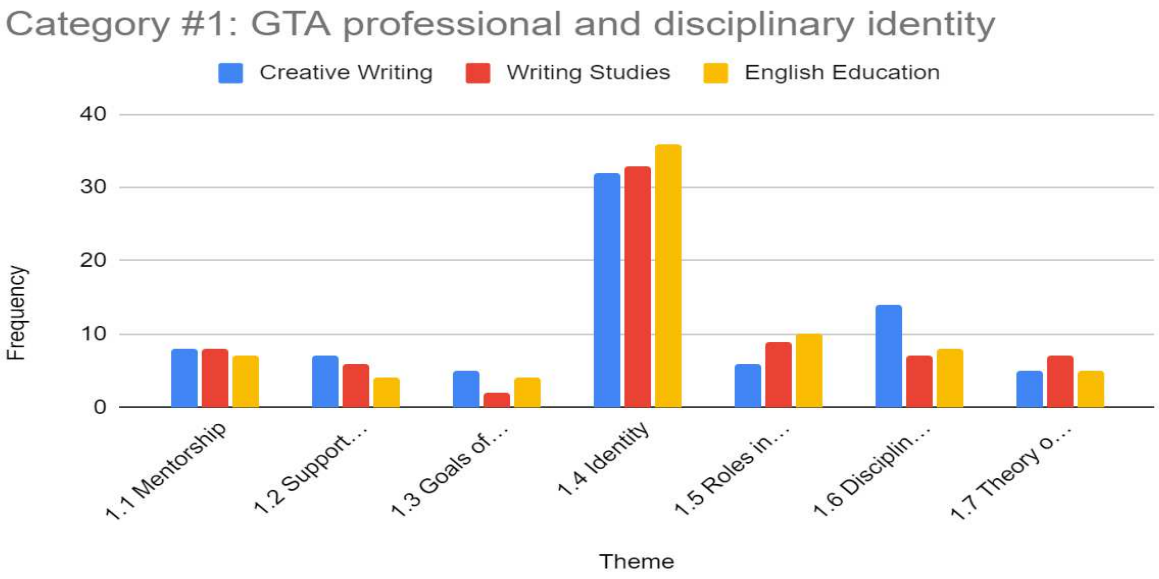

Figure 9
Category 1: Participant references to professional and disciplinary identity by discipline (themes 1.1-1.7)

Support Systems and Mentorship

The graduate student participants in this study stressed the importance of their support systems as they navigated graduate school. Jill described graduate school as "messy and hurtful" and explained that graduate school carries the expectation that "you're going to suffer." Anne described her experience in graduate school as "tumultuous" while Rebecca said it has been "difficult." Most graduate students, and those who have been through graduate school, will agree that it can be a grueling and, at times, bewildering experience. A critical component to anyone's graduate school experience is their support system and, within that system, the mentorship of other graduate students, seasoned professors, and faculty within their program and university.

New composition GTAs are required to participate in a week-long orientation prior to the start of their first semester as well as a semester-long practicum course as a part of the composition program's Writing Pedagogy Education (WPE) program. This emphasis on formal WPE not only provides a pedagogical foundation for the new instructors, but it gives new GTAs the opportunity to bond with other members of their cohort and form relationships with the composition directors and their assigned faculty mentor. Every GTA participant in this study acknowledged the importance of their GTA cohort as a primary support system (Table 6, Figure 8). Jill succinctly stated that she "definitely leans on [her GTA cohort] first… they made a huge impact on me." For Jill, Anne, and Rachel, their GTA cohort was a primary source of support as they began to navigate their role as an instructor and as a graduate student. In a slight contrast, Rebecca, Megan, and Sara emphasized their program cohort as a primary support system. Sara explained that her poetry cohort has a special bond due to the intense workshop process that is an integral part of the creative writing MFA program. Similarly, Rebecca and Megan acknowledged

their GTA cohorts in a positive manner, but clearly relied on their program cohorts as their primary support with their GTA cohort in a more secondary role.

This difference in support systems may be due to the participants' progression in their graduate program. Jill, Anne, and Rachel were first-year composition GTAs, Rebecca and Sara were second-year GTAs, and Megan was a third-year composition GTA. It is clear that the GTA orientation, small mentor groups, and practicum course provided by the composition program as primary components of the composition program's WPE for are critical for new composition GTAs (Schwaller & Miller-Cochran, 2020; Reid, 2008). Each of the participants in this study mention all three of these components as having a significant impact on their teaching practices and professional development as instructors. However, it does seem that as GTAs progress in their discipline specific programs that they begin to separate from the initial composition GTA cohort and rely more on their disciplinary peers and faculty mentors.

Mentorship in graduate school is a critical component for graduate student professional development. Each participant reflected upon the importance of mentorship and, for some, the significant lack of a meaningful mentorship relationship (Table 6, Figure 8). Rebecca mentioned her current faculty advisor as a primary motivator for her return to graduate school while Rachel, Anne, Jill, Sara, and Megan all mentioned undergraduate mentors as significant sources of encouragement for their decision to attend graduate programs. Rebecca and Sara both spoke at length about the meaningful relationships they have with mentors in their respective programs. Sara, in addition to her work as a composition GTA, was teaching a discipline-specific writing course alongside her faculty mentor. Though this mentor was not her direct supervisor for her duties as a composition instructor, Sara disclosed that this relationship now supersedes her relationship with faculty in the composition program. Consequently, Sara was more likely to

report any difficulties or questions she had to her disciplinary advisor rather than the composition faculty. She also revealed that her practice in co-teaching a discipline specific course influenced the way she approached teaching composition as she became more aligned in her artistic and instructional practices. Rebecca was similarly influenced by her faculty mentor. In her second interview, Rebecca mentioned that in an earlier voice memo she said she would "reduce the amount of reading but make [her students] read more in depth." However, after a conversation with her mentor, she would instead like to increase the amount of reading assigned to her students. It is clear that Rebecca and Sara's practice as composition instructors and as disciplinary scholars is significantly shaped by their faculty mentors.

As a third-year GTA in the creative writing MFA program, Megan disclosed that she was unable to find a supportive mentor in her program. She revealed that she had sent emails to faculty in her discipline that took days or weeks for a response and, perhaps, even went unanswered. She also mentioned that she would have meetings that were rescheduled up to three times in a row. Ultimately, she was unable to find a mentor or a support system from the faculty in her discipline. However, this lack of support from her own discipline resulted in her continuing reliance on the composition faculty. She expressed immense gratitude that the composition director would respond promptly to her questions and concerns. She was amazed by the care the assistant composition director showed the composition GTAs and expressed how meaningful that was for her professional development. Her lack of confidence in her discipline faculty was somewhat eased by having the assistant composition director as a support. This faculty mentor had affirmed Megan's experience in her discipline program and stepped in when Megan's official advisor left the program unexpectedly. Megan's experience as a graduate student consequently felt "very isolating. I don't really feel seen or understood as a student or

member of the academy." As she neared the end of her program, Megan confessed that she was "dreading [her] thesis project for so many reasons. I wish that I had a professor like me. Honestly, I do."

