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Multiculturalism and FYC Teacher Training:
An Examination of GTA Perspectives on Being Trained to Teach in a Multicultural, College Classroom

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ABSTRACT
This research study was designed to determine graduate teaching assistants' (GTAs) perspective on their preparation to teach First Year Composition (FYC) in a multicultural teaching context and to determine the relevance of culturally responsive teaching to this experience. The study utilized the qualitative research methodology Portraiture and examined the experiences of three white, female English GTAs at a major urban university in the Midwest. The researcher found that each of the participants felt instruction about culturally responsive teaching would enhance their training, although it is not a concept that is a part of composition discourse. Moreover, they believed their training adequately prepared them to teach in a multicultural classroom context despite often feeling like they did not “know what to do” in their classrooms when issues related to cultural diversity arose. This seeming contradiction is discussed as the possible outcome of Shulman’s (1994) notion of the “plague of nostalgia”—which suggests that novice teachers are most comfortable repeating the behavior(s) of those who taught them the respective subject matter irrespective of the potential problems that may cause—and only a partial commitment to culturally responsive teaching. The study thus concludes with the claim that GTA training as well as FYC instruction must commit to multicultural education and, thus, culturally responsive teaching in order to ensure that no student is denied full access to higher education.
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CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

The Back Story

The first school bell that ever mattered to me was the one that began my first professional teaching job. Before that bell rang my heart raced with anticipation and excitement. I was ready! English I. 90 minutes. 39 students (on the roll at least). Fortier High School. Uptown New Orleans. Black students. Poor students. Just like me.

As I awaited that bell, I stood in the hallway near the classroom door and greeted each student as he/she walked in. My “good mornings” rang out like a song with a shifting melody. I really needed it to be a good morning. Although nervous, I was determined to make it the best first day ever (at least for me, since the students began class weeks prior and I was replacing their English I teacher who had suddenly quit).

When the bell rang, my pulse sky-rocketed, and I surveyed the class. No more than 20 students had actually shown up. I took a deep breath and smiled (desperately seeking other smiles that welcomed my presence) before I began my introduction.

“Good morning! I’m Ms. Recasner. I’ll be taking over...”

“Where you from?” a student interrupted. It wasn’t a routine question. He looked at me as though I were odd, different. I decided to make a little game of this so that I could relax (I never wondered if any of them were nervous about the new addition to the class).

“Where do you think I’m from?” I asked. For some minutes cities and states rang out as some students agreeably offered guesses.


Not all students were interested in my story. One student yelled, “Who give a damn?” as her response to my question. Others shot if-looks-could-kill glances my way. This was their effort at reminding me that I was not the center of
their worlds. I then asked the students offering guesses why all the places they mentioned were so geographically distant from New Orleans. I listened and watched as they came to the consensus that I didn’t look like I was from New Orleans, and, most importantly to them, I didn’t sound like I was from there.

Thinking I could immediately bridge this imagined geographical gap between us, I eloquently told the class my truth. “I’m from here. I was born on Hamburg Street. That’s in the St. Bernard, the 7th ward.” The St. Bernard is a housing project in New Orleans.

They laughed at my articulation—clear enunciation of every syllable in every word. They laughed.

“You prolly ain’ even gro up round Black people,” one student teased.

“Who tole ju bout wawds?” another student asked—a question that insisted I was not a native New Orleanian.

I didn’t answer. I was hurt. I had traveled all the way back to New Orleans on my mission to save the children in my hometown, only to be met with mockery. I asked the class if they had other questions about me. They did. By the end of this introduction, I had revealed my academic history (this only means I listed the schools I attended, nothing else was important at the time), what kind of music I liked, that I could dance, and that I liked reading, writing, and playing sports for fun. I also shared that I was single and had no children.

I thought revealing more about myself would bring me farther away from the trenches of otherness, but it didn’t. I was still an outsider. I was their color, but not their kind. My poor Black womanhood, my sistah story, was too foreign—it was fashioned in a world unreal to them, and told in a language they did not value.

I began this research project with this memory—my first day as a public school teacher—realizing it was a critical moment in my career. This story, my story, reveals a very common error many novice teachers make. Ladson-Billings (2006) says it best:
In my work as a teacher educator, I regularly see prospective teachers who approach teaching with romantic notions about students. They believe the goodwill and energy they bring to the classroom will be rewarded by enthusiastic, appreciative students, who will comply with their requests and return the love they purport to give their students. (p.31)

I was such a teacher. On my first day, I was only concerned with classroom management. After having been warned by the principal during my interview that I smiled too much, I focused on the classic Wong and Wong (2001) text, *How to Be an Effective Teacher: The First Days of School*, which warns, “The first days of school can make or break you” (p.3) and suggests, “The effective teacher establishes good control of the class in the very first week of school” (p.4). Control (i.e. classroom management) was my only concern, and I thought mine and the students’ shared group identity—being Black and natives of New Orleans—would facilitate my ability to control the happenings in the classroom. When that failed, I was overcome by a sense of personal failure. I had very little planned for day one in terms of student learning. Their lesson for the day was me!

Additionally, it was on this day, my first day as a teacher, that I began to feel guilty about my commitment to Standard Written English (SWE). I was ashamed and defensive. It was because I so readily embraced using “proper English” that the kids with whom I desired a connection saw me as an outsider, and for a while treated me as an outcaste. My solution was to commit to making sure they used English, in writing and in speech, in the same way that I did as a professional English teacher and as a successful student—a usage that had garnered praise for me throughout my life. Thus, I believed they would eventually learn to appreciate and value SWE the way that I had.
I became fully committed to “GUARDING THE TOWER” (Shaughnessy, 1997)—protecting the academy from those deemed unacceptable—and this defensive posture followed me from the high school classroom to my current role as a teacher of college English. The consequence of this disposition was that, like Fleckenstein (1992), I spent years abusing my students; my refusal to see their various strengths and focus primarily on the correctness of their grammar and mechanics in writing and speech was damaging. Therefore, this study is my social action, my dedication to “other people’s children” (Delpit, 1995), and my fight against “the myth of linguistic homogeneity” (Matsuda, 2006), which suggests that SWE is the norm and that there are no variations in language use in the U.S. Such an ideology that abuses students like my Fortier students (Black, poor, from urban and sometimes failing public schools, users of non-standard English vernaculars) and denies them access to higher education (Fox, 1999).

**Background of the Study**

Since composition courses began at Harvard University in the late 19th century (Brereton, 1995), the English classroom in higher education has been a contested site. Today English classrooms remain a site where ethnic minorities, especially those whose language performance marks them as “other” engage in a socio-political and academic battle. Though valiant efforts have been made, the marked students often must wave the white flag of cultural surrender, indicating a willful linguistic assimilation (if not complete cultural assimilation), which results in an erasure of cultural difference and a silencing of “marked” voices. J. Elspeth Stuckey (1991) makes this point clear:

> Literacy education begins in the ideas of the socially and economically dominant class and it takes the forms of socially acceptable subjects, stylistically permissible forms, ranges of difference and deviance, baselines of gratification. Becoming literate signifies
in large part the ability to conform or, at least appear conformist. The teaching of literacy, in turn, is a regulation of access. (p. 19)

The gate keeping function of composition courses has been well asserted by many composition scholars (see Villanueva, 1997). Yet, the limited success experienced by minority students—particularly, African American and Latino/a students—in First Year Composition (FYC) courses remains alarming (Ball and Lardner, 2005). When Mina Shaughnessy penned *Errors and Expectations* (1977) in response to the basic writing crisis in the CUNY system, she attempted a paradigm shift that would (if embraced) ideally lead to greater success among the many struggling basic writers granted admission to CUNY schools during this time, thus equalizing access in a time of open admissions. Although Shaughnessy’s focus was on basic writing—a notably different discipline than FYC—her concern was about access to the ivory towers of the academy, and currently (more than 30 years later) many African American students continue to struggle at disproportionate rates in FYC (Ball and Lardner, 2005), hence their access to quality higher education is threatened if not completely denied by this struggle.

First Year Composition as a focus, then, is critical in the study of writing in higher education because it is a site of regulation of access as the only university-level required course—a point highlighted by Crowley in 1998 and echoed by Yagelski in 2005—and it is often taught by the graduate teaching assistant (GTA), the least experienced departmental member—and economically efficient choice.

*Statement of the Problem*

First year composition (FYC) courses have historically operated and continue to operate as tools for maintaining the status quo. Yagelski (2005) claims schooling in the U.S. has not changed since the “advent of widespread compulsory education in the U.S. in the late 19th
century” (p. 265). Though Yagelski refers particularly to K12 education, slow progress toward embracing diverse perspectives in higher education is also evident. In her discussion of the history of composition, Crowley (1998) asserts, “Freshman English still serves American universities as a border checkpoint, the institutional site wherein students either provide proper identification or retreat to wherever they came from” (p. 160). This Crowley’s observation about FYC a century after its inception.

Despite this historic commitment to the status quo, the face of America’s university is changing. As Boyd et.al (2006) remind us, “Never in the history of the United States has there been a more urgent need for educators to join forces to create literacy classrooms that meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse learners.” Thus, a commitment to “a pedagogical paradigm that teaches to and through students’ personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments” (Gay, 2000, p. 24) is in high demand because of the increasingly multicultural status of the American college classroom.

Multicultural is a challenging concept to define, particularly because, as Spring (2004) suggests, the notion of culture in the U.S. is a very fluid if not ambiguous term. Nonetheless, if as Gay (2000) purports, culture “refers to a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as the lives of others,” then multicultural refers to the simultaneous presence of various systems within the same context. Those systems might be race-based, ethnicity-based, gender-based, religion-based, sexuality-based, and/or economic status-based.

Some systems, however, converge to create a dominant culture—that of “the most powerful members of society” (Spring, 2004, p. 3). In the U.S. white, middle class, heterosexual,
Christian men represent the dominant culture. This study is particularly interested in how equipped teachers are to address the needs of those students whose culture is dominated.

Furthermore, this study situates GTAs, a larger teaching force of FYC, as critical to the success of minority students in FYC classes, especially because teachers are often guards and provide surveillance at the checkpoint mentioned by Crowley. GTAs are literacy educators, and “as literacy educators, our fundamental purpose must become making sure that no student is excluded from full participation in classrooms and in the learning activities contained therein regardless of ethnic, cultural, or linguistic difference” (Boyd et. al., 2006, p.330). Responding to this charge requires more than introduction to curriculum and mere “professionalization” (Dobrin, 2005). As Ladson-Billings (2006) contends, “No curriculum can teach itself. It does not matter if teachers have access to exceptional curriculum if they do not have the instructional skills to teach all students” (p. 33). To this point, GTAs need effective preparation to teach. Particularly, they need training in pedagogies that ensure no student is excluded.

**Purpose of the Study**

The major purpose of this study was to determine whether or not GTAs believed their training adequately prepared them to teach in a multicultural setting. The data collected in the study revealed how GTAs interpreted content of training courses and if and how they applied knowledge gained from training courses to the classes they taught. The data also revealed whether or not GTAs valued discussions of or inclusion of multicultural perspectives in both their training and their teaching.

**Research Questions**

 Particularly, this study seeks answers to the following questions:
• What type of preparation is provided to graduate teaching assistants to help prepare them for teaching writing in a multicultural classroom?

• Do GTA’s feel adequately prepared to teach FYC in a multicultural classroom? More, specifically, to what do they attribute their feeling of preparedness or lack of preparedness?

• What do GTAs understand about culturally responsive teaching and how does their understanding shape their pedagogy?

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical theory and its branches—critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and borderlands theory, etc.—provide an analytical framework for exploring issues of power and powerlessness, social justice and inequity, and liberation and oppression in teaching and learning literacy. It offers a lens of optimism because it maintains “that man can be more than a manipulable subject in the production process of class society” (Kivisto, 2002, p.380).

Thus, critical theory is about liberation, freedom—a freedom that deficit theories about minority student achievement never espouse. Rather, deficit theories suggest inherent deficiencies in groups and often espouse pathology.

This notion of freedom mirrors the Freirean (2003) notion of liberation. Freire conceived a liberation that is contingent upon the use of problem-posing education, which calls for consciousness that informs action, is dialogue centered, and embraces education as the practice of freedom. This freedom in the pedagogical world is the offspring of a critical analysis of social, historical, political, and cultural contradictions—this realm of contradictions is essentially the place where all unfree subjects exist. If a subject or marginalized other is to reach full emancipatory potential, then the subject must embrace a self-critical positioning—one that acknowledges strengths and critiques limitations simultaneously (Giroux, 2003).
Despite its ostensible goodness, however, liberation as an effect of education is a seemingly foreign concept in the United States, one often criticized as idyllic (Morrell, 2005). As Giroux (2003), McLaren (2003), and Freire (2003) acknowledge, education, when used as a socialization mechanism (as it is in the U. S.), is more oppressive and inhibiting than it is liberating. Hence, outsider groups like African Americans and Latinos/as experience an education that attempts to change their consciousness about oppression as opposed to changing the oppressive situation (Freire, 2003). Woodson (1977), when commenting on the education of Blacks in the U.S., for instance, refers to this as the tragic mis-education of the Negro, a mis-education that led/leads to bondage of the mind as the educated Negro in America tried/tries earnestly to be more like his White male oppressor, instead of fighting to eradicate the oppression.

This mis-education occurred and still occurs in the system of schooling as an effect of ideological hegemony—the social, political, and historical positioning of dominant cultural values as norms—and is manifested in the presence of a hidden curriculum (Giroux, 2003). Boyd et. al. (2006) cite Apple’s 1979 definition of hidden curriculum; it is

“the tacit teaching to students of norms, values, and dispositions that goes on simply by their living in and coping with the institutional expectations and routines of schools day in and day out for a number of years.” (p.330)

For instance, when students are encouraged to follow a teacher’s instruction to avoid writing like they speak, there is an implicit devaluing of how central to one’s identity language as manifested in speech is. Further, there is a privileging of SWE, which closely resembles the speech of white, middle-class men. It is this hidden curriculum that is the threat to minority student empowerment. Thus, Hilliard (2001) argues, “Our response to the problem ultimately must
target ideology, not merely everyday individual behavior” (p. 15), even if the critique begins with the everyday.

As critical theory challenges notions of power and powerlessness, critical pedagogy examines the ways in which systems of power inform the reflection and action (Freire’s notion of *praxis*) of participants in teaching and learning. Therefore, if American education has been reported as having failed “to mitigate for all Americans the obstacles to full participation in the society; failed in redefining and redistributing power according to the country’s current realities” (Hackley, 1996, p. ix), then critical pedagogues must work to counter hegemonic regimes.

Combating this oppression begins with emancipatory literacy, and, as Morrell (2005) terms it, “Critical English Education.” Morrell says, “A critical English education is explicit about the role of language and literacy in conveying meaning and in promoting or disrupting existing power relations” (p.313). Freire argues that emancipatory literacy has a dual outcome. On the one hand, students will become literate about their personal histories—reading the world (Freire and Macedo, 2003). On the other, they will begin to understand and appropriate the codes and cultures of dominant groups—reading the word (Freire and Macedo, 2003). Morrell (2005) calls this the ability to “deconstruct dominant texts.” This level of literacy “demystifies” hidden realities while deconstructing and then reconstructing notions of power—tasks that necessitate the development of critical consciousness.