It is notable that as first-year GTAs, Rachel, Anne, and Jill, explicitly said they do not identify a mentor in their graduate programs. As a primary source of support, they did mention the assistant composition director and other composition faculty as resources for questions regarding their role as instructors. However, within their disciplines they expressed excitement and desire to find a mentor. Rachel in particular looked forward to finding a mentor who could guide her work towards her thesis. In her final voice memo, Rachel expressed her relief at identifying a thesis advisor who helped her narrow her research interests: "Finally… we nailed down a topic for my thesis, which I'm really excited about. Because up to this point, I feel like I've been a little lost." Rachel's experience in finding a mentor put her on a clear path towards her work as a scholar in the field. However, Jill and Anne continued to express frustration and confusion with the lack of guidance and mentorship they were experiencing in their respective programs.

Support systems are critical for the success of graduate students. In addition to the support of their GTA and discipline cohorts and faculty mentors, each participant mentioned the support of family and friends. However, it also seems clear that having a clear and dedicated faculty mentor in their program corresponds to the participants' progress as a scholar and felt efficacy in their program. Rachel, Sara, and Rebecca, as GTAs with a dedicated mentor, mentioned making clear progress in their field, felt autonomy as members of the academy, and excitement about their MA and MFA thesis projects. However, Megan, Jill, and Anne, as GTAs without a mentor, mentioned feeling lost in their program and anxiety about their MA and MFA

thesis projects. While the support of their cohorts and family is important, the role of faculty mentors should not be undervalued for composition GTAs in MA and MFA programs.

Table 7
Category 2: Participant references to perceptions of power and authority in the university and the recognition of neoliberal values and systems by discipline (themes 2.1-2.5).

Theme	Creative Writing	Writing Studies and Composition	English Education
2.1 Writing Studies and Composition	7	8	9
2.2 Efficacy as an instructor	3	4	5
2.3 Autonomy and empowerment as an instructor	8	6	9
2.4 Power and authority in the university	1	8	10
2.5 Goals and values in the university	4	4	10

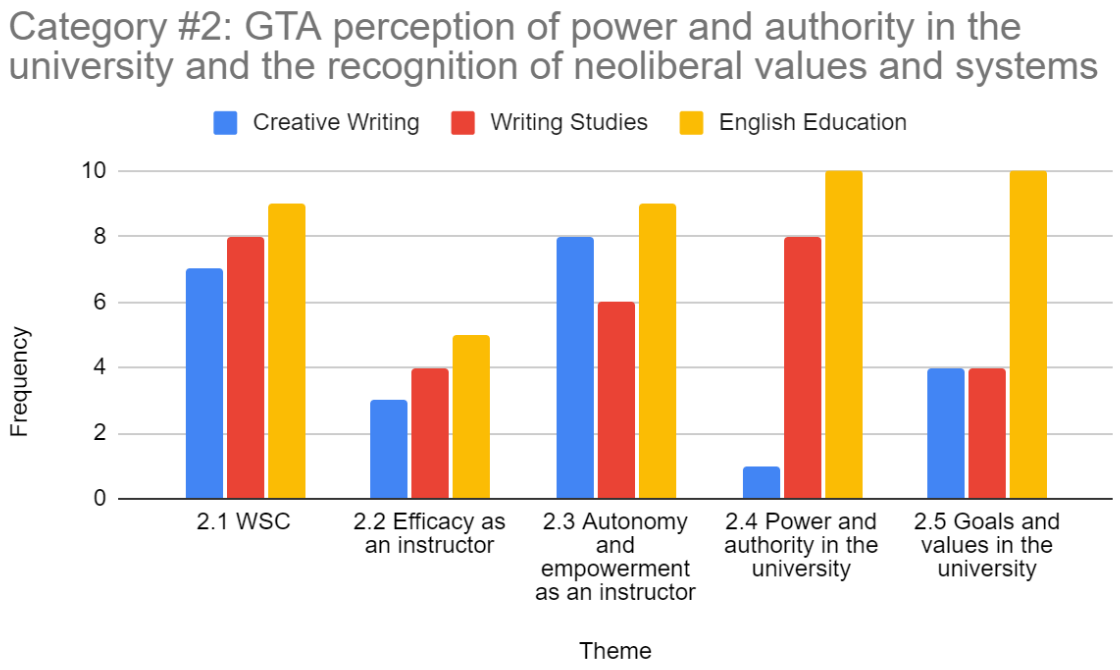

Figure 10
Category 2: Participant references to perceptions of power and authority in the university and the recognition of neoliberal values and systems by discipline (themes 2.1-2.5).

University Systems and Autonomy as Composition Instructors

As GTAs progress in their respective MA and MFA programs, they also develop as composition instructors in the university. As they advance in their program, they become increasingly established in their chosen discipline. A critical component of this development is the appreciation for the university systems that they operate within and their eventual autonomy as composition instructors. Of course, it is worth reiterating that most composition GTAs enter their programs with little to no formal teaching experience (Bushnell & Gorman, 2018; Schwaller & Miller-Cochran, 2020). As such, most composition GTAs are tasked with teaching a critical course, entering graduate school, and navigating the university systems as a teacher-scholar for the first time simultaneously. It is also worth noting that the composition GTAs in this study are all in MA or MFA programs, which are two and three year programs respectively.

This time goes by very quickly and GTAs must balance their graduate coursework, a large-scale thesis project, their obligations as a composition GTA, and learning to navigate the university in this short time period.

As new GTAs begin navigating the university as students, as instructors, and as new scholars, it is common for them to experience imposter, syndrome, otherwise known as the imposter phenomenon. In this study, five out of six participants revealed that they experienced this phenomenon to some degree. The imposter phenomenon was defined by Langford and Clance (1993) as "the psychological experience of believing that one's accomplishments came about not through genuine ability, but as a result of having been lucky" (p. 495). It should be noted that these imposter feelings have been linked to depression, anxiety, and worry resulting "from pressure to live up to one's successful image and fear that one will be exposed as unworthy and incompetent" (Langford & Clance, 1993, p. 495). As most new GTAs shoulder the responsibility for a FYC course as the instructor of record as brand-new educators, it is clear that they need external affirmation of their competency to combat these effects. These affirmations are most effective when bestowed by other faculty members, mentors, and in student evaluations.

As first-year GTAs, Rachel, Anne, and Jill all mentioned the positive student evaluations that they received at the end of their first semester of teaching. Jill, who emphasized an inclusive classroom environment as a primary pedagogical goal in her teaching practice, reported that she had "beautiful course evaluations and several letters of thanks for the community" in from her students. These positive evaluations from her students reaffirmed Jill's efficacy as a composition instructor. Anne revealed that she had struggled with imposter syndrome since her undergraduate coursework and that she had to remind herself that she was "the expert" in the room: "I know this curriculum. I was picked for this for a reason." Rachel revealed that her confidence in the

academy stemmed from her experience at conferences and having her work published prior to attending graduate school. However, she was also quick to recognize that there are "imposter syndrome feelings around being in graduate school. Like, do you have the credentials to apply to things?" As a second-year GTA, Sara reported a reported nine out of ten comfortability as an instructor, but revealed that she still experienced the lingering effects of imposter syndrome. As she explained that she did not tell her students that she was a graduate student, she began laughing at her reasoning: "I mean, what is that about? Is it an imposter syndrome? Is it a fear of losing some point of authority in terms of classroom management?" Sara realized that despite the external validation in her standing as an instructor from her advisor and faculty in the dance department, she continued to worry that her standing as a graduate student would disqualify her instructional practices in the eyes of her students. As a third-year GTA, Megan stated that she had "grown so much. It took me a full year to ditch my imposter syndrome and now I know what I'm capable of." To varying degrees, most GTAs experience imposter syndrome that affected their practice as instructors and students in the university.