**Limitations**

Because “identities confine as well as expand our lives and the lives of those around us” (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 302), the closeness of the researcher to the subject of the research—i.e. she is a professional teacher of first year composition—created moments of distance from the research questions and engagement with the content and activity of the courses.
being observed. Thus, the role of observer at times became participant observer, which impacted the quantity and the quality of field notes.

Furthermore, only four GTAs volunteered to participate and only three met all criterion for participation. Additionally, all participants were White females. Each of the participants also taught Composition 102 courses with students from engineering learning communities. Thus, the majority of their students was majoring in engineering and was also White. According to the participants, many of the GTAs who were asked to participate did not because of the labor demands of the study—participants had to schedule time to meet with me as well as keep a weekly journal.
CHAPTER TWO:

Review of the Literature

Introduction

This chapter discusses the research that has influenced and shaped this study. This study relates GTA training, composition pedagogy and theory, critical theory, and culturally responsive teaching. The literature reveals the longstanding connection of critical theory to composition pedagogy and theory and the way this has influenced the training of writing teachers and the development of writing instruction. Thus, this chapter is divided into the following sections: composition studies and critical theory, culturally responsive teaching; and GTA development.

Composition Studies and Critical Theory

Although composition instructors have embraced a critical pedagogical ethos (Balester, 2000; Bizzell, 1992), the struggle for social justice continues in composition classrooms. In FYC, students are being guided away from incorporating their personal histories (especially where this requires usage of a language other than SWE) into their writings since the personal in academic writing is often marked as evidence of immaturity and lack of sophistication (Faigley, 1986). If the focus of composition instruction is getting a student to write the "Ideal Text" in an authoritative voice without focusing on the contextual nature of language and schooling, then instructors become complicit in the reinforcement of hegemonic ideology that situates those non-white, non-middle-class, non-male students as outsiders, as others, and, most significantly, as less than those possessing "normalized" identities. Lillis & Turner's (2001) comment is then validated:

When student texts match the academics' expectations of what academic writing should be, i.e. when they match the institutionally embedded socio-rhetorical norms of scientific
rationality, language remains invisible. When texts don’t match such expectations ... it is the student-writer’s language use that becomes the ‘problem.’ (p. 65)

Thus, if the goal is to use the clear and concrete language when composing, using Chicano Spanish and English as Anzaldúa does in “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” becomes problematic because the intended English-speaking audience might not understand the Chicano Spanish terms. The point here is that “the first step toward creating equitable literacy classrooms—and to leave no student behind—is to acknowledge that English teachers and teacher educators are complicit in the reproduction of racial and socioeconomic inequality all across U.S. schools” (Boyd et. al., 2006, p.334).

A second step then would be to acknowledge that “success in culturally diverse classrooms often depends on [teachers’] ability to perceive diversity as the norm and to view it as fundamental to all aspects of schooling” (Gay, 2005, p.xxi)—especially literacy learning. The liberating acts of reading and writing the world (Freire and Macedo, 2003) become informed by one’s multiple subjectivities (multiple positionings) as experienced in the interstices of race, gender, class, sexuality, geography, and language.

Many critical theorists argue that it is through narratives, consejos, or trenzas, (Gonzálèz, 1999) (not authoritative, academic writings) that voices of oppressed groups are heard, or recognized (hooks, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Delgado, 1995). Narratives in this context are critical to composition curriculum and pedagogy because they counter the prevailing racist, class-biased, and patriarchal paradigm that privileges the voice of White, upper/middle class males as synonymous with “authoritative” and “academic.”

According to Sommers (2000) writing in a voice that is not one’s own can be a damaging practice. It has the ability to stifle the progress of writing, particularly in the revision phase, and
cause writers to become disillusioned by the writing process. Sommers (2000) speaks of her discontent with the "academic" voice as she reflects on a talk she gave at the Conference on College Composition and Communication:

What strikes me now, in this paragraph from my own talk, is that fictionalized self I invented, that anemic researcher, who set herself apart from her most passionate convictions. In that paragraph, I am a distant, imponderable, impersonal voice—inaccessible, humorless, and disguised... (282).

Thus, her personal voice was silenced by her use of an academic one. She goes on to argue that this personal/academic dichotomy in writing is limiting, stifling even, to the writer. Moreover, implicit in her argument is a call for the "re-visioning" of the concepts of authority and voice in academic writing.

The voices that emerge from critical theory have grave implications for pedagogy. But Elenes (2003) warns of the "universalizing" threat of critical pedagogy. She says, "My efforts are to open a dialogue with critical pedagogy, and to add to the continuous debates about difference and erasure" (p. 201). Identity, like language, is fluid and, therefore, multifaceted. Thus, the attempt to universalize border identities ignores the multiplicity of subjectivities living within borders. In other words, while educators must remain mindful of the distinctive language practices of students whose first language is Spanish, they must take care not to assume Mexican students and Puerto Rican students use their language the same way.

In order, then, to see a liberatory pedagogy come to fruition, the voices of all participants in education must be heard. Particularly, in writing classrooms, "We cannot teach them [students] English literacy without relevance to the other languages they use in their everyday
life" (Canagarajah, 2003, p. xi). Thus, as opposed to emphasizing lessons like “Don’t write like you talk,” how students speak should be seen as a way to engage their thinking and writing.

Culturally responsive teaching calls for such “re-visioning” as it places the student’s identity, the student’s culture, the student’s language at the center of the work being done, as opposed to on the margins.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Culturally responsive teaching emerged in response to the growing academic underachievement in literacy of minority students in U.S. public schools. Ladson-Billings (1992) notes, when culturally responsive teaching exists, “the goal of education becomes how to ‘fit’ students constructed as ‘other’ by virtue of race/ethnicity, language or social class into a hierarchical structure that is defined as a meritocracy” (p. 203). Thus, the use of cultural referents empowers students (Gay, 2001; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994), whether through reading materials that engage their culture or writing assignments that engage a celebration of who they are.

Furthermore, cultural responsiveness is an epistemology, not merely an act, thus, it is constantly challenged on the basis of proof. In other words, educators continue to beg the question: “But how do we do it?” Ladson-Billings (2006) offers the following as an answer to that question:

The first problem teachers [should] confront is believing that successful teaching for poor students of color is primarily about “what to do.” Instead, I suggest that the problem is rooted in how we think—about the social contexts, about the students, about the curriculum, and about instruction. (p.30)
Geneva Gay (2000) argues that culturally responsive teaching must start with the following thoughts, or understandings: (1) culture counts, (2) conventional reform is inadequate, (3) intention without action is insufficient, (4) there is strength and vitality in cultural diversity, and (5) test scores (primarily standardized test scores) and grades are symptoms, not causes of achievement. Ultimately, as Ladson-Billings (2005) informs, it is what teachers think about students that determines successful teaching. Thus, “[w]hether teachers think of their students as needy and deficient or capable and resilient can spell the difference between pedagogy grounded in compensatory practices and those grounded in critical and liberatory ones” (p. 31).

Gay (2000) explains that there are six descriptive characteristics of culturally responsive teaching: it is validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory. Teaching is validating, she says, when “it teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming” (p. 29). For instance, Hefflin (2002) demonstrates in her study how lesson plans and curriculums can be designed so that they are inclusive of students’ cultural practices. In her investigation, she uses the practice of cornrowing (braiding) hair—a practice culturally familiar to her primarily African-American students—as a catalyst for engaging literature in her class. This referent of cornrowing aided students in their understandings of the literature, by making the context for the book Cornrows (a text about fields of corn) relevant to their cultural experiences, thus affirming their culture as valuable to and valid in the classroom.

Culturally responsive teaching is comprehensive in that it is “committed to helping students maintain identities and connections with their ethnic groups and communities; develop a sense of community, camaraderie, and shared responsibility; and acquire an ethic of success” (Gay, 2000, p. 30). In Howard’s (2001) research, he discovers that elementary school students
particularly valued these efforts. He suggests, based on his findings, that teachers should (1) demonstrate care and concern for students; (2) establish a sense of community—a family-like atmosphere—by using cooperative learning opportunities, for instance; and (3) create exciting, stimulating classroom environments by frequently using storytelling and listening to the stories of students.

To Howard’s (2001) point, caring is essential to culturally responsive teaching on any level. Gay (2000) says caring is a concern for person and performance, action provoking, a prompter of effort and achievement, and multidimensional responsiveness. And, “being responsive is understanding and acting on, in educationally constructive ways, cultural influences on the behaviors and mental ecology of the classroom” (p. 52). Such an emotional commitment and involvement with students might seem or feel taboo to writing teachers (Kirtley, 2003)—particularly in higher education where the line between appropriate and inappropriate student-teacher relationships becomes blurred. But, implicit in any emotion, as argued by Jacobs and Micciche (2003) is the tendency to act—making emotion a potential catalyst for the social change desired by scholars of culturally responsive teaching. Furthermore, this emotional involvement is a springboard for an “ethos of befriending” (Gregory, 2001). Gregory clarifies:

“Primarily, the kind of teacherly befriending I am talking about entails creating an atmosphere of classroom trust in which the teacher’s willingness to call a bad job a bad job is seen by the student as helpful and productive rather than as mean and destructive” (p. 83).

When teaching is culturally responsive it is multidimensional: it “encompasses curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships,
instructional techniques, and performance assessments” (Gay, 2000, p. 31). Although culturally responsive is a label typically reserved for K-12 school settings (as aforementioned), Winans (2005) clearly models this multidimensional effort as she uses her English class to interrogate whiteness. This interrogation bears in mind the limited cultural diversity reflected in the community of Selinsgrove (a small town in central Pennsylvania). Winans protests the idea of essentializing whiteness as an unracialized identity and claims that her white students need opportunities to confront contradictions in their experiences of race. She writes, “Making diversity central to my teaching helps students recognize that all ideas and writing emerge from a specific subject position, a position or point of view shaped and reshaped by one’s lived experiences of race, class, sexual orientation, gender, religion, and ability” (p. 254).

Finally, when teaching is culturally responsive, it is empowering, transformative, and emancipatory. Gay (2000) acknowledges that this practice enables students to reach full humanity and to become better students, it challenges traditional ways in which education addresses culture, and it is liberating. Thus, Elenes’ (2003) and Anzaldúa’s (2003) call for language diversity reflects the spirit of culturally responsive practice.

But, it is precisely the tenuous state of language that makes culturally responsive practice in FYC such a foreign notion. In addition to combating the historic bias and ideologies that are endemic to FYC courses, Ball and Lardner (2005) advocate using culturally relevant readings and writing to unleash the literacy potentials of minority students. As Gray-Rosendale’s (2000) Rethinking Basic Writing reveals, basic writers (too often synonymous with minority students) already have the rhetorical resources to succeed in FYC. When they are allowed to critically engage in courses and when their instructor values their identities they have greater chances at writing success.
It is high(er) achievement that is the ultimate goal of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000). To quell the concerns of critics, Sheets (2005) asserts “high achievement outcomes and acceptable social standards are not sacrificed when creating culturally inclusive environments” (p. 85). A questioning of the quality of students’ writing if they are allowed to use home dialects often arises when language diversity is proposed for writing classes. This debate has commenced since the publishing of “Students’ Rights to Their Own Languages” in 1974. However, as the title of Crotteau’s (2007) article suggests, honoring dialect and culture is a pathway to success. Furthermore, Boyd et. al. surmise; “When teachers successfully incorporate texts and pedagogical strategies that are culturally and linguistically responsive, they have been able to increase student efficacy, motivation, and academic achievement” (p. 337). Additionally, the “teacher’s ability to create a culturally safe classroom context (a classroom environment where students feel secure and comfortable culturally, linguistically, academically, emotionally, and physically) provides more students with greater opportunities to learn” (Sheets, 2005, p. 91), which enhances students’ competence (Ball & Lardner, 2005).

Schunk and Swartz (1993) claim “learners who feel competent [confident] about writing should be more likely to choose to write, expand effort, and persist at writing tasks than students who doubt their capabilities. Studies with adults show that self-efficacy for writing predicts achievement” (p. 338). This self-efficacy along with self regulatory practices creates a resilience in students, “motivating them to sustain their efforts [in writing], even in the face of daunting obstacles” (Zimmerman & Risenberg, 1997, p. 83), and resilience is critical to minority students living in the inherently racist U.S. (Price, 2006).

*Culturally Responsive Teacher Training.* Although research in culturally responsive teaching has centered on the K-12 experience, composition scholars are already responding to
culture (Ball and Lardner, 2005; Center, 2004; Sanchez, 2005). However, as Saroyan et. al. (2004) warn, “Inadequate grounding in pedagogy disadvantages the professor in creating learning-centered teaching within reasonable time” (p. 16). Therefore, in order to sustain pedagogical commitment to diversity and increased achievement of all students, composition as a discipline must become remain committed to the scholarship of teaching, which Kreber (2001) explains “requires knowledge of the discipline as well as knowledge of how students learn, the thoughtful integration of the two resulting in pedagogical content knowledge... The scholarship of teaching, as seems to be the consensus, is knowledge that can be shared with and reviewed by a community of peers” (p.79).

Kreber (2001) recognizes that graduate programs, while claiming to prepare GTAs for lives as future academics, neglect the issue of teaching. Thus, pedagogical development is marginalized—treated as an add-on to discipline knowledge. Yet, despite this reality, she optimistically looks to graduate education—not merely the training of GTAs—as the most effective site to generate a reversal of pedagogy as outsider discourses. She offers five recommendations:

1. Change the doctoral program curriculum to include at least two courses on pedagogy in the discipline.

2. Allow dissertations to focus on pedagogy in the discipline.

3. Provide opportunities for graduate students to teach and receive feedback on their teaching by those who practice the scholarship of teaching.

4. Base workshops and seminars, such as TA training programs, on educational theory and research.
5. Identify professors who practice that scholarship of teaching and have them act as mentors to graduate students.

These strategies are particularly salient as one considers the plague of “nostalgia” (Shulman, 1999, p.14) that GTAs and other novice teachers face. Shulman says, “This condition is marked by a common symptom—the firm belief that whatever the educational problem, the best way to combat it is by reinstating the ways through which the observers had been taught when they were the same age as their students” (p. 14).

Gay (2005) notes that as related to cultural diversity, “many pre-service and in-service teachers are reluctant to embrace or outright resist multicultural education. These reactions are prompted, in part, by a lack of knowledge about and genuine lived experiences with ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity” (p. xviii). She speaks of this ignorance in her 2000 text as she warns, “Ignorance of people different from ourselves often breeds negative attitudes, anxiety, fears, and the seductive temptation to turn others into images of ourselves” (p. 23).