These feelings of being an imposter in the academy correspond to GTAs' felt vulnerability in the academy and consequent perceived authority and autonomy as composition instructors (Table 8, Figure 10). Due to their standing as both students and instructors, GTAs experience the academy from a unique perspective. This awareness of their liminal positionality in the academy as both student and instructor contributes to the composition GTAs' sense of disempowerment. Jill revealed that she saw GTAs valued as "cheap, contingent labor" in the university. Similarly, Anne felt "expendable in some ways" and thus worked extremely hard to be "checking the boxes of professionalism" to ensure that "this opportunity… isn't taken away from [her]." All the GTAs in this study also expressed an awareness of neoliberal university

values that impact their positionality in the university. When asked about the values of higher education, Rachel immediately responded with “I’d definitely say money.” Anne expanded on these values by explaining that university systems are “turning students into consumers and less than into learners who can just be there to expand themselves.” This recognition of neoliberal values affects GTAs’ perceived authority and autonomy as composition instructors. Jill did not see herself as having authority in the academy because she was “a consumer of it as well.” Jill explained that her place in the academy was not to have authority but to be relatable to her students and, in essence, believed that is the ultimate role of a GTA: “My job is to be relatable. That’s my role.” From this relatability, Jill saw herself as a mentor to her students who must be responsive to their needs. However, Jill also saw her instructional practices as constrained by the university systems: “we have to run a certain service that the university dictates.” In navigating these constraints, Sara explained that “the best instructor I can be is going to honor my own experiences in the classroom with these students at [the university] and how that's requiring me to adapt [my instructional practices].” Jill and Sara understand that the common curriculum provided by the composition program constrains their instructional practices in the classroom. However, these constraints may contradict their responsibility to effectively meet their students’ needs. It is clear that these composition GTAs experience vulnerability in their position in the academy that affects their perceived autonomy as instructors in the university and, consequently, their teaching practices.

Although these GTAs often experienced disempowerment in the university due to the constraints on their teaching practice, they also value their graduate experiences. Jill expressed immense excitement to be teaching composition and revealed that “I have to believe that as a GTA, we're not just contingent labor. We're also magic in a way in that we have feet in both

worlds." Jill believed that her autonomy as an instructor in the university is derived from this feeling of "magic" and she continually worked to be an efficient composition instructor for her students. Rebecca, similarly, recognized the constraints that these university systems place on those in academia but that "I think to be in education or to be an academic though, you kind of have to have faith in the greater purpose or in a higher calling in order to stick it out." Megan noted that her experience as a GTA gave her space to grow not only as an instructor, but also as a student. Her role as an instructor provided her with insight into the academy that supported her development in her MFA program. Due to her previously discussed experiences in her discipline, she explained that "it's really just as a GTA that I felt I had space to grow and learn." Performing the multiple roles required of a composition GTA can be overwhelming. However, while they may be experiencing disenchantment with the academy, they are also expressing joy in their disciplinary academic studies and instructional practices in the first-year composition classroom.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: GTAS' INTERACTIONS WITH UNIVERSITY ACTIVITY SYSTEMS

This chapter is informed by the literature reviewed in chapters one and two and activity theory, which was discussed in Chapter 3 and is briefly reviewed below. These theoretical frameworks and scholarship provide insight into the complex systems that impact GTAs' professional development as emerging disciplinary scholars and composition instructors. Activity theory is used to model the overlapping systems that influence composition GTAs' approach to teaching FYC courses and their concurrent disciplinary development. This model reveals contradictions between the different systems that impact composition GTAs. These contradictions provide openings for collaboration and learning for the WPAs who seek to support composition GTAs as effective composition instructors. Subsequent to this discussion, Engström's matrix of expansive learning (2001) is used to consider ways in composition programs and WPAs can provide openings for continued learning practices and collaboration between composition GTAs and the composition program.

The first step in this process necessitates reviewing the research questions that shaped this project. The first research question – *How does an English department GTA's disciplinarity and ecology of influence affect their pedagogical goals and approaches to teaching first-year composition as they progress in their graduate program?* – is informed by the results, subsequent case studies, and discussion from the previous chapter. Composition GTAs' are greatly influenced by their educational background and identity in both their teaching practice as composition instructors and their development as disciplinary scholars. Most GTAs referenced successful undergraduate programs in English that inspired them to commit to a discipline of study. These successful experiences included scholarships, awards for their scholarly work, and

the appointment of teaching assistantships. These undergraduate experiences also included the mentorship of faculty that further encouraged and guided the participants to apply to graduate programs. Once the participants were committed to these disciplinary graduate programs and hired as composition GTAs, their teaching practices are initially shaped by the Writing Pedagogy Education (WPE) program provided by the university's composition program. This program includes a week-long orientation, a semester long practicum course, and small mentor groups. The writing studies and composition focused curriculum introduces and provides a foundation for the pedagogical theory that grounds composition GTAs' approach to teaching writing in the FYC classroom. The WPE program provides support through the provided composition curriculum, GTA cohort, the composition directors, and the small group mentors. After this first semester and its intense focus on writing studies and composition, participants begin to settle into their instructional practices and graduate studies. The valued support of their composition GTA cohort begins to be supplanted with their disciplinary cohort from their specific disciplinary programs. These participants also begin the process of finding a dedicated mentor in their disciplinary program. This entrenchment in disciplinary writing practices and supports is a significant impact on the way in which composition GTAs view the practice of writing and the consequent teaching of writing. As composition GTAs progress in their disciplinary programs and their ecologies of influence shift to incorporate more disciplinary knowledges, they begin to adopt discipline specific writing practices that influence their teaching practices in the composition classroom.

The second research question – *How do systems of power within the university impact GTAs' pedagogical goals and approaches to teaching first-year composition and their perception of self-efficacy and empowerment as instructors?* – is explored more thoroughly in

this chapter using activity theory. The previous discussion in Chapter 4 provided insights into how composition GTAs perceive systems of power and authority in the university. The participants unanimously mentioned that these systems of power are motivated by neoliberal logics and values. These logics and values include academic capitalism, prioritization of research over teaching, and scarcity of resources dedicated to programs in the humanities. It should also be noted that in a neoliberal system that has consumerist values, composition GTAs who hold few formal accreditations and are awarded a small stipend experience vulnerability in their contingent positions. This vulnerability impacts composition GTAs perceived efficacy as composition instructors and results in a lack of autonomy as instructors of record in the university. The following use of activity theory models the university systems that composition GTAs interact with as they develop into disciplinary scholars and as composition instructors. The contradictions between these systems provide openings for new collaborations and learning cycles that can helps WPAs support and guide composition GTAs as future scholars and writing instructors.

A Review of Activity Theory Methodology

The participants' ecologies of influence and the neoliberal systems in the university they interact with are well suited to analysis using activity theory. The previous discussion chapter focuses on the voices of the GTA participants in this study and their perspective on their disciplinarity, mentorship and support systems, and the university systems that impact their autonomy and efficacy as composition instructors. That discussion informs the ways in which the different activity systems discussed in this chapter impacts composition GTAs' professional development as composition instructors and disciplinary scholars. This section employs activity theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Leontiev, 2005; Engström, 1987), also known as cultural-historical

activity theory (CHAT), to model the overlapping activity systems that composition GTAs must interact with in their roles as student, instructor, and emerging disciplinary scholar. Activity theory provides a theoretical framework that can help us understand the contradictions and subsequent opportunities for growth within the contradictions of these systems. Finally, Engeström's (2001) matrix of expansive learning is used to understand how scholars in writing studies and composition and WPAs can support their GTAs' disciplinary and professional development.