Because the work of higher education faculty has been compartmentalized into scholarship, teaching, and service, the myth of mutual exclusiveness (and in some cases hierarchical order) of these practices is pervasive. Subsequently, “despite the very strong case that has been made for teaching as a legitimate object of scholarly inquiry” (Tinberg, Duffy, & Mino, 2007, p.28), obstacles to the scholarship of teaching persists. But, scholarship is not separate from teaching. In fact, Nicholls (2004) supports Ernest Boyer’s idea that scholarship has four roles: “discovery, integration, application and teaching” (p.31, emphasis added). As such, academics should “consult discipline-specific literature on teaching and learning, focusing on students and learning, and publishing results of teaching initiatives through peer review mechanisms” (Nicholls, 2004, p. 33).
**GTA Development**

In 1998, Mary M. Kennedy’s *Learning to Teach Writing* asked its readers to consider whether formal teacher education makes a difference in how writing is taught. Her work was significant because it acknowledged a potential alternative approach to writing teacher training than what had been traditionally employed by English departments across the U.S. As Dobrin (2005) acknowledges, the issue of best practices for training writing teachers has been around since the turn of the 20th century. He cites Raymond MacDonald Alden’s 1913 “Preparation for College English Teaching” as a turn of the century text that called for adequate professional development of graduate students. This call was echoed by Alden’s contemporaries, and the early 20th century saw the birth of the first practicum-type course: Harvard’s *English 67-English Composition. Practice in Writing, in the Criticism of Manuscripts, and in Instruction by Conferences and Lectures. Discussion of Principles of Management of Courses in English Composition*. Over time, although names changed and shrank, a plethora of these courses emerged and remain in effect.

The writing practicum, according to Dobrin (2005), is complex in conceptualization and function. Dobrin says it’s the place where GTAs are introduced to “composition theory, research methodologies, pedagogical theory, histories of composition as a discipline, and larger disciplinary questions about writing…”(p.2). Miller et al. (2005) offer a more vague claim about the practicum; they claim it is the foundation of lifelong professional development. Bellanger and Gruber (2005) have yet another, more philosophical, take on the practicum; they claim it is the course that helps (or should help) GTAs realize their freedom. Whether descriptive statements are concrete or abstract, most English departments employ some practicum or practicum-type course as preparation for teaching FYC.
Thoughts on what should be included in the content of the writing practicum are varied. Tremmel (2001) notes that Richard Gebhardt offered a prototypical guide for practicum courses in his 1977 article “Balancing Theory with Practice in the Teaching of Writing.” Gebhardt (1986), in reflecting on that piece, claims that in the 1977 article he wanted to put forth four benchmarks for such a course as the writing practicum:

1. It should be “a writing course in which students continue to develop their skills as writers and become more self-consciously familiar with the frustrations, dead-ends, and pitfalls that their students will encounter.”

2. Second, the course “should press home to students the necessity, as a natural prerequisite of their chosen profession, of their being writers.”

3. “The course should provide opportunity for students to serve as critics of other students’ papers—and, of course, to have their papers examined by sharpened students as well…”

4. The course “should ask students to write about the teaching of writing. And to provide material about which to write, it should use readings, guest speakers, lecturers, and discussions to direct students to a wide range of approaches and materials.” (p. 2-3)

Yet, even these benchmarks, he claims, do very little by way of unifying the diverse perspectives in composition and its teaching. Thus, in 1986, he proposed that all training programs embrace three unifying ideas: that they “should help…clients develop comprehensive, integrating views of [1] writing and the teaching of writing,” (2) “the writing process as a complex collaboration of physical and mental activities through which a writer discovers as well
as communicates ideas,” and (3) “the writing process as the organizing center of composition instruction” (p.4-8).

While Gebhardt’s scholarship called for an emphasis on process, a more comprehensive knowledge of Theory (with a capital T) has become the dictate of many compositionists. M. L. Kennedy (1998) proclaims composition studies has moved beyond pragmatism and into a “fully theoretical phase.” She also says that the field “has rejected a central, objective presentation; instead it proposes a plurality of possible approaches with different vocabularies, different metaphors, and different frames of reference (p.x). Thus, Villanueva’s (1997) Cross Talk in Comp Theory (an anthology of critical essays that vary significantly in foci), for instance, is a commonly used text for the practicum.

Studying theory in the practicum then helps GTAs make sense of those myriad approaches, and it does the unifying work desired by Gebhardt. Because theory is “the intellectual foundation on which teaching gets done” (Odum, Bernard-Donals, & Kerschbaum, 2005, p. 215), scholars agree that it is an integral part of FYC teacher development (Bridges, 1986; Dobrin, 2005; Fischer, 2005; Villanueva, 1997). “However, the issue of theory is hardly settled … in the discipline at large” (Tremmel, 2001, p. 23). For instance, whereas Fulkerson (1979) purports essentially four theoretical traditions influencing the teaching of composition—pragmatic, mimetic, expressive, and objective—M. L. Kennedy (1998) acknowledges a plethora of theoretical traditions that influence composition studies—from communication theory to social constructionism to whole language. It is up to the GTA then to develop a pedagogy that operates as his or her “enactment of a theoretical position” (Odum et al, 2005, p. 215), a development that Villanueva (1997) asserts is necessary for really engaging students in written discourse.
GTAs, however, are challenged by the idea of merely identifying a theoretical position let alone basing an entire pedagogy on one theory (or several as the case may be). Furthermore, helping GTAs come to such pedagogical enlightenment is challenged by the diversity of the GTA student group. GTAs are no more monolithic than the students they teach and, although commonly enrolled in the practicum, they often have varying dispositions towards both theory and teaching. Michel (2005), for instance, explains that creative writing majors and literature majors often view language differently—the first group sees language as a "medium for accessing inner truths," while the second sees language as something to be "decoded for embedded truths"—which leads to variations in theoretical positions as well as thoughts on how to teach writing. Fischer (2005) further purports that there are also those GTAs who have absolutely no interest in teaching composition! These students view the task of teaching and the practicum as merely a means to an end: it pays their tuition. Brown (2000) notes the presence of this latter GTA subgroup is "not intentional, but student interest in and potential for teaching rarely comes up in the discussions" about who to hire or who should receive the graduate teaching assistantship.

How GTAs envision their future relationship to or with composition has been a critical concern to practicum instructors and writing program administrators (WPAs)—where there is a difference between the two—because of the practicum’s role as a professional development tool. Hence, Stacey (2005) asserts a distinction must be made between the aspired professional roles of teacher and scholar, researcher, or professor. He says, "People who want to work with knowledge and people do teaching; people who want to work with knowledge and ideas do scholarship, research, or theory" (p. 240).
But, GTAs are teachers whether they like it or not. It is here that the focus of the practicum as professional development for future careers becomes problematic. This focus seems to guild the reality that college Freshmen must succeed in FYC courses in order to matriculate and earn an initial degree, and GTAs as teachers must work to ensure that success. Therefore, the FYC student’s success must remain the center of GTA work. Since teaching is “the facilitation of learning,” GTAs must ensure that all “students learn designated material—the content that comprises the planned curriculum—and do this in such a way that each student builds her or his confidence and self-esteem” (Callahan, Clark, & Kellough, 1998, p. 17).

Reflexive Practice as Student Centered Action. Before GTAs can respond to the various needs of culturally diverse students, they must first embrace reflexive (or reflective) practice about their teaching. Balester (2000) defines reflexivity as “an understanding of how our positions and backgrounds—including our culture, ethnicity, gender, and race—contribute to, restrict, color, and even construct our ‘readings’ of culture and especially of others” (p. 126). This process of reflection in combination with action is understood as the Freirean notion of “praxis.” Freire (2003) proclaims, “Critical reflection is also action.” And, “Those who through reflection perceive the infeasibility or inappropriateness of one or another form of action (which should accordingly be postponed or substituted) cannot thereby be accused of inaction” (p. 128).

GTAs often enter FYC classrooms feeling compelled to shift from an identity as student to one of teacher. In this effort, they then become primarily concerned with pragmatic issues like classroom management and being perceived as the authority (Duffelmeyer, 2003). They long to be experts, therefore, they expect institutional efforts like the writing practicum to serve as a “how to” course on teaching writing, assessing students’ work, and classroom management
(Michel, 2005). They seek mastery of rote practices with seemingly no theoretical underpinnings, let alone a critical pedagogical one.

Maxfield (2000) discusses this reality in her study of instructional practices of secondary and postsecondary writing instructors. It was revealed by a study participant that “many [instructors] are ‘blissfully ignorant’ of theory…many do not have the time to think about how theory informs their practice” (p. 215). She goes on to comment about the role of reflexive practice in the lives of graduate students: “Quite simply, graduate writing teachers generally believe that they do not have time for such reflection; rather, they are caught up in a race to juggle responsibilities and keep pace with the dual demands of being both a teacher and a student” (p. 215).

M. M. Kennedy (1998) suggests, “to the extent that a teacher’s self-concept depends on whether he or she is recognized as an authoritative source, that teacher may avoid the strategic and purposive aspect of writing in favor of its prescriptions” (p.72). Dependence on prescriptive modes of writing can also inhibit the teacher’s freedom, which Bellanger and Gruber (2005) discovered was quite significant to GTAs at Northern Arizona University. They note, “Despite using a required reader, following assignment sequence, and applying rhetorical tools to the texts they were teaching, they had freedom within this structure to apply their own pedagogies, methodologies, and theories to teaching first-year composition” (p.133). This shift towards valuing freedom, ingenuity, and creativity of writing instructors is quite monumental when one considers prior practices as revealed in Bullock’s (1987) “Teachers Talk about Their Research: A Round-Table Discussion”:

_Ferguson:_ …it came over me that, my god, I’m teaching my literature courses the wrong way. Instead of teaching them the way I think writing courses ought to be taught, I’m still
teaching them the traditional way I learned in grad school. There's this big gap between my philosophy of teaching writing and what I'm allowing myself to do in the lit class...

Peggy:...All the other English teachers are doing what everybody else does, you know, the traditional way: give students the modes, here's the argumentative paper, and the samples, and they read the samples and then write a paper. I'd love to go back and say, "Hey, look you're all doing it wrong, let's do it this way," but I'm not about to, since I'm the youngest and low man on the totem pole; I won't rock the boat...

Ferguson: Why, I wouldn't either. It's a threat to your professional survival that you see things differently. (p. 150)

Critical reflection, or reflexive practice, not only protects what might be considered the academic freedom of FYC instructors—a freedom needed to creatively and innovatively respond to cultural differences in the classroom—but it also is necessary to combat hegemonic ideology in the composition classroom. The practicum as "purveyor of cultural capital" (Dobrin, 2005) can, if not critically approached, also function as a proponent of racist and xenophobic ideologies, thus promoting intolerance of difference. This is manifested when GTAs hold fast to their identities as guardians of the tower (Shaughnessy, 1997) and insist on counting and pointing out students' errors as a way of demonstrating their expertise. Hence, Strickland (2001) warns that "intense scrutiny of college students' writing for signs of error seems curious...[particularly when] The appearance of a person's writings, in the logic of hygienics, was a sign of the appearance of the person: mechanically correct writing was a sign of a correct person—a sign, that is of a white, native-born American" (p. 474-475).

Reflexive practice then is espoused by critical pedagogues because it requires that teachers confront their beliefs about teaching, writing, or any subject, since those beliefs are
what tend to influence them in the classroom (M. M. Kennedy, 1998). These beliefs, particularly about teaching, are typically learned during what M. M. Kennedy calls one’s “apprenticeship of observation”—the time one spends as a student observing teachers and teaching and learning the “rules” of education. Thus, if difference was not valued during or at the site of one’s “apprenticeship,” one might struggle to appreciate difference in the classroom in which one eventually teaches—despite what one might have learned while “studying” educational methods or theory about valuing difference.

hooks (2006) discusses the unfortunate reality of the lack of readiness in most teachers to teach in classrooms where cultural differences are present. She comments on the way in which cultural ideology operates to negate the valuing of certain discourses:

The discourses on democracy, diversity, and civil rights in this country have often taken place on a philosophical level, but the moment they’re engaged in forcing change, and in forcing power to change hands and generating agency for nonwhites, people stop and say, “Well, we really don’t need to do that because we have already accomplished that.” In other words, we’ve already talked about it—we don’t need to do it. (p. 55)

This is where Phelps’s “PTP arc”—practice-theory-practice—(cited in Fischer, 2005) and Freire’s notion of praxis become invaluable to GTAs. While teaching, they will inevitably encounter challenges to their beliefs about teaching and learning. They must then critically reflect on their decisions while embracing previously learned and/or investigating new theories so that their actions might change. They cannot resolve to ignore cultural difference claiming to have already “talked” about them because “difference, especially racial difference, has become a key factor of analysis in many contemporary critical discourses, and it is becoming an ever-increasing concern for anyone involved in higher education because the demographics of the
student population are shifting dramatically: with each passing year the population becomes more racially, ethnically, and nationally diverse” (Olson, 2003, p. 209).

**Summary**

As Bartolomé (2003) informs us, there is no quick-fix, technical strategy for addressing the needs of culturally diverse students in FYC courses. Yet, GTAs, through the practicum and other professional development efforts, are provided with a theoretical foundation that should inspire critical pedagogies—pedagogies that respond to change and seek to liberate students from the oppression of hegemony. Before GTAs can do this, however, they must come to critical consciousness, a consciousness that can only emerge from examining contradictions—i.e. the Freirean notion of “tensions” (Freire & Macedo, 2003)—through critical reflection. If this is not achieved, then “literacy becomes a weapon that can be used against those groups...whose social class, race, or gender renders their own experiences and stories as too unimportant to be worthy of investigation” (McLaren, 2003, p. 80).
CHAPTER THREE:
Methodology

Introduction

The goal of this study was to determine how graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) in English interpreted their teacher training and to discover whether or not they believed their training adequately prepared them to teach writing in a multicultural classroom context. This study employed the qualitative research methodology of Portraiture—a qualitative research approach developed Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot. This chapter explains research procedures used to uncover answers to the research questions. It is divided into the following sections: Qualitative Methodology and Portraiture; Participants: The Substance of the Portraits; the Portraitist as Instrument; Preparing the Canvas: Data Collection; and Developing the Portrait: Data Analysis.

Qualitative Methodology and Portraiture

Composition as a discipline has been influenced, according to McLeod (2003) by two research paradigms: hermeneutics—a reflection of composition’s disciplinary parent, English studies—and social sciences—a reflection of composition’s relationship with educational studies. First year composition (FYC) research specifically then is social science research because “freshman composition is the only college level course that was designed to solve a perceived social problem rather than to investigate a branch of knowledge…” (Connors, 1992, p.26). Its sociological roots—especially those related to hegemony—have led to a shift in composition research from quantitative empirical, positivistic, research models that have historically “failed those who found themselves in vulnerable or subordinate positions, such as women, people of color, basic writers, adjunct teachers, and students” (Kirsch, 2003, p. 135)—
which includes GTAs—to more qualitative research models that privilege the voices of those in socially marginalized groups.

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) assert, “Qualitative research emphasizes understanding by closely examining people’s words, actions, and records...” (p.89), and this understanding is furthered by Miles and Huberman’s (1994) insistence that a “main task [of qualitative research] is to explicate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations” (p.7). They also acknowledge that “the researcher’s role is to gain a ‘holistic’ (systemic, encompassing, integrated) overview of the context under study: its logic, its arrangements, its explicit and implicit rules” (p.6). Thus, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argue, qualitative research “consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world [of the participant(s)] visible” (p.3).

It is necessary, however, to distinguish methodology from method. Kirsch and Sullivan (1992) define “method as a techniques or way of proceeding in gathering evidence, and methodology as the underlying theory and analysis of how research is done” (p.2). The methods employed in qualitative research are typically one (or more) of the following: participant or direct observation, which may include using audio and/or visual equipment; interviews; focus groups; open-ended and/or closed-ended questionnaires; content analysis; and discourse analysis (Babbie, 2001; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Schloss & Smith, 1999). Methodologies, though, vary from researcher to researcher and are typically shaped by the research questions and the theory shaping the investigation (Anyon, 2009; Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2003).

Because this study sought knowledge about GTAs in English (a relatively disadvantaged group), a research methodology that worked against the positivistic tradition in social science research was needed. Portraiture is committed to such anti-positivistic work. As characterized
by Chapman (2005), it is “a response to the marginalization and sterilization of teachers, administrators, and students in schools. The portraiture method rejects flat, stereotypical explanations for school success or failure and depicts the multiple layers of contexts represented by events and people.”

The Methodology of Portraiture. When Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot developed the method of Portraiture in qualitative research in the early 1980s, she desired to bridge the worlds of authenticity and authority. Qualitative research in the social sciences at the time was burgeoning, moving beyond the traditional, authoritative influence of the Chicago School of Sociology and into a phase of “greater reflexivity about methods and texts” (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2003). Lawrence-Lightfoot admits she “wanted to create a narrative that bridged the realms of science and art, merging systematic and careful description of good ethnography with the evocative resonance of fine literature” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.4). In this way portraiture espouses postmodernism’s valuing of “artistic pastiche—deliberately blending multiple genres...in one’s data collection and presentation” (Prasad, 2005, p. 231). But more than that, portraiture was intended to counter the tendency of pathology in education research; it was about liberating voices of research participants through a search for goodness (Chapman, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1981; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

The notion of research as liberating work is in keeping with this study’s theoretical framework. Critical theory (also called critical social theory) “references systematic thought attempting an explicit analysis toward social justice, which distinguishes it from typical mainstream theory...We employ the term ‘critical social theory’ to include scholarship that critiques domination and subordination, promotes emancipatory interests, and combines social
and cultural analysis with interpretation” (Anyon, 2009, p.2). These are precisely the aims of portraiture. As such, narratives are tantamount to its success.

Narrative research and portraiture are, however, distinct in that narrative research centers on the collection of narratives (Andrews et al., 2004) while portraiture is about the construction of narratives (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It is this nature of the story that also distinguishes portraiture from traditional ethnography; “Ethnographers listen to a story while portraitists listen for a story” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 13). Therefore, the narrative is the axis of portraiture: it shapes how and what data is collected and it determines how and what interpretations are presented.

The portrait though is not completely a creative art. Lawrence-Lightfoot explains Joseph Featherstone’s defense of portraiture: “The power of portraiture, he claims, lies in its explicitly humanistic impulse. It embraces both analytic rigor (a perspective that is distant, discerning, and skeptical) and community building (acts of intimacy and connection. Featherstone calls this ‘a people’s scholarship’—a scholarship in which ‘scientific facts gathered in the field give voice to a people’s experience’” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 10). Portraiture remains committed to the “rich description” that traditional ethnography demands, but the portrait (the presentation of the findings) is shaped by dialogue between the researcher and the participant. And dialogue “is critical to educational research efforts and the use of findings generated from research” (Dillon, 2005, p. 106).

Portraiture is a structured approach to research that focuses on context, voice, relationships, emergent themes and the aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Contexts shape human experience. Therefore, the portraitist must be mindful, according to Lawrence-Lightfoot, of five contextual points:
“The first use of context depicts a detailed description of the physical setting; the second refers to the researcher’s perch and perspective; the third underscores the history, culture, and ideology of the place; the fourth identifies central metaphors and symbols that shape the narrative; and the fifth speaks to the actor’s role in shaping and defining context” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 44).

Voice, the second focus of portraiture, is about the lens through which the portrait is perceived and created. The voice of the researcher is significant in that it is ever present, but the voice of the research participant is also critical in portraiture, especially in education research, because it co-creates meaning. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1986) asserts “the relationship between researchers and practitioners [creates] opportunities for the empowerment of both parties,” (p. 26) of both voices. Relationship development in portraiture is thus tantamount to the creation of the portrait. Tirima (2007) acknowledges that “through relationships access is sought and given, connections are made, contacts are reciprocated and responsibility (both formal and informal) is developed, trust is built, intimacy negotiated, data collected, and knowledge constructed” (p.47).

Because of these relationships, because of the intimacy involved, portraiture is able to accurately identify emergent themes. The themes that emerge “reflect the portraitist’s first efforts to bring interpretive insight, analytic scrutiny, and aesthetic order to the collection of data. This is an iterative and generative process; the themes emerge from the data and they give the data shape and form” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 185). Finally, portraiture is concerned with the aesthetic whole—illuminating the participant in a way that demonstrates how context, voice, relationships, and themes are woven into the tapestry of the story. This was alluded to in the aforementioned commitment of portraiture to narrative, to the co-construction of a story by the researcher and the researched.
Participants: The Substance of Portraits

This study used criterion sampling to select the primary participants (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). In order to answer the research questions posed, the participants had to be enrolled as graduate students in the English department and had to have the responsibility of teaching FYC courses at the selected research site. These students had to have completed the entire training sequence provided by the department: orientation, Practicum I and II, and Teaching College Writing. The participants also had to teach their FYC course during a time that the researcher would be able to observe at least once a week.

After gaining access to the student population that met these criteria, requests for participation in the study were sent to each student. Only four GTAs volunteered to participate. One, however, taught at the same time as the researcher, which would not have permitted any observation of the class. Thus, this volunteer was eliminated from consideration. Therefore, this study focuses on the experiences of three graduate teaching assistants in English.

All three participants are White females. One, however, was a doctoral student, while two were Master’s level students. They were all in the first year of their program. There is no major in Rhetoric and Composition available at the institution that served as the research site. Each participant was a Literature major. Nonetheless, all GTA participants had a proclaimed vested interest in teaching.

The instructors of the Practicum courses and Teaching College Writing are also participants in this study. They provided the actual training in question and participated in a brief follow-up discussion with the researcher. The purpose of the discussion was to validate interpretations of the courses’ goals and to explain challenges to the training that were not observable.
The Portraitist as Instrument

Any ethnographic study “allow[s] investigators to study the complex interactions of individuals within their immediate environment” (Schloss & Smith, 1999, p. 87) and “focuses on detailed and accurate description rather than explanation” (Babbie, 2001, p.283). Hence, the goal is to reveal the subject of research as it really is. Moss (1992) says the goal is to “describe a particular community so that an outsider sees it as a native would and so that the community studied can be compared to other communities. Only through such careful comparisons can researchers start to develop a global picture of cultural groups” (p. 155). This process is what Moss calls making the strange familiar and what Wolcott (2008) names “mindwork, not merely a set of techniques for looking but... a particular way of seeing” (p. 46).

Like traditional ethnographic work, the researcher is centered in the meaning making work of portraiture. Qualitative research has long been challenged by the question of the researcher’s relationship to the person, group, or community being examined and to the analysis of the data (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2003). Wolcott (2008) asserts, “to identify oneself as an observer perpetuates the idea that we are studying them, and that is no longer the way we prefer to portray either ourselves or our work” (p. 51). Wolcott’s comment here is alluding to the shift toward a critical ethnography: one that aims to “transform the social environment through a process of critical inquiry” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, the shift away from a we-them paradigm is in keeping with a shift away from the emic-etic, insider-outsider dichotomy that has plagued ethnography. Yet, according to Wolcott (2008), “Whether insider or outsider, the ethnographer wants to convey how things appear to those ‘inside’” (p.144).

Effective portraiture, as aforementioned, hinges on the nature of the relationship between the portraitist and participant(s) as well as the voice of both parties. Lawrence-Lightfoot and
Davis (1997) explain that portraiture pushes against tradition "in its explicit recognition of the use of the self as the primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting the perspectives and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied" (p. 14). This is not an act of narcissism, however. It is an acknowledgement of how the portraitist influences the research context as she focuses on participant(s).

Because the researcher/portraitist is so centered in the research process, her biography is as much a part of the portrait as what she observes. Thus, she "needs to manage the tension between personal disposition (more or less explicitly recognized and expressed) and rigorous skepticism" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.13). Lawrence-Lightfoot explains this idea further:

"She [the portraitist] is seen not only in defining the focus and field of inquiry, but also in navigating the relationships with the subjects, in witnessing and interpreting the action, in tracing emergent themes, and in creating the narrative. At each one of these stages, the self of the portraitist emerges as an instrument of inquiry, an eye on perspective-taking, and ear that discerns nuances, and a voice that speaks and offers insight" (p. 13).

Therefore, while portraiture field work includes observations, interviews, and review of documents (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1986), it is the portraitist’s duty to illuminate the actions and manifest behaviors with a standard of "authenticity, capturing the essence and resonance of the actors’ experience and perspective through the details of action and thought revealed in context" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 12). Portraiture is not concerned with notions of validity or traditional understandings of reliability. "The reliability of a portrait is ascertained when the truth of the subject (the confirmed likeness of the portrait through rich descriptive narrative of
the study’s participants and their feedback on the reemerging portrait) reshapes and reconfigures the researcher’s notions” (Tirima, 2007, p.59).

This study used traditional qualitative research tools—observations, interviews, and document analysis—to collect data needed to respond to the research questions. Classroom observations of the training courses—the Practicum and Teaching College Writing—review of the materials, and follow-up conversations with the instructors of the training courses helped with the conceptualization “training” for GTAs in this study. Classroom observations of GTAs in their teaching settings and review of their completed assignments provided insight into their interpretations of GTA trainings. Finally, semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A for interview guide) with GTAs revealed their evaluation of the effectiveness of GTA training courses in preparing them to teach in multicultural classroom contexts.

Despite the use of these traditional qualitative research instruments, the researcher’s/portraitist’s voice remains a preoccupation of the study: this “refers to the ways in which her observations and her text are shaped by the assumptions she brings to the inquiry, reflecting her disciplinary background, her theoretical perspectives, her intellectual interests, and her understanding of the relevant literature. Voice, here, refers to the lens through which she sees and records reality” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 93). In short, it is then critical to the authenticity of the portrait to understand the factors (i.e. the many hats of the researcher) that shape it (Tirima, 2007).

*The Portraitist’s Lens: A Researcher Self-Portrait.* Hill (2005) argues that the tendency of portraiture to blur the boundaries between the scientific and the artistic “supports the poetic documentation of educational research” (p.95). Thus, she uses poems as portraits of the participants in her study of Black women teachers. Hill (2005) claims that poems provide insight
into the “feelings of characters” and allow the relating of the “spirit of their beings in a way that other, more traditional, forms of data documentation would not enable” (p. 104).

Below, then, is the poetic self-portrait of the researcher\(^1\). The information provided is the creative presentation of reflective journaling throughout the research process. The poem is divided into four reflective periods: before the data collection began (\textit{Preparing for the Field}), the beginning of data collection (\textit{The Evidence of Things Unseen}), an interruption in data collection (\textit{Being Locked Up}), and after the data was collected (\textit{Can I Lay My Burden Down?}).

\textit{Preparing for the Field}

I am tired and have been for a while. Not “I’ve been running too long” tired, or “my body can’t take it no more” tired. But “when will this struggle with my skin, of my kin, and for my kind be over” tired.

I work hard as a student so my students won’t struggle. But, they are tired too. So I work harder as a teacher because the student in me can’t stand to see the student of my kind, of my kin so tired.

(I don’t rest so that they can.)

People have tired of my kind thinking of, speaking for, and writing about our kind.

I can’t kindly accept that.

But, I hope they accept me anyway.

\textit{The Evidence of Things Unseen}

I don’t see me! So, I’m scared. Uncomfortable. I don’t trust your smiles. I don’t know your stories. But, I need you. That wears me out!

I should be watching you, looking for your story. But, none of you look like me!

\begin{quote}
You don’t teach my kind. I wonder if you see my kind, even when we are not there? Do you really see us when we are? I doubt you would ever live with or near my kind, but will you still care?
\end{quote}

\(^1\) The poem provided offers a particular insight into the researcher’s/portraitist’s identity. However, the use of “voice as autobiography”—the revelation of who the portraitist is (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997)—is a part of construction of every portrait. Thus, the portraitist’s subjectivity is revealed in the portraits presented in Chapter 4.
The researcher wants to silence my questions, to silence the student me, the teacher me, the student-teacher me, the Black me, the woman me, the sister me, the daughter me, the poor me, the tired me. Poor. Tired. Me. But they all keep telling me what to see. They all fight with the researcher, because she’s new. She’s the outsider. And I laugh. I listen to and need them all. But it is the researcher that helps me see. I am there.

Even when I don’t see me.

*Being Locked Up*

I want to be here some days, but not today!

Today, I am a sister. Not a researcher. Not a teacher. Not a scholar. Not a student. A Sister. Today I am with you but I am not here. I am crying and don’t want you to see my tears. Your are not my kind so you won’t understand. I am a sistah. I am a Big Sistah, and my lil brotha is lost.

Today, research is my prison.

*Can I Lay My Burden Down?*

I didn’t want to do it. I was tired, remember?

But, you have done much. I have been given much.

You should require much.

I am grateful.

*Preparing the Canvas: Data Collection*

Before data were collected, approval from the University of Cincinnati’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. After gaining approval, all GTAs in English were sent emails requesting their participation in the study. Four students responded quickly to the request. The desired number of participant for the study was 3-5. Each respondent shared her teaching schedule in order to ensure the researcher would be able to observe her teaching at least once a week. One of the four respondents was eliminated as a potential participant because she failed to
meet that criterion. A second, follow-up, request for participants was made, and there were no
volunteers to participate. It should be noted that one of the research subjects confided that many
of her GTA colleagues were indeed interested in the study’s focus and would have liked to
participate; however, they saw the study as too labor intensive because of the requirement to
keep a reflective journal. Thus, the study proceeded with three GTA participants.

Data collection for this project occurred in winter 2009—a total of eleven weeks. As
mentioned previously, classroom observations, interviews and document analysis were used.
going directly to the social phenomenon under study and observing it as completely as possible,
researcher can develop a deeper and fuller understanding of it” (p.275). During this study, GTAs
were observed as teachers in their FYC courses once a week. As well, the training courses were
observed so that a deeper understanding of GTA training was obtained. Nine out of the ten
sessions of the practicum course and Teaching College Writing were observed.