Activity theory was originally conceptualized by Lev Vygotsky (1978) in the 1920s and 1930s and expanded upon by his peers, Alexei Leontiev (1978) and Sergei Rubinstein. In the first generation, as termed by Yrjö Engeström (2001), Vygotsky created the concept of *mediation*, which is graphically visualized in the famous triangular model (see Figure 11).

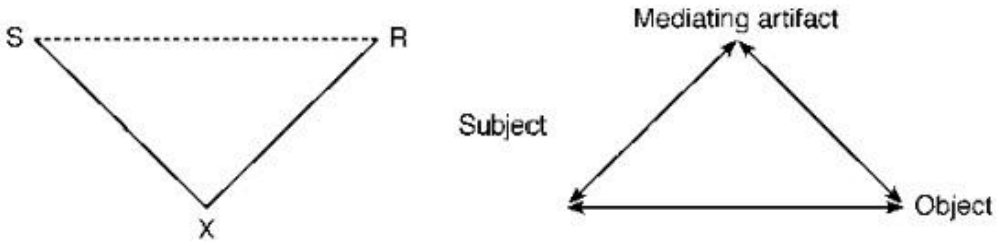

Figure 11
Vygotsky's model of mediated act and its common reformulation (Engeström, 2001, p. 134).

In this model, we see the conditioned connection between stimulus (S) and response (R) which is extended from a mediated act (X). This concept of cultural mediation is often reformulated as the triad of subject, object, and mediating artifact. This first iteration of activity theory was revolutionary in that it allowed for the consideration of cultural artifacts as the individual could no longer be understood without their societal contexts. Leontiev then expanded upon Vygotsky's work in the second generation of activity theory by recognizing the limitation of

Vygotsky's individually focused unit of analysis. Leontiev saw a difference between individual action and a collective activity. His theory was never graphically visualized into a model of a collective activity system until Yrjö Engeström created the structure of a human activity system (see Figure 12).

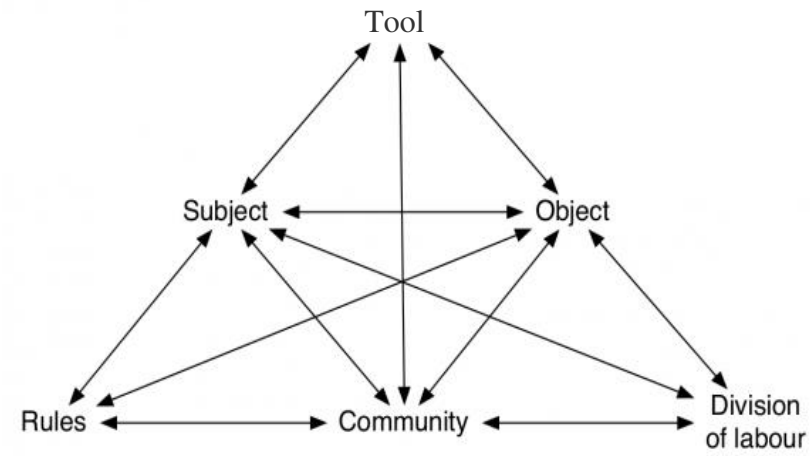

Figure 12
The structure of a human activity system (Engeström, 1987, p. 78)

This model expands Leontiev's work to account for cultural and historical factors that shape an activity system.

The third generation of activity theory includes Engeström's expansion of Leontiev's work and the subsequent efforts to apply the theory to complex, socially mediated actions and decision making (Engeström, 1987; 2001). This iteration stemmed from a need to develop conceptual tools to understand multiple perspectives and networks of interacting activity systems (Figure 13). Due to its ability to analyze collective action, activity theory has been used by scholars in writing studies and composition (Bazerman & Russell, 2003; Evans, 2003; Ketter & Hunter, 2003; Palmquist, 2022; Bradbury et al., 2023), education (Abdullah, 2014; Burke, 2020;

Cartaut & Bertone, 2009), and other diverse fields such as instructional technology, software development, and human computer interaction. The

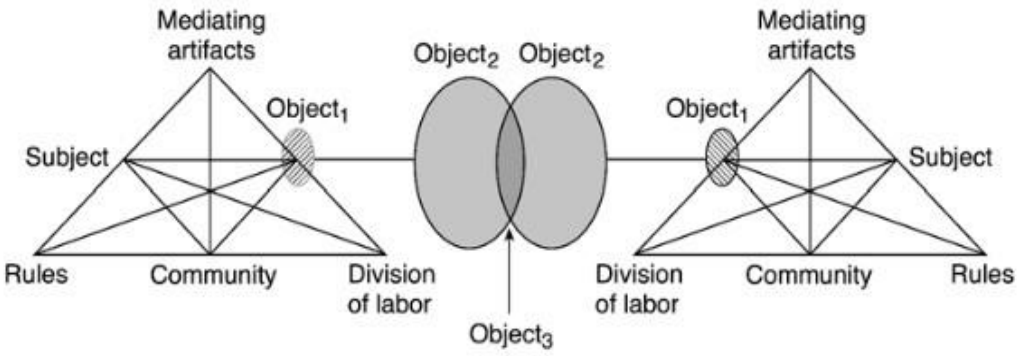

Figure 13
Two interacting activity systems as a minimal model for the third generation of activity theory (Engeström, 2001, p. 136).

A more recent elaboration of activity theory explores how activity systems may interact with each other or are embedded in larger systems of activity. For example, in using activity theory as a framework to explore how the gtPathways Writing Integration Program at Colorado State University is influenced by state and university structures, Bradbury et al. (2023) envision interacting activity systems as embedded and overlapping with one another. This model of embedded activity systems is an expansion of the third generation of activity theory. Palmquist (2022) models these embedded activity theories in the application of activity theory to the overlapping systems of the WAC Clearinghouse publishing organization. This model of embedded activity systems is visualized for this project in Figure 14 below. These embedded activity systems shape the ways in which GTAs perceive their efficacy and autonomy as composition instructors in the university. These systems also impact the professional and disciplinary development of GTAs in their MA and MFA programs.