In addition to observations, interviews were conducted. Babbie (2001) explains
qualitative interviewing as “an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the
interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked
with particular words and in a particular order” (p.291). Walcott (2008) cautions that what
qualifies as an interview can range from a casual conversation to a structured interview. This
study used semi-structured interviews specifically — those that take shape as they progress
(Wolcott, 2008)— of GTAs. The interviews were key to gaining insight regarding the GTAs’
understanding of issues of diversity as it relates to pedagogy and GTA’s perspective on the
effectiveness of their training. These interviews were audio-recorded for accuracy and lasted
approximately one hour and twenty minutes each.
While the instructors of the training courses were not the primary subjects of investigation in this study, an end of the course conversation was held about their thoughts on the nature of the course as a “training” site, their general impressions of the students’ responsiveness to the course, and any challenges they faced in teaching the course. This deepened the conceptualization of training for this study.

Document analysis is an invaluable method in qualitative research. As Miles and Huberman (1994) note, qualitative data is data in the form of words and “the words are based on observation, interviews, and documents” (p.9). The documents of interest to this study include course syllabi, assignment descriptions, unevaluated completed assignments, and readings. These documents were provided by GTAs at the end of the quarter. Course syllabi and course reading materials for Practicum and Teaching College Writing were downloaded at the start of the quarter from each course’s electronic course management system page.

Finally, GTAs were asked to keep reflective journals. They were given the instruction to write/journal at least once a week. In her 2007 article, “Living in, Learning from, Looking Back, Breaking through in the English Language Arts Methods Course: A Case Study of Two Preservice Teachers,” Pamela Crosslin Stockinger acknowledges the benefit of having research participants keep what she calls “writing notebooks.” She says:

They lived in the experience of keeping and using the notebook; they learned from an environment that included demonstrations; gradual building of concepts, and sharing of writing voices; they looked back at their histories and what they believed and perceived; and they broke through to new beliefs and images of themselves as writers, teachers, and organizers of writing environments that would be their future classrooms. (Stockinger, 2007, p.205-206)
Using reflective journals for this purpose in the study allowed the research participants time to document and ultimately share thoughts on their preparation and experience as a writing instructor that were not elicited during the participation in classrooms. The journals also served as a space for the GTAs to reflect on the challenges they faced as graduate students, instructors, or both.

Each participant was offered a journal for reflection. Two participants decided to accept the journal, but one participant asked if she could simply type her reflective thoughts. She not only maintained typed reflections, but she shaped these reflections into a blog.

**Analysis of Data**

Qualitative analysis, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), consists of “three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification” (p.10). This approach to data analysis was used in this study.

“Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10). It is essential to qualitative analysis because qualitative research yields enormous amounts of data in the form of field notes and interview transcriptions. In this particular study, reduction of data gathered from documents and from reflective journals was also necessary. Data reduction was facilitated by the use of NVIVO. The software enhanced organization of data, thus allowing greater ease with coding and classifying. It also eliminated the need for the construction of an independent matrix or data display. This heightened organization also illuminated patterns in the data, which is critical when searching for emergent themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).
Open coding was used in this study after the collection of data was complete. The first set of data was pertinent to the primary participants in the study: GTAs. The phenomena that served as the basis of analysis were classroom observations of the GTAs as students and classroom observations of the GTAs as teachers; review of assignments given to the GTAs and review of assignments given by the GTAs; reflections completed by the GTAs about their roles as students and about their roles as teachers; and interviews.

After the data was collected, it was organized into the following categories and subcategories in keeping with the tenets of Portraiture:

- Context—When, where, and how was teaching and learning taking place?
  - Personas—who are the GTAs as students and who are they as teachers?
  - Direct Knowledge Transfer—what information from the training courses was mentioned, used, or alluded to in the courses that GTAs taught?
  - Concerns about Culture—what experiences centered around issues of multiculturalism? How often were moments of cultural conflict obvious?

- Voice—GTAs interpretations of this experience
  - Direct Evaluations of Training—what do GTAs believe is the purpose of the training? What value do they place on the training? What are the shortcomings of the training according to the GTAs?
  - Interpretation of Culturally Responsive Teaching—how do GTAs understand this concept? When or where do they see this manifest in their teaching?

The second set of data was related to the teachers of the training courses. These data were organized in a similar fashion, but the trainers’ participation in this study was limited:

- Context
• Persona—how do the trainers facilitate class? Who are they as teachers?

• Voice

• Interpretation of the training—what do the teachers understand is the goal of the training? What challenges to the training existed?

After categorizing the data in this manner, the process of triangulation began. Triangulation was critical to the construction of the portraits revealed in the next chapter. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) attest, “Using triangulation, the researcher employs various strategies and tools of data collection, looking for the points of convergence among them. Emergent themes arise out of this layering of data, when different lenses frame similar findings” (p. 204). Thus, as they further note, there is an “ongoing dialectic between process and product” (p. 216). In this study there was a constant, ongoing triangulations of field notes and documents produced by the GTAs—i.e. posts in discussion boards—and those used by the GTAs—i.e. the texts for the training courses.

Finally, the data was reviewed for emergent themes in keeping with the theoretical framework of critical theory and in light of the research questions.

Summary

This chapter discussed the employed research strategy and its effectiveness in responding to the research questions. Because the research calls for a closer look at FYC GTAs and the context of teacher training and culturally responsive teaching, portraiture was employed as an emancipatory research methodology. A discussion of the research participants was presented along with a closer look at the researcher—a necessary step in the portraiture process. As well, the chapter outlined the data collection and data analysis strategies used in this study. The results of data analysis—actual portraits of the three GTAs—are revealed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR:  

Research Findings and Data Analysis  

Introduction  

This research study was designed to examine the training graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) in English received to teach first year composition (FYC). Particularly, the study sought to reveal what preparation GTAs received to teach in a multicultural classroom, what GTAs understood about culturally responsive teaching, and whether or not GTAs believed their training adequately prepared them to teach in a multicultural classroom context. The insights discussed in this chapter were acquired through qualitative data collection methods including classroom observations, interviews, and analysis of documents relevant to training. This chapter presents the results of data analysis in direct response to each research question. Thus, the first section, A Portrait of GTA Training, provides description of the type of preparation GTAs received. It makes clear the content of and practices involved in GTA training. The second section, The Way They See It: On Being Trained to Teach Writing in a Multicultural Classroom, reveals the perspective of each GTA participant about the effectiveness of her training in preparing them to confront issues of diversity in their classrooms. The third section, Is Culturally Responsive Teaching Relevant?, offers a discussion of GTAs’ understandings and appreciation of culturally responsive teaching. Finally, Emergent Themes: Data Analysis and Interpretation is provided. 

This study employed the methodology of Portraiture; therefore, the analysis of data can be dubbed the “construction of narratives” (Lawrence Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). To this end, each section is presented as a comprehensive narrative of findings, a story, a portrait that answers each of the research questions. Furthermore, because this study particularly focused on the perspective of GTAs, the voices and experiences of the GTA participants are what primarily
shape this chapter. The three GTA participants are Angie, a first year doctoral student majoring in literature who has been a graduate teaching assistant at another university; Bethany, a first year Masters student majoring in literature; and Chelsea, also a first year Masters student majoring in literature. The first section of this chapter (A Portrait of GTA Training), however, necessarily includes the voices of the trainers—Dr. Johnson, teacher of the Practicum courses, and Dr. Landow, teacher of Teaching College Writing and the Director of Composition at the university.

A Portrait of GTA Training

The university is a large, public, urban university in the Midwest. It is almost the epicenter of this major metropolitan area as it is one of the city’s largest employers. The campus sits on a hill and one needs only travel the circumference of the university within 5 miles to see the diversity represented in the city. Like many universities in urban areas, the school is surrounded by wealth and poverty alike and racial and ethnic diversity. Yet, it is the campus on the hill. The dangers and struggles that plague the neighborhoods less than three miles away are not apparent threats to the students here. What students see immediately surrounding campus are campus housing, restaurants, clubs, bars, and other gathering places that cater to the university students’ desires. The reality that lies just beyond those borders doesn’t often infringe upon campus life, and because many students arrive to this campus as newcomers to the city, they usually appreciate this.

Among the newcomers are the graduate teaching assistants for the English department. There are many sections of First Year Composition (FYC) that must be taught. The English Department understands this demand, so every year a new batch of fresh composition teachers arrives. This new group of GTAs is a large, seemingly racially homogenous group; they appear
to be all white students. The group is predominantly female and the ages of the GTAs appear varied. The fact that there are ostensibly no GTAs of color makes engaging research centered on issues of multiculturalism a bit challenging. The research question then becomes how do these white GTAs address the needs of their potentially non-white students. Furthermore, the trainers (English faculty) are white. Thus, conceptually, the question of GTA training becomes how do these white faculty members train the GTAs to become aware of and inclusive of the needs of non-white students in composition.

Nonetheless, the training starts in the summer at this university—a couple of weeks before autumn quarter commences. Commonly referred to as “Orientation,” the summer session is step one in the training process of GTAs in English. Orientation, which is about a week long, is where these new members to the university’s community first encounter their task: teaching English Composition 101 and 102. This is also where they receive and review the materials needed for the course (particularly the Student Guide) and are introduced to the department’s expectations of them as GTAs. But, orientation isn’t enough.

Dr. Johnson reports that “normally you would get maybe an orientation for maybe a few days, then you would be pretty much on your own. Maybe you would get a syllabus, maybe you wouldn’t. Maybe you would get some meetings regularly scheduled, but nothing like what we have.” Her comment compares the training at the university to that provided at comparable institutions across the country. What they have here, though, is a system of training and ongoing support. “We are here to support what’s going on in the classrooms. We want to always hear their take on what’s happening,” she shares. Dr. Johnson has been a compositionist for over ten years and is passionate about and proud of the department’s vision and commitment to developing strong writing teachers. The work that goes into designing the materials for
composition instruction, training for GTAs, and training materials is intense. Committees are formed. Intellectual debate ensues about what goes into the training and materials and what is left out. This happens annually. The most concrete product of these meetings is the Student Guide to English Composition 101 & 102.

The title of this text makes its purpose somewhat ambiguous. Who is the audience for the text? On one hand, it is a guide intended to help the student enrolled in Composition 101 and 102. On the other, it is a text designed to assist the GTA instructors of Composition 101 and 102. As is stated in the guide, the text “provides direction for the entire English Composition program at the University.” This text is “the result of hundreds of hours of discussions and contributions over the past several years from faculty who teach in the English Composition Program. Each year the Guide undergoes rethinking, revising, and editing as [the English faculty] strive to define [their] goals and develop materials that represent the type of writing and thinking valued throughout the many colleges that make up the university.” The editors leave no room for vast imaginings about their labor. This is their expression of their commitment. Their labor, like that of a mother, is about providing for and protecting their babies: English Composition as a discipline, the English Department, the university’s students, and the GTAs. Thus, Dr. Johnson and her colleagues understand that orientation is not enough.

Their something more is the Practicum (a course divided into two parts) and Teaching College Writing. Practicum I (English 731) begins in Autumn quarter (along with other classes for GTAs and the courses GTAs must teach). As the season changes and the campus boils over with “New Student this” and “New Student that,” GTAs are introduced to the tight-rope walk of GTA life—succeed as a student and succeed as a teacher. The trepidation experienced by GTAs in this moment makes that first step on the tight-rope an immensely difficult one. In her journal,
Bethany, a first time teacher and Masters student, laments, “I want to give 100% to both comp [teaching] and my graduate work, but I have to make sacrifices. I think this is often the case with GTAs, and I wish it wasn’t.” The Practicum, though, is designed to be Bethany’s safety-net and her attached harness so that, while her concerns are real and the task is indeed a challenge, the walk cannot and will not be fatal. The goal of the Practicum as stated in the syllabus is to support the GTAs in teaching the first-year composition course. Dr. Johnson (also the instructor of the Practicum course) and the other members of the department are driven by their desire to counsel and coach the GTAs through this experience.

“They should appreciate this,” she says. And they do. Angie, a new GTA and doctoral student in English Literature, shares, “The reason I’m actually here is because of the comp program and the teaching program.” By “comp program” she means the department’s commitment to composition and the ability to teach composition as a graduate student. There is no graduate level concentration in rhetoric and composition at the university. “I didn’t get this at my previous university; it was completely lacking in teacher support. Completely. I’m a huge fan of the courses [referring to Practicum and Teaching College Writing], of them being there. I think it’s hugely important for our professional training to have teacher training. A lot of places don’t emphasize it.”

Angie is one of 26 GTAs. This year the group is unusually large and poses quite a few challenges for the trainers. “This is the largest class that we’ve had in about eight years,” reveals Dr. Landow, the current Director of Composition. 26 GTAs. More PhDs than Masters students. Dr. Johnson also shares that “MA students typically come for creative writing, and most students come here not wanting to be compositionists.” So, there are 26 GTAs, at least 26 Composition 101 courses, 26 students who probably don’t want to teach composition, and 26 different
classroom experiences. 26 GTAs. 26 perspectives. 2 hours for 10 weeks. 1 Practicum instructor. The numbers are daunting, and no matter how one tries this equation cannot be balanced. “The number of students,” Dr. Landow acknowledges, “posed very specific kinds of challenges that I don’t think we were anticipating in advance.”

As a result, the Practicum had to change. The original plan to meet with all 26 of the students at once is altered. Dr. Johnson actually separates the group into two and each group meets for an hour on Fridays for the second phase of Practicum. While usage of the discussion board in the course’s Blackboard\textsuperscript{2} page is not new, there is heavy dependence on this tool. The electronic discussion board is the platform for the sounding of GTA voices. This is particularly useful since the largeness of the group and the limited class meeting time inevitably limited how often and how much each of the GTA contributed to the in-class discussions. Dr. Johnson also has an assistant, a second-year Masters student, who helps her most obviously with logistical issues like setting up assignments and activities in Blackboard. She has a profound appreciation for her assistant. Yet, an air of suspicion about the assistant looms among the 26. The assistant sits as a student would in the class—her bag on top of the desk, cup of coffee in her hand, back resting against the wall so that she is sitting across her chair rather than in sync with the chair’s design, notebook or materials out and ready for use. She never postures as an authority really. She doesn’t linger around the podium or stand when she speaks. She laughs at the jokes and

\textsuperscript{2} The following comprehensive description of Blackboard was taken from Boise State University’s IT website at http://itc.boisestate.edu/BbSupport/BbDocs/general/WhatIsBlackboard.htm: "Blackboard is a Web-based course-management system designed to allow students and faculty to participate in classes delivered online or use online materials and activities to complement face-to-face teaching. Blackboard enables instructors to provide students with course materials, discussion boards, virtual chat, online quizzes, an academic resource center, and more. The degree to which Blackboard is used in a course varies. For example, instructors may supplement an on-campus class by putting their syllabus and handouts on their course sites. In contrast, other courses may be conducted entirely through Blackboard, without any on-campus sessions."
snide comments made by GTAs—after all she is one of them. She smiles often when she is not laughing. But, she also answers questions confidently. She is quite knowledgeable of administrative practices and facilities on campus and often chimes in when someone asks a question that begins “Where do I go if..?” So, she can and does contribute. Nonetheless, the GTAs remain leery of her ability to really help. Dr. Johnson complains that some GTAs give her assistant a hard time because she is only a Masters student, and she wonders why her assistant’s academic rank matters to them at all.