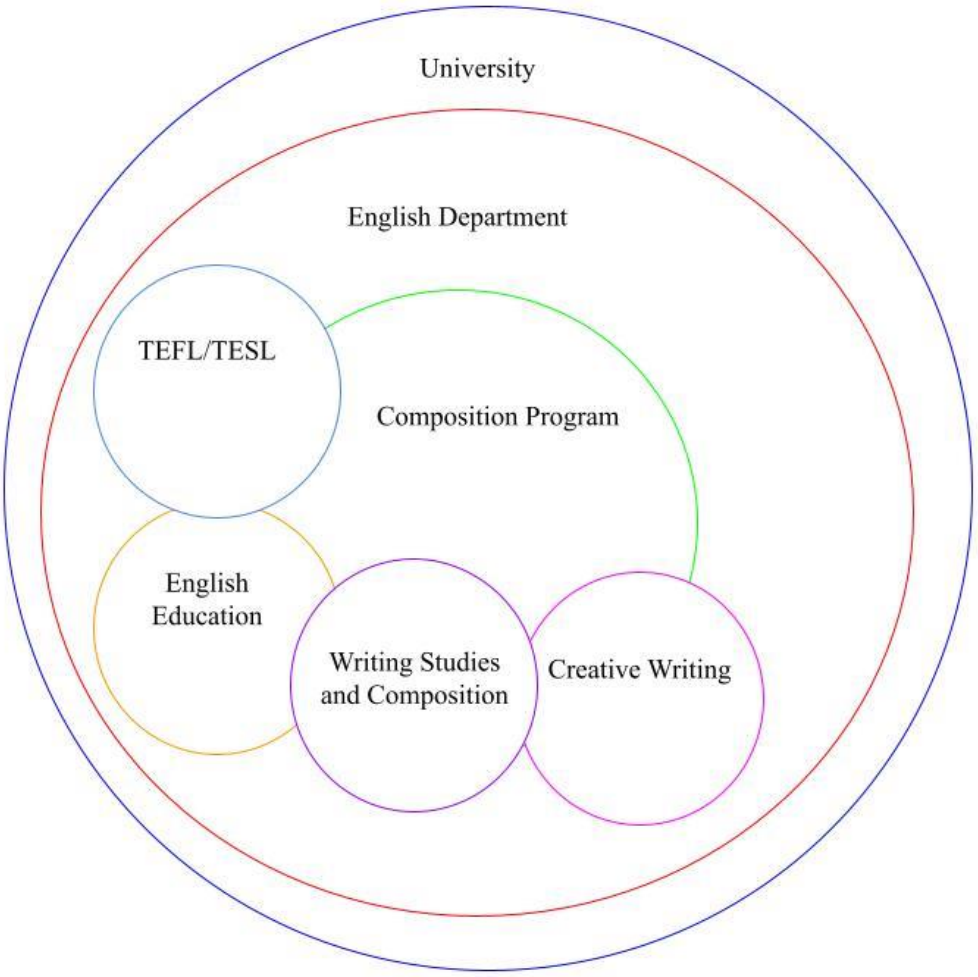

Figure 14
Embedded and overlapping activity systems.

Developing the University Model: Contrasting and Complimenting Goals and Values in the University

Using Engeström's model of an activity system (Figure 12) and the ensuing model of overlapping activity systems (Figure 13), the activity systems implicated in this study involving composition GTAs were modeled (Figure 14). In performing their roles as graduate students, composition instructors, and emerging disciplinary scholars, composition GTAs move within and between these systems. The overarching university system in this model encompasses the

students enrolled across the university as subjects who are completing the activity (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). This system operates according to rules including state and federal guidelines and community values such as the university's "Principles of Community-." For this system, the neoliberal logics and values discussed in chapter one and chapter four are seen as mediating tools in this system. The administrators, faculty, departments, and disciplines may be seen as the communities involved in accomplishing the shared desire outcome. This desired outcome was derived from the vision statement found on the university's homepage:

CSU has produced record enrollment, built on all-time highs in student diversity and student success; record fundraising far outpacing ambitious goals; groundbreaking research driven by a highly productive faculty; a campus revitalized by a transformational building campaign; and, perhaps most important, an unrivaled learning environment where 9 of 10 recent graduates say they would choose CSU again and rate their education as excellent.

From this statement, it is clear the university valued its student diversity and success, fundraising operations, research that is driven by productive faculty, and learning environment. The individuals and collectives that worked within the university therefore share these accomplishments and goals. However, the "most important" outcome that motivated these collectives is the "unrivaled learning environment." Consequently, the overlapping systems implicated in this model had their own activity systems that shared this same motivation. The outcome of this shared motivation and vision was a university where "9 of 10 recent graduates say they would choose CSU again and rate their education as excellent." This desired outcome – satisfied graduates – is the object that unites the embedded activity systems in this model. This shared motivation and object provides the foundation for analyzing the embedded activity systems implicated in this study and visualized in Figure 14.

Within the larger university system is the English department. This activity system shares the same motivation and object as the larger university system in this model. The composition program is also housed within the English department and similarly shares those the same motivation and object. In this model, the subjects of composition program activity system are the undergraduate students who enroll in FYC courses. A key component of activity theory is that the subject cannot directly act upon the object because it is a collective "artifact mediated and object oriented" system (Engeström, 2001, p. 136). Instead, the relationship between the subject and the object is mediated by the tools, or artifacts. While there are many tools in this mediation, for this system, the tools include the common syllabus provided by the composition program that both constrain and enable the composition GTAs' instructional practice. The community and division of labor in the composition program activity system are other key tenets. Engeström (2001) referred to the "multi-voicedness" of an activity system that incorporated the different positions for participants and the diverse perspectives and histories they brought to the system. In networked activity systems, such as in this overlapping model, multi-voicedness was multiplied and was a source of "trouble and a source of innovation" (p. 136). This multi-voicedness as a result of the community and division of labor in these overlapping systems is explored further in the next section. For now, it is important to note that the community – comprised of disciplinary departments and their faculty – and the division of labor – comprised of faculty, WPAs, administrative staff, and the composition GTAs that move among these systems – are key components in this activity system model. The rules in this activity system do not refer only to the codified regulations that govern an activity, but also to the cultural norms that influence behavior (Engeström, 2001). However, for this system it is useful to view the rules as the "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition" (2014) as

the learning outcomes that guide the instructional practices of composition instructors – including GTAs – who taught FYC courses.

The English department also houses the different English disciplines represented in this study: writing studies and composition, TEFL/TESL, creative writing, and English education. These MA and MFA programs have a goal of producing high quality graduates who can contribute to the field as emerging disciplinary scholars and are prepared to be successful in their post-graduation endeavors. The composition GTA participants were enrolled in one of these four disciplinary MA or MFA programs and performed as graduate students, which are the subjects of the disciplinary activity system. However, in the composition program they were concurrently performing as part of the division of labor in their role as composition instructors. In navigating the different roles they performed in these overlapping systems, composition GTAs must confront several challenges and contradictions including their division of labor between the roles they performed in these overlapping systems, the disciplinary values and practices of writing, and the role of mentorship in their disciplinary program and in the composition program.

One of the primary contradictions they must confront is the workload required by the composition GTA program as composition instructors for FYC courses and their disciplinary program as graduate students and emerging disciplinary scholars. In this university, within the first semester the composition program requires GTAs to participate in a week-long orientation prior to the start of their first semester and a semester-long practicum course. The program also requires GTAs to participate in smaller cohorts with a designated faculty mentor. These smaller cohorts are required to observe their mentor teaching a FYC course for the entirety of the first semester while concurrently teaching their first FYC course. This is a robust writing education pedagogy (WPE) program that provided composition GTAs with a foundation in writing

pedagogy that is focused in the field of WSC. The goal of this intense WPE program is to support the new GTAs in becoming effective composition instructors and in providing their first-year composition students with a rigorous composition course that will support students' college and professional careers. Thus, the composition program system moves the subjects – the enrolled students – towards the university and composition program's common object, which is the satisfaction of recent graduates.