The suspicion about Dr. Johnson’s assistant is but one contributing factor to an air of tension that has developed in the course. It is the tension of experiencing new challenges—teaching is new for many of the GTAs and 26 GTAs is new for Dr. Johnson; the tension of meeting and working with new people; and, for most of the GTAs, the tension of navigating a new campus, new campus policies, and new campus politics. Dr. Johnson’s challenge with the numbers begins to mirror that of the GTAs’: 1 versus 26 is the reality of the GTAs every time they enter the classroom. As Chelsea, a Masters student and GTA, records in her blog entitled Reflections on Teaching Freshman Composition, “There is only one of us. There are twenty-three of them. What to do?”

What to do is precisely the focus of the Practicum. As the course continues into winter quarter as Practicum II, or English 732, it remains the site for airing frustrations, troubleshooting issues with courses and instruction, and receiving further clarity about the department’s expectations for teaching composition. Thus, the goal of the course is not to particularly address issues of multiculturalism in the FYC classroom. However, because the course is designed to assist students in whatever way they need, there is space for discussion of multiculturalism if the GTAs choose to engage such a discourse.
Nonetheless, the course uses John C. Bean’s *Engaging Ideas* as a central text, but also demands that students critically engage the *Student Guide; The World without Us* by Alan Weisman; and *Rules for Writers*, a writing handbook. The Bean text is used to help GTAs with methods for engaging student participation and thinking in their courses. For five weeks, each GTA is a part of a group presentation, or (more accurately) sample implementation, of Bean’s ideas for his/her classmates. For instance, Angie prepares a sample activity that actualizes Bean’s thoughts on effective use of dialogue as a way of engaging critical thinking. She describes her activity in the following way: “This activity is designed to have students play around with opposing viewpoints; often students can’t escape their own perspectives or are too quick to arrive at and stick with a point of view. Angelo and Cross (1993) are advocates of the dialogue to stimulate (and gauge) critical thinking.” In light of this, she uses this “Invented Dialogue”—a technique suggested by Bean: First, have students read Nicolas Carr’s “Is Google Making Us Stupid?”; second, have students watch “mwesch’s” Youtube.com video “Information R/evolution”; third, have students write on this question: “Imagine Carr and Wesch were here, and Wesch showed us his video. How would Carr respond?”; finally, have students share their responses.

Like Angie’s suggested activity, many of the illuminations of Bean’s ideas are inspired by the happenings in the GTAs’ classrooms—i.e. the topics of discussion they use, getting students to understand the paper topic (writing rebuttal essays), etc. The presentations, though an excellent opportunity to engage culturally responsive teaching practice, do not overtly engage such awareness of cultural differences among students. For instance, when discussing chapter four of *Engaging Ideas*, the GTA presenters focus on ways of explaining the difference between usage and grammar. They mention their belief that students know the rules of grammar even if
they cannot articulate them “fancifully”, as writing teachers do. They suggest using metaphors (i.e. sports analogies) to explain the function, purpose, and value of grammar. There is cursory commentary on the way culture becomes relevant to grammar use: “grammar is context and culture bound.” However, there is no application of grammar lessons for various cultural contexts; there is only acknowledgement that these contexts exist.

The other text that is referred to in the course is The World without Us. This is a text that was selected by the GTAs as the central piece of reading to be used in Composition 102. Chelsea shares, “When voting for this book, I was excited about the many current issues that it might invite into the classroom. For example, I thought debates on global warming, technology, nature and disorder, developmental psychology, Darwinism, imperialism, decay, destruction, and reconstruction would be the fruitful result.” But, as she admits, those debates did not excite her students. Bethany also struggled with the Weisman text: “I struggled with teaching the course around a single text; even with the excellent lesson suggestions from my classmates, my students’ engaged with Weisman for about three class periods and were less interested after that. I think the issue was that they had figured out Weisman’s game within the first few chapters.” That game for Bethany’s students, is possibly what Chelsea identifies as the difficulty her students had with the text as well: “the assuming nature of Weisman’s rhetoric.” According to Chelsea, Weisman’s “(what I believe to be) purposeful subjection (or silencing) of any controversial (whether religious, cultural, or scientific) perspectives on evolution or global warming” silences opposing voices. Thus, robust debate among its readers is limited and Practicum becomes the site for airing frustrations about how to engage the text with writing students.
Although the Practicum has required texts, Angie describes it as a course that “is not text centered. We had a text in both quarters, but the first quarter we didn’t use it at all. [The Practicum] was about how to be a graduate assistant. You know, budget your time, which you don’t need a book to tell you that.” Chelsea describes the course as “a vent session—a way to deal with issues that were strange or difficult.” Thus, discussions range from attendance policies to useful activities to grading practices. The course, according to Bethany, is “valuable for practical issues like dealing with students when they don’t show up, figuring out how to order your books, figuring out how to enter letter grades like NP or withdrawals, and then putting out lesson plans and hearing feedback from the whole class.”

The discussions then are less the agenda of Dr. Johnson and more that of the GTAs. The syllabus makes clear that the concerns of the course are with “the practice of teaching writing itself: the work of managing the classroom, devising meaningful assignments, assessing student work, and keeping on top of the paper load.” It does not, however, mention how student driven the class meetings will be—at least for the first half of the course. In other words, there is a planned course schedule, but the class sessions tend to begin with a discussion of “issues” in classes as experienced by the GTAs, and this portion of the agenda often dominates the meeting.

On an average day, Dr. Johnson begins the course by establishing the agenda and ultimately directing students to share concerns about issues in their classes. Dr. Johnson slowly paces across the front of the room—she monitors her stride closely since there is very little space between the podium and the first row of desks in this cramped classroom. She speaks cautiously as if in deep contemplation about every word she utters. “What’s going on in your classes?” She asks this question with a tone of sincerity and concern. It’s the first item on the agenda for that day and most days. The GTAs appear to wrestle with the question for some seconds. Some fret
about physically as they decide how to respond. Some share looks with others before they say anything as if ensuring that they will not divulge too much information. There is hesitation before anyone speaks. Perhaps they are all wondering how to phrase a question or comment, or perhaps they are prioritizing concerns—wondering which concern they should address first. Nonetheless, there is hesitation. Then Angie’s voice emerges. She has a student with a proclaimed disability in her course, but the student has not provided formal documentation of accommodations. In her journal, Angie’s concern for this student arises more than once: “Several students have already gone beyond the free absences limit. One of these students is registered with disability service, but he hasn’t presented documentation and he has only attended a couple of classes.” Her class meets every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The quarter began on January 5, 2009; this entry is written on January 21, 2009. In February she is still concerned. The student is now identified as “an often missing supposedly learning disabled student.” Dr. Johnson and her assistant offer suggestions to Angie about how to address this issue. Angie is told where disability services is located on campus, and Dr. Johnson encourages her to “keep helping and encourage the student to work with a writing center tutor as well.” Angie looks content with the response, but fidgets as though she expected a bit more.

On another day, Dr. Johnson asks, “What surprises/concerns have crept up in the last few weeks with your 102 class?” Again the agenda is the GTAs’ to construct. Discussion erupts around the idea of students writing papers from socially irresponsible positions—i.e. advocating child labor. Conversation ensues for quite a while around this topic. Dr. Johnson, despite grimacing slightly (her polite way of acknowledging how distasteful such a work might be), then encourages them to always “pay attention to the soundness of the argument.”
This is a common exchange in Practicum. Students with concerns voice those concerns, the concerns are discussed, and reasonable resolutions are uncovered—at times the resolutions come from Dr. Johnson at others they come from the GTAs. These are the ins and outs of Practicum, and this course varies in content and structure from the third component to GTA training—Teaching College Writing (TCW). “Teaching College Writing gives you the theoretical reasons why our pedagogy and curriculum are set up the way it is,” acknowledges Bethany. It’s taken concurrently with Practicum II (the courses are intended as compliments to one another) and the students meet once a week for 2 hours and 45 minutes. TCW differs from the Practicum in that students can petition to get out of taking the class. Dr. Landow has sole discretion to determine a student’s ability to opt out of TCW. “They will submit to me a portfolio of work that they have completed in a course at another university. They would show the syllabus and the works that they have completed and we would sit down and talk. I would ask basic questions about what kinds of theoretical or practical ideas from that course they took with them into their teaching. I really just use those documents and that conversation to make a decision about whether I think they need to take TCW here.” She also shares, “There were three or four students [to apply] this time around, but after looking at the coursework they did and talking to them, I didn’t feel that was to their benefit. I thought they still needed to take it here and have some grounding in traditions of thought within composition that wasn’t covered in the previous course.” However, there are students enrolled in Practicum who are not enrolled in TCW. There are also students in TCW who are not enrolled in Practicum. Nonetheless, the number of students enrolled in Practicum mirrors that enrolled in TCW, which means the class size remains an issue because it is so large.
Dr. Landow’s description of the course highlights the value she places on it as a part of
the department’s curriculum for its graduate students and its commitment to quality writing
instruction. “The goal of the course,” she says, “is to tell them something about the discipline.
But, it’s also to immerse them in the debates that animate the discipline and to give them a sense
of where we’ve been and where we are now, where we’re going, where we’re headed as a
discipline. What are the new and interesting things people are doing with writing students at the
college level? That piece is particularly important to me. It is my responsibility to prepare people
to teach and to offer them the framework they need to teach college composition and to be able
to talk about it in thoughtful ways when they go out onto the job market.”

TCW is comparable to many graduate-level courses in that it is reading and writing
intensive (see Appendix A for the list of readings). “Expect to write steadily about the issues
we’re studying,” the syllabus warns, and the issues are vast. The GTA’s practical concerns,
however, are not the center of the course. Rather, the readings are the center and the GTAs are
encouraged to make practical connections to the readings. It is an exercise of praxis.
Furthermore, TCW is the theoretical compliment to the Practicum.

Dr. Landow uses a large discussion circle to facilitate dialogue about the readings. She’s
unassuming, and if not for the pile of materials on the desk in which she sits, one might not know
she’s actually the instructor. Each class is led by GTAs who have been assigned the task of
discussing a particular reading for that day. The readings assigned for the class range from
discussions of the history of the discipline, post-process theory, revision, multimodal composing,
voice, audience, culture and language, grammar, grading, and power. The discussion of various
theories and perspectives leaves the GTAs consumed with thoughts about their roles as teacher,
their pedagogy, and (especially) their responsibilities as graders/assessors. Discussion about this topic emerges in more than one meeting.

The technical aspects of grading papers are addressed in Practicum. For instance, in Practicum, one activity involved the collective evaluation of a sample student essay. The goal of this activity was to establish some potential baseline for assessing papers. The essay reviewed was titled “Beer: The Eco Friendly” (the obvious assumption was that the student submitted this paper before checking whether or not the title was complete). The GTAs were asked to apply the supplied rubric from the Student Guide when evaluating this essay. After the essay was read by all, a series of questions rang out: “How old is she?” “Is she being serious or satirical?” “What’s her intention?” A comment about the student’s status as a member of the U. S. military was offered and further discussion about both the irrelevance and importance of that fact to the essay occurred. Dr. Johnson then corralled the various questions and comments and centered the discussion on answering one question: “What was the most generative aspect of the paper?” (where was meaning generated most clearly). There were few responses other than laughter at cynical comments and harsh criticism of the essay. Nonetheless, a consensus was reached. The paper was collectively not passed—the group agreed it merited the grade NP, which, according to the Student Guide’s rubric, suggests the following: the paper “fails to fulfill the assignment’s guidelines and expectations; lacks focus or shifts focus; displays clichéd, lackluster, or overly simplistic writing; demonstrates insufficient or cursory engagement with the subject matter; does not support or develop ideas sufficiently; lacks basic organizational structure, demonstrates little consideration of audience or is offensive to general readership; and, lacks basic control or understanding of sentence mechanics.”
In TCW, however, there is little focus on actual measurement (i.e. assigning a grade to a paper) and more an emphasis on engaging ideas from readings as a way of understanding one’s approach to assessment (should one use a rubric or not? what kind of feedback does one provide?) and one’s theory of assessment (what informs the way one assesses a paper?). Chelsea acknowledges in one class session that the type of paper feedback she offers changes when students’ papers are of different quality. This is how she connects to Peter Elbow’s claim that if one “likes” one’s student, one is more compelled to “like” the student’s writing. Another student in the class shares that she “can be pretty biased about her grading,” thus a conversation about the role of GTAs as graders, the role of grades, and the way issues of power enter into the teaching of writing is sparked. “Students take writing comments personally,” Dr. Landow warns. Angie has been and/or is in the midst of reflecting on this idea, and she shares that she is wrestling with “how dismissive” she is with students she believe are not trying. Bethany offers her concern about grading practices when she says, “writing is not scientific”; she struggles with how to do grading “correctly.”

Dr. Landow constantly offers interpretations of the major concepts or ideas extrapolated from texts and placed as focal points of discussions. But, she does not tell GTAs what to do or how to find comfort with the challenges they face as composition instructors. Thus, this is not the place where Bethany will be told how to grade correctly. Rather, TCW intentionally leaves the students with questions or ideas to ponder: “There’s so much affect, so much feeling connected to writing.” “Teachers’ attitudes matter.” “What is your construction of teacher?” This is not to say that Dr. Landow allows students to continue down seemingly unethical paths or that she is never corrective. She admits “there were a lot of students who I felt misread or totally did not understand what was going on in the readings. So I would make quick attempts to try to get at
that without necessarily correcting them, but offering more context, trying to create a broader picture of it.” Yet, one exchange stimulates a somewhat firm response from Dr. Landow, who is not an authoritative instructor by any means. In a discussion about revision practices, she asks a student who had expressed frustration about reading revised papers that were so similar to the original, “Do you really think students’ papers will be drastically different the second time around?” The student responded, “I hope so!” But the tension in her face—the pensive look—and the flailing of her hands—palms up and fingers spread as if presenting some obvious point says more than that. “Duh!” is what her body communicates. “Isn’t this what we all expect of revision?” is the unasked rebuttal question. Then, in a tone that suggests there is absolutely no other way to respond to this, Dr. Landow says, “That’s a problem!” The student looked quite surprised, but did not protest. There was no room to negotiate this claim. Some chuckling and mumbling followed Dr. Landow’s assertion. It wasn’t laughter of amusement. It was well I’ll be damned laughter, as if discovering the cunning yet very simple key to a magician’s trick. It was a simple, yet firm assertion, and it caused a tide of relief to sweep over the GTAs. They had been given the directive they need.