The disciplinary MA and MFA programs have the same object as the composition program, which is to produce satisfied graduates. However, in their disciplinary system, composition GTAs do not perform as part of the division of labor as they do in the composition program, but rather as the subject. The first challenge to the multiple roles GTAs must perform is balancing the intense workload required of both the composition program and their disciplinary program of study. It should also be noted that all these disciplinary MA and MFA programs require an intense focus from their graduate students as they are apprenticed into that discipline. Graduate coursework is often overwhelming in its base workload and time requirement. Students not only take on an immense amount of reading and disciplinary writing assignments for their courses but are required to produce a long-term thesis project. As mentioned by each participant in this study, the duties and responsibilities of a GTA often far exceeded the allotted 20 hours a week that the composition program formally requires and this, in turn, compromises their ability to complete their own course work. This challenge is further complicated by the low GTA stipend that necessitates many GTAs to find additional employment opportunities to make ends meet. This study has shown that in navigating between these systems and confronting this challenge, composition GTAs were more likely to compromise their own graduate coursework in order to be more effective composition instructors.

Another contradiction GTAs must navigate within these systems are the values, or rules, of different disciplinary approaches to writing. The composition department strictly adheres to the State SLOs that are aligned to the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (2014) as primary learning outcomes for all students enrolled in a FYC course, which is shown by these learning outcomes place in the composition program activity system. To illustrate these learning outcomes preeminence in guiding FYC instruction, it is a requirement that these learning outcomes are on each composition GTAs' syllabus for their FYC courses. As a means to align assignments and coursework to these learning outcomes, the composition GTAs are provided with a common curriculum as the primary tool, or artifact. This curriculum includes daily lessons, assignment prompts, and rubrics. Although most participants expressed immense gratitude for the support of a common curriculum, it is also clear that as they progressed in their disciplinary program, their understanding of writing began to align with their chosen discipline and deviated from the explicit instructional practices in the common curriculum.

As composition GTAs progressed in their program, they also gain confidence and autonomy as writing instructors. It is notable that most GTAs in this study expressed concern that the common curriculum was unable to meet their students' needs in the FYC classroom. Consequently, composition GTAs felt a need to change the curriculum based on their disciplinary knowledge and experience as composition instructors. For example, the creative writing MFA program stated on its institutional homepage that their program "offers a balance of intimate and intensive writing workshops with courses in literature, form and technique." GTAs in the creative writing MFA program were consequently entrenched in literary studies and a writing community that was built around the "intimate and intensive writing workshops." This focus on workshopping as an integral component of the writing process is echoed by Sara, a

second-year creative writing GTA, who would revise the peer review process in her FYC courses to more closely resemble the workshops she participated in. It should also be noted that GTAs in the creative writing MFA program have the opportunity to teach introductory creative writing courses in place of FYC after enrolling in a graduate level course titled "Teaching Creative Writing." From these programmatic values, it is clear that creative writing GTAs were steeped in a creative writing culture that has different pedagogical approaches and guiding rules to the teaching of writing than the composition program.

In a slight contrast, the writing studies and composition program stated on its institutional homepage that their graduates "study in top tier rhetoric and composition Ph.D. programs, teach composition and rhetoric at secondary and post-secondary levels, and work for social change through careers in government, publishing, industry, and non-profit organizations." It is clear that this disciplinary program envisioned its graduating students as effective scholars and instructors in composition and rhetoric. Consequently, the writing studies and composition MA program had goals that align with the composition program. However, in addition to this focus on the teaching of composition and rhetoric, the writing studies and composition program also emphasized a programmatic focus on "analysis of and engagement with diverse contexts for writing, [in which] students create and apply methods for addressing shared social problems in classrooms and communities." This emphasis on social change certainly affected the pedagogical views of the writing studies and composition GTAs. For example, Rebecca explained that she integrated conversation as a key pedagogical strategy that was aligned with her goal to empower her students to recognize the inherent power of their written and spoken voice for civic engagement. While the values and goals of the writing and composition MA program are somewhat aligned with those of the composition program, there are distinct areas of dissonance

that impacted the writing studies and composition GTAs' pedagogy in the FYC classroom. This area of dissonance may best be summarized in the approach to social justice themes in the composition classroom. While there is a clear emphasis on social justice in the graduate program, composition GTAs struggled to find that same focus in the WPE program. This perceived dissonance contributed to the challenge of aligning their disciplinary practices as graduate students with their pedagogical practices as composition instructors.

A final contradiction is the role of mentorship in the English department and the university. It is clear in this study and others (Finch & Fernández, 2014, Shannon et al., 1998; Reid, 2008) that mentorship is a critical component for graduate student professional development. The composition program provided new composition GTAs with a smaller cohort and faculty mentor in the division of labor. This practice contributes to the "multi-voicedness" of the community in the composition program (Engström, 2001). However, in their attempt to expose composition GTAs to different composition faculty by switching mentor observers and discontinuing the small cohort meetings, the composition program contributed to the lack of a single dedicated support that most GTAs need. The discontinuation of these smaller cohorts and lack of a consistent composition mentor resulted in GTA dissatisfaction with their assigned mentor.

Consequently, in this study most participants experienced dissatisfaction with their mentor or that this support disappeared after the first semester. In each disciplinary program in the English department, graduate students were provided a default advisor before being encouraged to find a faculty mentor to support their research interests, professional development, and thesis project. For some participants, finding a dedicated mentor facilitated their professionalization into their respective fields and affirmed their role in the university. For

others, the lack of a dedicated mentor devalued their time spent in graduate school. As is clear in the university's statement referenced earlier, research produced by "a highly productive faculty" is a clear priority in their vision. However, mentoring as a component of teaching is consistently devalued in the neoliberal university systems that consistently prioritizes faculty service and research output. As Samuels (2017) explained, "One reason it is so easy to devalue teaching in higher education is the notion that anyone can teach but only a few special people can do research" (p. 31).

This neoliberal logic can be applied to the role of mentoring as well. Mentoring as a service component in the division of labor is undervalued. As Reid (2008) explained, "scholarship supports mentoring as part of a comprehensive, multifaceted education for TAs who are teaching composition. The literature on teacher-preparation pays scan attention, however, to the task of mentor-preparation" (p. 51). Reid (2008), continued to illustrate that like the myth that 'good writers *naturally*, without explicit practice or study, make good teachers,' there is a myth that good teachers *naturally* make good mentors. Similarly, Finch and Fernández (2014) noted a significant lack of research regarding effective mentoring methods, and those that did exist were focused on mentoring undergraduate students. However, effective mentoring for graduate students must include acting as an "ambassador" between the mentor's mentees and the institution (Reid, 2008, p. 52). Furthermore, while the specific practices of mentoring may vary, Finch and Fernández (2014) pointed out that the mentor-mentee relationship should focus on helping the mentee with "professional and career development, role modeling, and psychological support" (p. 70). I believe these relationship outcomes between a mentor and mentee should be expanded to include navigating the complex systems that graduate students must learn to successfully navigate as they perform their multiple roles in the university systems. In

considering these three contradictions composition GTAs confront within and between these activity systems, the composition program has an opening to provide meaningful mentoring opportunities that can help GTAs as they develop into disciplinary scholars and effective composition instructors.

Matrix of Expansive Learning: Finding New Openings for Mentorship and Collaboration

For this project, the next step was to use these three contradictions – *the division of labor between the roles composition GTAs performed in these overlapping systems, the disciplinary values and practices of writing between a GTA's disciplinary program and the composition program, and the role of mentorship in their disciplinary program and in the composition program* – found with activity theory and apply that learning to Yrjö Engeström's (2001) conceptualized matrix of expansive learning. This matrix enables a closer look at the embedded activity systems and contradictions previously discussed. The ensuing analysis provides openings for learning and collaboration between activity systems that can work to support and guide composition GTAs as they develop into effective composition instructors and emerging disciplinary scholars.