While Dr. Landow’s comment assuaged the GTAs’ concerns about shoddy student revision, the climate of this classroom was such that the GTAs were always free to disagree with and/or challenge Dr. Landow’s perspective. Yet, no one did on this matter. What is revealed by this exchange is a readiness to receive practical knowledge from the instructor. This reality empowered Dr. Landow with the ability to push students thinking in certain directions—toward particular theories. However, a goal of the course is to “explore competing theories of writing pedagogy so that we can test and formulate our own.” Thus, shaping students’ thinking—even if intended to push them toward cultural responsiveness—is antithetical to the course’s goals.
While Orientation, Practicum I and II, and Teaching College Writing each offer specific insights about writing instruction at the university and Composition Studies as a discipline, none quells the GTA’s insatiable appetite for “how to” knowledge that can be applied in the classroom. This desire heavily influences the training; it is essentially the ongoing agenda of Practicum and it informs how students read, interpret, value, and/or devalue the material covered in TCW. For instance, when Dr. Landow reminds the GTAs that language reflects culture and that they should consider what their theory of language is, it is not surprising that Angie responds by confronting the issue of conventions in writing. “This is how I learned to unlock writing,” she says as she reveals her commitment to reinforcing grammar conventions in her classroom. She struggles with the place of conventions throughout the quarter. “Saying let’s just buck the rules,” she shares, “and make them up as we go along, that’s not good. Where I was, I was just hoping that someone would encourage me to experiment...I embraced a lot of Patricia Dunn’s Sketching Living. I now have the whole book because I appreciated other modes of composing and thinking so I asked my students to talk about their writing experiences in terms of metaphor and to draw and that sort of thing. And I got that in TCW, not a practical course but, nonetheless, gave me these ideas.”

Chelsea also used ideas from TCW to directly shape paper assignments: “After reading Yancey’s Made Not Only in Words, I got real interested in the importance of circulation to meaning. So, I asked students to read nine articles and create some kind of collage where the voices of the writers will come out in some way. Some students created actual collages from pictures cut out of magazines. Others made powerpoints where each slide represented each author’s voice. This was to help them with their exploratory analysis.” Though Bethany does not comment directly on readings, she does acknowledge that “the stories and issues of [her]
classmates/fellow teachers help generate ideas for problems in [her] own class.” Thus, the practical application of information gained in the training is praiseworthy to the GTAs.

The measure of the effectiveness of the training (Orientation, Practicum I &II, and TCW) for GTAs is tied directly to the GTAs’ ability to apply the knowledge gained to their work as writing teachers. What does this mean, then, for issues of multiculturalism? There is no specific amount of time set aside on the agenda of the Practicum courses or that of TCW to explicitly cover issues of multiculturalism per se. Nonetheless, Chelsea, Bethany and Angie engage discourses of diversity as both students and teachers.

**The Way They See It: On Being Trained to Teach Writing in a Multicultural Classroom**

*Angie’s Story.* Angie is a first year doctoral student at the university but is not new to GTA work, as she was a graduate teaching assistant during her studies for her Master’s degree. She particularly defines her work as preparation to teach, which might distinguish her somewhat from the other members of her GTA cohort. “I think that some people go to graduate school to execute the discipline, write or whatever, become an expert in the field,” she explains. “And I want to do that second. Some people teach to write and I want to write so that I can teach. And I’ve thought about other types of people but to me college students are the best.” This is not a new journey for Angie. Rather it is one that began when she was an undergraduate student: “I started out trying to be a secondary education major. There was too much thinking about educational issues for me and not enough thinking about literature.”

Angie’s Composition 2 class consists of predominantly white students, most of whom are male. There is not much visible racial or ethnic difference and this could be coincidental or it could be a reflection of the demographics of the engineering program at the university since most
of the students in her class are a part of an engineering learning community. Nonetheless, a sense of cultural homogeneity is pervasive.

Angie maintains a rather stern posture in the classroom, both as a student and as a teacher. She’s not the outspoken student or the student whose voice one expects to hear every class. However, her facial expressions and body language make any observer aware of the moments she completely disagrees with what’s being said or done or those moments when a mental wrestling match is occurring as she prepares to speak. She doesn’t laugh much; she’s a very serious person about academic work. But, she appreciates laughter in the learning environment: “I like buzz and comfort and camaraderie and laughing, but I also like hard work and basic courtesy.” Her valuing of the presence of hard work and fun simultaneously places her at a crossroads often in the classes she teaches. The idea of a relaxed and even chaotic classroom is idyllic to her, but she cannot find peace with this type of learning environment because she identifies as an authoritative teacher and relates success with rigor and discipline.

She writes during a reflection: “I am also thinking a lot about my ‘teaching self’—who I am in the classroom. I have been considering next quarter referring to myself not as Angie, but as Ms. Thompson. I think I am ready to take on that more authoritative moniker.” However, she later states in this reflection, “I think this is really ‘me’; as an ‘academic’ I don’t have a very serious persona—I value working and thinking hard, but not performing as a serious academic. I also know that as a student, I always enjoy most professors that offer themselves as ‘real’ people. I also tend to have the best intellectual experiences with professors that I like. And I definitely

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3 The following description of learning communities was obtained from the University’s website: “Learning Communities at the University are made up of diverse groups of students and faculty who come together because of shared academic interests to interact in two or more university courses. There are more than 100 different learning communities for students to choose from. During orientation, incoming freshmen have the opportunity to join a learning community based upon their major or area of academic interest. The partnerships that first year students form with faculty, staff, and other students in learning communities provides a cohesive learning experience centered around courses that fulfill core requirements.”
know that I want my students to like me—and this is for their benefit, but mine too. This, person, which works to entertain and engage the students, can also interfere with my authority in the classroom.”

Angie’s students, however, do not disrespect her “authority” when she is less authoritative in her approach. For example, when facilitating discussion about the difference between assuming and knowing, Angie asks, “What does it mean to assume?” A student responds, “To make an ass out of you and me!” Angie doesn’t react sternly to the student’s use of the expletive “ass.” Instead, she accepts the response, saying, “Exactly!” She continues to build on the adage—the notion that the consequence of assuming is negative—and compares assuming to knowing—which yields a less costly outcome, but demand greater corroboration. The point of the exchange is to teach the students a lesson about when to use citations. This is Angie’s modus operandi: use whatever relatable ideas possible to help the students understand the task before them. She then concludes the discussion with a writing exercise that calls for analyzing The World without Us: “After reading (parts of) The World without Us, what do you assume or know about what Weisman believes? What does Weisman want to have you think or believe?”

Despite the lack of offense to the student’s language, Angie continues to associate authority with effective teaching. She asserts her teacher authority in the classroom by remaining at the front of the room—depending on the podium as the place where she organizes materials for the class. She often places the Student Guide on the document camera and refers to it directly for explanations of tasks—i.e. paper topics—and examples; thus, she guides the students reading of the Student Guide. She stands the entire time (unless she decides to rest on the desk at the front of the room), while students are seated. She doesn’t often rearrange the
desks in her rather small classroom, and, when she paces, she moves as if anchored to the front of the room. These are common antics of teachers—efforts to distinguish their roles as teacher from that of student. But, Angie is no more likely to be boxed into a one word descriptor (like “authoritative”) than the winds of Santa Ana, and she is not fully comfortable with the type of classroom climate an authoritative approach to teaching creates.

She admits to wrestling with her identity and her work as a teacher, and while once a staunch advocate of reinforcing rules—“I want to expose myself as a total advocate of the FUNDAMENTALS of the 5-paragraph essay”—she later reveals, “I have been experimenting with ways to decrease the arbitrariness of the criteria on which essays are evaluated and ‘taught.’ There is, after all, something quite arbitrary about many of the rules we enforce... Thus, I have been trying to think of ways to make criteria for a successful essay independent of my sense of it. I am trying to think of ways to make students not write like me.”

Angie’s reflective posture reveals a sense of openness in her to perspectives that are not only different from her own, but that might also suggest her perspective is problematic—i.e. after reading about and discussing the English conventions her position shifts from absolute reinforcement to consideration of the arbitrariness of those conventions. Moreover, she is especially concerned with making whatever change necessary to ensure the success of her students. She writes, “I guess what this signals at the halfway mark of the second term is my concerted efforts to truly cultivate a student-centered classroom.”

Cultivating that student-centered classroom is incredibly important to culturally responsive teaching, but it is not as easy as it seems—especially when cultural differences among students present challenges to instruction and assessment. Angie shares this story about a discussion in the Practicum course: “It started with a woman showing us something with this
online version of the Bible that was kind of magazine like and sexified. It was this weird cultural object, and she was asking if she could use this for discussion. One student said, ‘I just want to let you know that if you bring anything religious in class you should really think about it.’” Angie shares that an email warning GTAs about being religiously insensitive was prompted by an encounter she had with a student in her class: “[He] had missed because he was observing a religious holiday, and he felt lost. I just said, ‘You have to catch yourself up first. You have to do your part first.’ The student took that exchange as me not being sensitive.”

Following this instance, issues related to religious practice arose in Practicum. Angie recalls “this conversation about religious holidays and about how religious students know that there are days they will miss.” She continues, “How do you make it fair is what [the GTAs’] question was. But, it came across as well if this religious student can’t make it to class then they should just beat it and find their own school. All of these comments were really strange. I’m not sure why [GTAs] felt compelled to solve this problem. There’s no way to solve this or change this calendar issue. So, this became a conversation about religious students and practices in general.”

What disturbed Angie most about the issue is not that it arose, but that there was not a lesson in this for what to do when these issues come up in the classes the GTAs teach. She concludes, “One student was associated with the Jewish organization on campus and she kind of stepped in as the advocate for knowing something about it, and she felt like the center of the conversation because she offered herself as the person who knows. A lot of us don’t know about the faith and practices and we’re not sure how to judge if the student is being truthful or whatever. So, she was trying to help on a practical level, but then, because she was the center of the Q & A, she felt like she was targeted. Meanwhile, Dr. Johnson is saying nothing, which I
found really troubling. She doesn’t tend to cut us off, which I appreciate, but she wasn’t saying, ‘Okay wait a second.’ She didn’t bring it back for us. We started in the right place...But, we were off in this weird place, and everyone’s feelings were hurt. And, Dr. Johnson came back and just said nothing!”

Ostensibly Angie’s desire was to reconstruct this moment of conflict into a moment to learn something about the realities of teaching. Instead, she was left disappointed by the silence that Dr. Johnson embraced. Not only was the issue not seized as a teaching moment by the instructor, but for Angie the issue was unresolved. Angie then had to come to her own conclusion about students’ culture: “We don’t think that maybe a student is religious and they’re too afraid to out themselves or too afraid to announce that or too timid to approach the instructor in general. So, it’s important to think about are you truly being open to your students’ needs no matter what they are.”

This was not the first time an issue relating to multiculturalism or diverse perspectives went unresolved for Angie. She recalls, “I seem to remember in Orientation there was a session where an instructor, a GA who had been around for years, brought in papers that were just abhorrent with sexist language. The implications of the thoughts were just hard to deal with, and we opened a conversation of how to deal with this. I don’t remember feeling resolved. I just felt kind of icky about it—not feeling like I knew how to handle it.”

The absence of a readiness to handle such issues remained a point of contention for Angie as she completed her training. While she felt disappointed in those moments, she speaks with contentment about her training; she asserts that the training did all that training can do, which suggests an absence of faith in the idea of being truly prepared to teach. As she states in conversation, “The challenge [with scenarios like the ones mentioned above] is not knowing.
You don’t necessarily know where students are coming from. Even if you read [for instance] this is how African Americans compose, well just because that’s true doesn’t mean it’s true across the board. I can’t imagine a teacher education that truly prepares you for this.”

She continues discussing the matter of African American composition styles: “I read a piece in TCW about the way some African American compositions are linked tangentially, and I had a paper from one of my African American students. I thought I saw some of this tangential connection between paragraphs and I thought maybe that’s the logic here. This student is being influenced by this logic. I thought, ‘Well, how do I deal with this?’ I don’t want to assume and say that as an African American student this is the way you write. I think that’s horrible. I think that’s an ignorant way to approach this. But, it [the student’s paper] is still not doing what I think it should do for this specific context for this purpose of the writing. So I said in the comments, ‘I see how your mind is linking these things together, but here’s another strategy to try.’ I didn’t say this doesn’t make any sense and I couldn’t follow you because I could follow. And, maybe this was because of what I read.”

For Angie, the idea of being effectively prepared to handle tension that emerges classrooms around cultural differences cannot exist completely in any training course. “I don’t know what that looks like,” she says. This notion of preparation, she claims, cannot be fully achieved. This especially cannot be achieved if the training courses are not designed to address these issues explicitly. After deep contemplation, Angie comments, “There is a sense that when we talk about academic discourse that all students’ voices get brought under this unifying discourse that they have to learn to succeed, and it’s dominating and alienating and all that sort of thing and it’s a big device of power. I think that all of the theoretical readings lead us to think
that and I think that frustrates new teachers—myself included—because it’s...well..I still have to go into class tomorrow so, what the hell am I supposed to do?”

*Bethany’s Story.* Bethany is a quiet observer. In the training classes she sits with genteel posture and a pleasant countenance that rarely changes. There’s no special indication that she is engaged or disengaged except by her actions (note-taking at times) or her speech. Yet, she doesn’t speak often. When she does contribute to discussion, however, her comments are positively phrased, practical, and solution oriented. This is also the Bethany she presents as a teacher.

“I kind of have to take a more pragmatic approach to composition, where you teach what you need to succeed in the college classroom,” she shares. Because she has been a successful college student, she doesn’t hesitate to set herself as a model of good student practice. She regularly identifies herself as a student. For instance, in a conversation about audience awareness in her class, she shares with her students, “Really, I am your audience for this paper.” She follows this comment with the personal revelation that when she writes, she also considers her instructors. Moreover, she describes her writing as a production of “what my professor’s tell me.” This allows students to see that she is currently engaging in the same struggles they are, and she readily admits about GTAs that “we are teachers, but we are students first and foremost.”

Bethany’s approach—identifying as a student often instead of as a teacher—creates less of an authoritative air in her classroom than what is present in Angie’s. While she regularly writes the daily agenda on the board and stands near the doorway or in the hall to watch for students’ arrival to class, she’s not stern with the students. Her tone is light-hearted, even if the topic of discussion is quite technical and difficult. She’s comfortable with her students as they
are with her. Most of her students are in a mechanical engineering learning community, they appear predominantly white, and she's taught the group before.

Familiarity aside, there are still struggles that she encounters with the group. "I just had my students sign a behavior contract this year, which basically said that if you have something strongly worded that you need to say, then you need to say it to me outside of the class so that I can take your ideas into consideration and bring them into class in a way that works if you can't do it yourself." She later explains: "In practice, this gives students a chance to talk about what is bothering them and we can talk about how to present that to the class together. The reality is that we all have strong opinions and we have to learn to present them productively. I always allow students to say what they want to say, but the contract makes them think about it first. It also helps everyone else see that this person has considered both sides of the issue." This is her proactive approach to limiting insulting language that might emerge as a consequence of the students coming from different cultural backgrounds, and she attributes this readiness to deal with such issues to the training that she received.

"I'm thinking specifically back to Practicum last quarter when we had a discussion about difference and how to encourage it in our classroom and not just do the superficial acceptance and moving on, but actually how to appreciate that." She discusses the same scenario that Angie shared regarding students' religious identity. "We had a really heated conversation one day about religious holidays," she says, "but I think Dr. Johnson did a really good job with following up on that and saying this is a teaching opportunity—this is a chance for you to really examine discourse in its multiple forms and it's valuable for your students to do that too." She continues commenting about the issue of cultural differences: "In TCW I'm not sure if we ever came to any solutions or any ideas of how to find one. I think we were just hashing all of those lines of difference that we had amongst ourselves too. The idea of just addressing it in TCW was helpful
just to get people thinking about it. It’s definitely an issue with composition because there are just so many different ways of speaking.” To illustrate the complexity of the issue of difference, Bethany shares this story of one of her students:

“I had a student complete make-up grammar work and he wrote a one page paper about grammar. He really found some really great and interesting ideas about difference and grammatical difference. And he had not read any of the things we had read in TCW, but he hit the high points. He said, ‘It seems to me that there are so many ways of speaking now that we’re not even sure how to teach grammar anymore.’ And that’s really how I feel, but not just for grammar; it refers to composition in general. He referred specifically to text messaging lingo. He said, ‘I compose all the time in text message.’ I do too! So, I don’t know if we ever found some solutions but we definitely solidified some of our own opinions about this.”