This matrix relies on situated learning theory originally conceptualized by Lave and Wenger (1991) that is predicated on the concept that people who share a desired outcome and a care for what they do will learn how to improve their practice as they regularly interact. This desire to improve, or learn, is derived from the participation in "culturally valued collaborative practices in which something useful is produced" (Engeström, 2001, p. 141). This matrix, pictured below in Table 9, was used by Engeström to visualize how this expansive learning activity produces new patterns of work activity. To provide an example of the application of expansive learning theory, Engeström (2001) used this matrix to understand the learning

challenge in children's health care in Helsinki. The first step in this process is to identify the learning challenge. For Engeström, this learning challenge was to find new ways of collaboratively planning and monitoring children's care among the parents and practitioners from different caregiver organizations. Next, Engeström identified the different and interconnected activity systems that are implicated in this learning challenge. A critical component to this step is recognizing the historical contexts, communities, and division of labor that impact these interconnected activity systems. This context informed the contradictions identified among these embedded activity systems. Finally, the learning that can arise from these contradictions is viewed as an expansive cycle rather than a singular outcome.

Table 8

Engeström's (2001) matrix for the analysis of expansive learning

	Activity system as a unit of analysis	Multi-voicedness	Historicity	Contradictions	Expansive Cycles
Who are learning?					
Why do they learn?					
What do they learn?					

How do they learn?					

For this project, the embedded and overlapping activity systems pictured in Figure 14 and discussed earlier in this section are applied to Engeström's matrix for the analysis of expansive learning. The first step is to identify the learning challenge. As has been previously acknowledged in this project, the composition program provides prodigious support for the composition GTAs through the writing pedagogy education (WPE) program that is required for all new GTAs. However, the small group mentoring cohorts provide an opening for an improved mentoring program through the composition program. A consistent and dedicated composition mentor has the potential to provide guidance and oversight for GTAs who are interested in modifying the common curriculum, professional development as composition instructors, and psychological support (Finch & Fernández, 2014). Therefore, for this project, the learning challenge is to design a model for such a mentoring program in the composition program. Yet, it should be remembered that this learning challenge is to *design* this model by facilitating collaboration among collectives and individuals in the implicated and interconnected systems. The process of designing necessitates their sustained collaboration and engagement in this endeavor.

A key component to this matrix that analyzes opportunities for expansive cycles of learning is what Engeström identified as a *conflictual questioning* of the existing practices (2001). In considering theories of organizational learning, Engeström drew on Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) framework of cyclic knowledge creation that is based on conversions between tacit and explicit knowledge. This framework includes four stages: socialization, externalization,

combination, and internalization. A problematic assumption in this framework is that the assignment for a learning challenge is typically decreed from a higher authority and thus accepted among all implicated parties. This assumption then translates to a model where the first step of socializing is free of any conflict. However, adopting Engeström's inclusion of *conflictual questioning* provides openings for study and analysis of these systems that can result in organizational learning. I believe the process of articulating this project, conducting the study, and using activity theory to find contradictions between the implicated systems lends itself to this model. The interconnecting systems that are identified in Figure 14 include communities, programs, and individuals who do an immense amount of work to support composition GTAs. However, the process of conflictual questioning can acknowledge that work while looking for openings that can result in expansive cycles of learning to further support GTAs as composition instructors and emerging disciplinary scholars.

The implicated activity systems for this learning challenge include the university, English department, the composition program, and the different disciplinary MA and MFA programs. Contradictions between these activity systems include the division of labor between the roles composition GTAs performed in these overlapping systems, the disciplinary values and practices of writing between a GTA's disciplinary program and the composition program, and the role of mentorship in their disciplinary program and in the composition program. These contradictions were discussed in more length previously in this chapter. These contradictions provide insights to openings for expansive cycles of learning.

Table 9
Matrix analyzing expansive learning in answer to the learning challenge.

	Activity system as a unit of analysis	Multi-voicedness	Historicity	Contradictions	Expansive Cycles
Who are learning?	English department, composition department, disciplinary MA and MFA programs, composition faculty, composition GTAs	Voices of GTAs, composition directors, composition faculty, disciplinary faculty			
Why do they learn?			GTAs are inducted as composition instructors via a WPE from the composition department	GTAs' professionalization into a discipline, development as composition instructors	
What do they learn?				GTAs are entrenched in disciplinary communities that include writing practices, theories/values WPE from composition program	Expansion of mentorship opportunities from composition faculty; from singular to network

How do they learn?			WPE, mentorship, cohorts		Dialogue between current composition GTAs, composition faculty, composition directors, and faculty in disciplinary programs Mentorship opportunities

In considering the interconnected and overlapping activity systems identified in this project, it is important to remember that the composition GTAs must navigate these different systems during their tenure as composition instructors and graduate students. A key contradiction that has been explored is the role of mentorship for composition GTAs. From this study and others (Finch & Fernández, 2014, Shannon et al., 1998; Reid, 2008), the role of a dedicated mentor is crucial for the professional development of graduate students. Small group mentors are provided by the composition department and include a few members of the composition faculty. However, these mentorship groups are discontinued after the first semester and composition GTAs seem to then rely on their disciplinary mentor for guidance if they are able to identify one. Composition GTAs without mentors struggle to find external affirmation that validates their status as instructors in the university. From this matrix of expansive learning (Table 10), I propose opening dialogue and mentorship opportunities between current composition GTAs and other composition faculty who teach first year composition courses. Currently, composition GTAs are generally kept separate from the other composition faculty. This separation devalues the role GTAs occupy as composition instructors. From expanding the role of composition faculty mentors from the singular small mentor cohort in the beginning of the semester to a

larger network, GTAs are included in the professional community and are seen as viable members of the larger body of composition faculty. The socialization of composition GTAs into the professional community of composition instructors also illustrates commitment to the potential for compositions GTAs to continue their development as future professional scholars and instructors.

This proposed opening is not a singular solution to the identified learning challenge, but rather an opportunity for organizational learning. This opening does not necessitate the revision of the current WPE program that the composition program provides but rather serves as an expansion. Rather than sequester the composition GTA meetings separately from the larger composition faculty meetings, the composition department may consider combining the two. This expansion would include composition GTAs in the professional discourse community that they already partially occupy in their role as composition instructors. This would also provide them with the opportunity to interact with current faculty in the composition program they are otherwise unlikely to meet. These interactions may provide new mentorship opportunities that include discussion on different pedagogical approaches to FYC courses, classroom management styles, and disciplinary approaches to teaching FYC courses. In providing the opportunity for this dialogue, there is the continued possibility for new questions, processes, and collaborations between these different systems.

6. FINAL THOUGHTS AND NEXT STEPS

As I begin to end this project, I return to the feminist methods used in Chapter 2 in order to again position myself in relation to this project, the participants, and the other scholars who contribute to the topic of composition GTAs. In Chapter 2, I mentioned the particular kind of discomfort that accompanies the process of using colleagues and friends as research participants. It was clear that this was not a process I was going to take lightly as I wanted to represent their stories with care and respect. I was also aware that this project is an endeavor in the cocreation of knowledge between myself and the participants. When participants reviewed their case study narratives and we discussed how the narratives would shape the resulting discussion, I was unprepared for their unequivocal support. I worried that I would place undue scrutiny on these participants even as I considered their stories as critical for the continued progress of supporting composition GTAs. The participants' willingness to share their experiences and candor during this process were invaluable. I believe their concerns are critical for the improvement of the collaborative processes in the WPE program, but I worry that these concerns may overshadow the incredible care and work these instructors do for their students. During this process, I also worried about placing my own thoughts over theirs and misrepresenting their experiences. However, with their collaboration, I believe their stories are honestly presented in this study.

I would also be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the deep impact their stories and support have had on my own practice as a scholar and instructor. I returned to the composition classroom to fill in for an instructor on leave this semester, and the experience has brought this study full circle. My current instructional practices have certainly been impacted by the participants in this study. For example, I am revising the peer review process as put forth by Sara and offering optional rhetorical grammar workshops which are inspired by Anne and Rachel. Rebecca

encouraged me to integrate more opportunities for conversation in the classroom while Megan motivated me to consider how creative writing practices can add depth and complexity to our daily writing prompts. And Jill made me consider the ways in which my classroom is accessible to all students and to me more mindful of those with different abilities. Clearly, the process of working with these brilliant composition GTAs during this project has improved my own instructional practices.

In concluding this phase of the project, I also think it is necessary to revisit Lev Vygotsky's (1978) *zone of proximal development*, or the ZPD. Vygotsky (1978) defines the zone of proximal development as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving" (p. 86). My initial introduction to Vygotsky and the ZPD was in an educational theory primer textbook assigned during a graduate course at the University of Denver. The primer introduced foundational educational theorists such as Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky. As a result of the primer, and of the course's affection for the ZPD, I have continued to use this term in regard to my own instructional practices. However, it was not until I was introduced to activity theory by my advisor for this project that I realized how foundational Vygotsky's work is for modern educational psychology. When I realized that the ZPD is the foundation for activity theory, I was bewildered and confused. But, finally, it is a bit clearer.

Engeström's theory of expansive learning is likewise predicated on activity theory and the ZPD. As previously discussed, the theory of expansive learning focuses on learning processes and opportunities that arise from networked activity systems. As agents from the different systems collaborate on the identified learning challenge, there is opportunity for organizational learning that aligns with Vygotsky's ZPD (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). In short,

as an organization collaboratively analyzes a learning challenge that has been identified due to contradictions between systems that need to be resolved, they must learn how to move into and through the ZPD. This process culminates in a sequence of learning actions in an expansive learning cycle that has been modeled by Engeström (2001) and reproduced below in Figure 15.

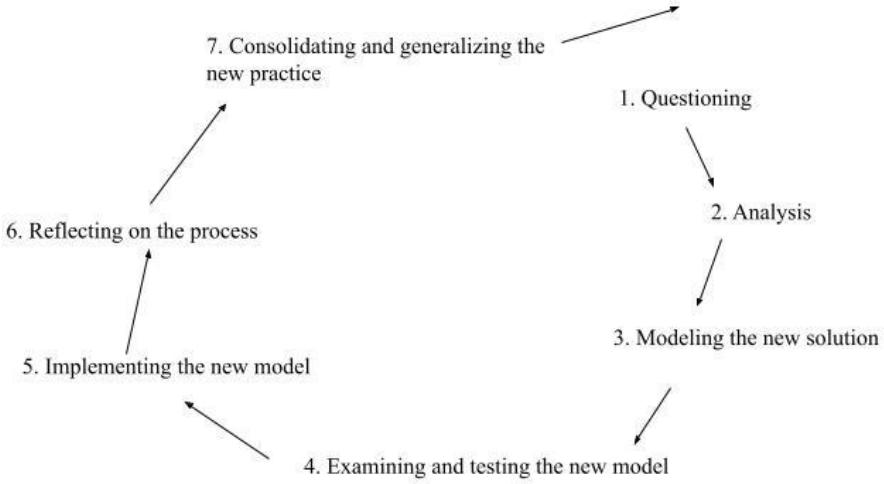

Figure 15
Engeström's sequence of learning actions in an expansive learning cycle (2001).

As noted in chapter five, this sequence of learning actions begins with individuals or collectives questioning the current process. And one thing I truly appreciate about the academy is the pursuit of quality questions that can produce new knowledge. Through this lens and my experience in the composition program as a GTA, I have been affected by the directors' and faculty's willingness to consider new perspectives and improve current systems. This consistent push for new knowledges and progressive change is a practice I greatly value and that I see formally

modeled and analyzed in Engeström's theory of expansive learning. Therefore, my goal with this project is not to critique current systems, but rather to look for openings that can lead to new processes that support the composition GTAs as both emerging disciplinary scholars and currently developing composition instructors.

In considering Engeström's model in Figure 15, I see this project as existing in the (1) questioning and (2) analysis stages. The two research questions that guided this project led to the use of activity theory analysis and use of expansive learning theory. Therefore, while this project concludes that GTAs' practices as emerging disciplinary scholars and composition instructors are significantly impacted by their ecologies of influence and the neoliberal university systems; it is also suggested that a mentoring program that encourages consistent and dedicated mentoring practices from composition faculty throughout the entirety of a composition GTA's time as a composition GTA at the university will further support their development as emerging disciplinary scholars and effective composition instructors. And this is where I leave this project. The next step would be to design new models that could be implemented in the composition program. This design process would necessitate involvement and collaboration from the implicated collectives and individuals.

Looking forward to the future of this topic, I also want to continue encouraging composition GTAs to advocate for their place as emerging disciplinary scholars and composition instructors in the university. As explored in Chapter 2, there is significant scholarship on the topic of GTAs, but very little of that scholarship is produced in tandem with GTAs and with a focus on their development as disciplinary scholars. I believe that if the field of writing studies and composition sees composition GTAs as necessary – which they do – and significant resources are dedicated to their development as composition scholars – which there are – then, as

the future professoriate, GTAs also need support and guidance as they align their instructional practices in the composition classroom with their burgeoning disciplinary identities.

As I consider next steps for this project, I am struck by the notion that this endeavor is an opening. I am fortunate enough to have stumbled upon a topic and issue that I truly care about. The participants, my advisor, and my own support system have played a large role in making this an enjoyable and intriguing process. I recognize areas that could use much improvement, such as the development of tools, and areas that I am extremely proud of, such as the case studies. Both these areas of pride and areas for growth make me certain that this is not a topic I am ready to leave behind. This excitement is heightened by my conversations with scholars in the field. Over winter break, I presented this project in part at the Conference for Writing and Well-Being in Tucson. By chance, Heidi Estrem – a scholar who is featured significantly in Chapter 2 – sat in on my panel. Our ensuing conversation provided insights and openings into this topic I had not yet considered from the perspective of a WPA. The opportunity to talk with scholars and learn from other institutional practices is an exciting prospect as I look towards the future of this project.

I see the project as a beginning rather than an ending. Though I may be ending my time as an MA candidate, I look forward to continuing my work with new educators. As is common, my future is uncertain regarding employment opportunities at the university level, but I know that I will continue to be involved in educational institutions. Whether my work will continue to involve composition GTAs or new educators at the secondary level, I am certain that my time spent on this project will continue to inform my work.

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