Grammar has been an area of contention for Bethany, especially when considering cultural and linguistic differences. “I really struggled with that this quarter. It seems grammar is common sense to me and I don’t really know how to teach it.” Nonetheless, she felt her training courses allowed a space for her to work out and work through this tension. “We had a really good conversation about difference and diversity in TCW. It didn’t get overheated but there is definitely a line of tension and I think a lot of times language or word choice were getting in the way of conversation moving forward. I think we all kind of started talking around issues, but there were a few who would just stand up and say, ‘No, this is what I think.’”

In the spirit of pragmatism, Bethany desires to make these discussions relevant to her practice as a teacher. However, she remains ambivalent about these issues in her classroom. “On the one hand,” she says, “I have a standard that I have to pass them by. On the other, there is life experience that comes into play.” She later writes, “I find it hard to relate to my students as far as the course work goes… I can’t begin to understand the experiences of my students in a lot of ways because I haven’t lived their lives and they haven’t lived mine.” This challenge of understanding her students’ perspectives often interferes with her grading: “I tend to be a lot
more conservative than a lot of my students (at least economically). So, when I look at things like ‘no I don’t agree with you’, it’s really hard to let it go. But, you have to. So, I’ve really started examining my comments closely and keeping my biased opinion out of it.” Moreover, she notes, with regard to grading, “I don’t do this perfectly…I fall into the traps of genre as Smith describes in her essay…There are also some conventions which I unapologetically use and like. But I do consciously try to maintain my grading practices from paper to paper to ensure that I am giving the fairest audience as possible to all of my students’ work.”

This kind of reflective practice Bethany attributes not only to the insights gained from Practicum and TCW, but also from those gained in another English course—Race, Gender, and Culture. In that course she read Homi Bhabha’s work, The Location of Culture⁴. “Bhabha has some complex ideas, but the idea of hybridity and difference vs. diversity really stuck with me,” Bethany confesses. “I’ve had to confront how I really see my own conceptions of difference and it was interesting to see my classmates’ ideas about it too.”

Bethany shares that during a heightened discussion in the course Race, Gender, and Culture, one of her classmates posits that academic discourse bleaches out one’s heritage because of the language used. “But, I don’t think this bleaching out has to happen if we teach our students about rhetorical situations. The academy has a different language than most people’s regular language and I think there is something to be said for teaching the students the basics. From that, the field is wide open for variations of that style,” she retorts. She admits to being really sensitive about this in her class. “I don’t want to say that I’m just afraid of breaking eggshells around my students, but I do think it is my responsibility to respect their opinions and where they come from and what they’re doing. And I have to grade them as fairly as I can, so I have to consider these things.” Yet, if these differences might lead to tense dialogue in class, Bethany

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does exactly what she claims is not necessary: she bleaches or cleans the conversation by operating as a filter. Recall her behavior contract: “I just had my students sign a behavior contract this year, which basically said that if you have something strongly worded that you needed to say, then you need to say it to me outside of the class so that I can take your ideas into consideration and bring them into class in a way that works if you can’t do it yourself.”

Bethany defends her practice, however, and offers this example of why the practice is valuable: “I had a student who did not believe in abortion and was not afraid to tell the class. I happen to agree with her, but I know that this is not a popular opinion in the academy and among many of her fellow students. We talked about her ideals and opinions, discussed the pros and cons, I played devil’s advocate and we worked on rebutting and defending her argument. It helps them see what argument is and be prepared for it when they present those ideas in class. It helps everyone else see that issues are not black and white, but complex and changing.” She continues, “The behavior contract was meant to help students say what they want to say when they are walking the line of abuse, which does happen, especially among highly-charged eighteen year-olds. I don’t want to bleach, but I do want to maintain responsible communication.”

But, this is the type of contradictory reality (on the one hand wanting to create a safe space for students and a climate of community and on the other requiring students to engage mediation about controversial issues) on which Bethany reflects, and she attributes this reflection to her training. Her desire is not to mistreat her students; nonetheless, as many critical theorists assert examining contradictions is a necessary step in conscientization (Freire, 2003; Giroux, 2003).

Bethany celebrates that (more so than Practicum) Teaching College Writing “gives you the reason why you think [certain] things and helps you change your mind about some things.” Moreover, TCW forced her to think about her role as a teacher. For example, in a discussion of
Jonathan Alexander’s (2008) “Queer Pedagogies: Critical Multiculturalism Must Avoid the Flattening Effect,” Bethany shares, “My fear is that in Freshman Composition if there is no representation of difference, how does this conversation become anything other than a reinforcement of dominant values?” A classmate attempts to redirect (and also avoid) the conversation and asks, “Are [Freshman] ready for this discussion [of difference]?” Dr. Landow responds, “Applications from this text exceed this discussion of difference. There is a desire to make everything fit, but really all things don’t fit; I think the desire to resolve is very dominating.”

Bethany’s behavior contract—her mediation efforts—might reflect such a desire to resolve, nonetheless, she admits, “Knowing and having to think about what is a teacher and what I want to do in my classroom is groundbreaking in solidifying what you want to do.” Thanks to the exposure provided by the training courses and Race, Gender, and Culture, Bethany shares that she has “started approaching teaching language differently, varying the direction of [her] left-to-right lines.”

**Chelsea’s Story.**

“All teachers were once, or perhaps still are, students. In those years of studethood, we become conditioned to the classroom. We draw close to the teachers who inspire us and shy from those who intimidate or bore us. We make choices: to rise to expectations, to throw in the towel, or to rest on our laurels. The nature of the classroom is that it is teacher-mediated. As a result, our pedagogies reflect those who came before us—those techniques and approaches that worked for us, made us shine, allowed us to ‘get it’. I realize that the diversity of my students—whether in their personalities, learning styles, or cultural backgrounds—greatly influences my success in teaching them. Our students’ diverse positions in the world can be difficult to pinpoint, and even more difficult to penetrate. It is for this reason that I uphold a kind, reflective, multiple-perspective, student-centered approach to teaching in the composition classroom. My first belief is that the classroom should be defined by caring.”

This is the beginning of Chelsea’s *Teaching Philosophy Statement*, and it alone is a beautiful portrait of who she is as a student and teacher. Chelsea is a first year Masters student
who is studying literature but falling in love with rhetoric and composition. She has never pursued education as a profession formally, although she has taught German as a TA in her undergraduate studies.

It's not surprising at all that Chelsea's first belief is about the place of emotion in teaching. She is a very emotional participant in the training classes and in the classes she teaches. In the training classes, she sits often with books atop her desk and in a position as if perched on a ledge and ready to take flight. She's alert, ready, bouncing with anticipation. Her body language suggests youthful excitement and impetuosity; it says, "Oh, oh, please call on me. I can't wait to share what I've gained from this reading or this activity!" Yet, when she speaks, she's intentionally controlled, even methodical—she carefully selects the best phrasing or the best word and has no qualms about allowing others to see her work through her articulation; she speaks at a moderate pace and fidgets as though physically entangled with the idea she's daring to share; and she uses language to draw you into her comment: she beautifully guilds her strong assertions by using an interrogative tone so that her ideas aren't off putting. This is not to suggest, however, that concordance of ideas is always her goal; she doesn't hesitate to challenge her classmate's interpretation of readings or views about certain topics.

As a teacher, much like Bethany, Chelsea is not very authoritative. This is intentional, of course, as she wants to establish an environment of care and concern among her predominantly white and female group of students. In this vein, she often apologizes to students if she interrupts their in-class writing with some point of clarification or an announcement, and she always thanks students for turning in assignments and/or agreeing to participate in a public review of their writing—which suggests an appreciation for all that they do, even if the task is compulsory. She is particularly concerned with establishing a sense of community in her classroom, thus she
commonly makes comments like, “I hope we can explore the answers to your questions as a team.”

The affection she has for her students, however, is not always reciprocated. She writes in her blog, “For the first time in my (incredibly short!) teaching career, I suffered from feelings of loneliness and even disliking. With each ‘what’s your point?’ and ‘can we go now?’ facial expression, I felt not only professionally inadequate (‘What am I doing wrong?!), but personally disliked (‘Why won’t they talk to me? I certainly want to talk to them!’).” But, she pushes through their resistance and maintains her admittedly “bouncy” personality.

Chelsea intentionally and continuously blurs the traditional boundaries of teacher and student roles. She completes the in-class assignments she gives to students, she participates in peer reviews, and she readily admits that she doesn’t know answers to certain questions. In one class session, a student asked a question about MLA format. Chelsea, acknowledged that she wasn’t sure about the answer, and immediately asked me (the silent observer in the room), “Well you teach this stuff too, so what do you think?” I was uncomfortable at first, thinking, “Will this undermine her authority as the expert? Will she always defer to me if I choose to answer?” But, Chelsea’s agenda was transparent: her student had a question and she simply wanted to get the answer. It didn’t matter from whom the answer came. What was most important was that her student understood this aspect of MLA format.

This student-centered approach is what Chelsea believes works best (as she said above in her Teaching Philosophy Statement), and she is pleased that the work completed in her training helped prepare her to address student concerns. Particularly, she values TCW for its ability to help her deal with the notion of discourse and points of cultural conflict in her class. Chelsea relates this story:
“As I introduced the research paper, I introduced mountaintop removal practices in Appalachia, and I showed a video with some interviews from people whose homes had been flooded because of the mining and the land was less stable I guess. And, of course because they were from that region, dialect was different. So a woman who was being interviewed said ‘crick’ and one of my students said, ‘I just think whenever someone talks like that I just think that you’re stupid.’ Another student said, ‘Where I’m from, that’s just how it’s said.’ So she had just said that that makes her think that the people are stupid, and he said well that’s who I am. Of course, I felt immediately that I had to enlighten the student who said people who use this word are stupid. So, I related it back to discourse community. I tried to ask, ‘So, if someone is writing for the local newspaper, wouldn’t that kind of language be appropriate somehow?’ I also touched on the fact that dialect is dialect; it isn’t a measure of intelligence.

Chelsea admits that in addition to the knowledge gained from TCW, she “was prepared for this because [she] took an undergraduate class in Appalachian Literature and dealt really directly with white, hillbilly, poverty, all of those stereotypes.” She says, “I felt ready to defend that that was a way of speaking for those people. That’s how I was ready for that situation, but also because I had read about discourse communities in TCW.” Her appreciation for discussion that is centered on Appalachian culture does not translate into a readiness to address the manifestation of linguistic differences in writing. She continues the story: “The student who said ‘Well, where I’m from, that’s how it’s said’ actually had a lot of trouble on his first paper with sentence mechanics and was kind of striving for that academic tone but was really disorganized in terms of what he was thinking about. I couldn’t tell if it was just a cursory job or not. He got really close and was actually at the point where he couldn’t pass. And I told him, and he physically got really upset and angry and said, ‘I’m gonna pass!’ I said, ‘Well to pass you have to get A’s on your next few papers.’” Here Chelsea, at worst, conflates the student’s identity as a person who says “crick” with his ability to organize his essay (and possibly even being physically threatening). At best, she offers very little explanation of why his identity as someone who says “crick” is relevant to the discussion of the quality of his writing and his approach to success.
Although Chelsea celebrates her training as a place where “there was a kind of freedom
to adopt whatever ideas you felt connected to in some way and then get to reflect on those,” she
has not come to terms with how to teach students to have a disposition about discourse and
discourse communities that places one’s way of seeing the world, which includes one’s
home/natural/most comfortable language as the place to start the thinking process, the place to
engage discourse. She admits, this is her challenge as a writer, and thus her challenge as a
teacher. While working on a final paper for one of her classes, she blogs that she is struggling to
find a way to say exactly what she wants. She writes, “It sounds silly, but here’s what I see:
Small white birds flying quickly out of a bright red box into a shining yellow and blue sky (like
the one I see right now from the huge windows in Starbucks). And I laugh to myself for a
moment because I know I can’t use this language to describe Foucault’s depiction of the human
relationship with sexuality before the Victorian age. I know that I must find a word; one like
‘freedom’ (but of course not ‘freedom’); one that fits with the academic discourse I have already
begun to create.” Chelsea feels limited by the language of academic discourse, but believes that
she must figure out how to allow this language to inform the language she uses as a participant in
an academic discourse community. She wonders, “How can I lead students to think of discourse
in this way? How can I lead them to the discovery that we shape our (emphasis mine) language
to the discourse we write within?” The answer(s) for Chelsea, lies in the vast array of readings
completed in TCW.

Is Culturally Responsive Teaching Relevant?

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) places the student’s identity, the student’s culture,
the student’s language at the center of the work being done, as opposed to on the margins. While
there was not explicit conversation about CRT in the training, Bethany states, “I think there is a
circumvented addressing of the concept in our training. Because I think a lot of us are products of CRT (at least the teachers who are my age or younger; I’m just 24). In high school that’s basically the kind of teaching we respond to.” She has an understanding of CRT that has followed her since her days as an elementary education major: “It’s taking into account where your students come from and making a community around that.” Chelsea also admits that when she read *Other People’s Words* and *Ways with Words* she got really excited about this idea—though the actual phrase “culturally responsive teaching” was not mentioned in the texts explicitly. She recounts from the readings a conceptualization of CRT that involved this context: “The idea that the texts that were being used in the school curriculum were stories that were all about upper middle class families with a typical father, mother, and a dog, but those stories had no relevance to the students. The place of literacy in their world didn’t make sense. This is related to academic discourse,” Chelsea shares.

Yet the absence of a direct addressing of culturally responsive teaching in their training left each of the women wanting. Despite her excitement about *Other People’s Words* and *Ways with Words*, Chelsea confesses that “to actually examine [academic discourse] through specific cultural identity studies I think would really help.” She continues, “Because I’ve read some of that work I feel more capable of addressing urban Appalachian needs. Maybe I don’t though. Maybe I just realize that it’s an issue and I see it as a phenomenon that needs to be addressed…I think that we have talked about gender and sexuality, but I still don’t know what to do with issues of class and racial and ethnic differences.” The “not knowing what to do” with these issues caused a moment of panic for Chelsea in her classroom. As one of her students presented the draft of a paper, which was about the community center City Link, the student made a

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comment that conflated low income with struggling single mothers and troubled teens. The idea as the student presented it was that low income people are single mothers and are troubled teens. Chelsea attempted to help the student confront the stereotypical comment, but she stuttered and stumbled through that confrontation because, as she admits, “I didn’t know what to do.” Instead, she “literally stuck with sentence mechanics issues” and warned students about stereotypes in their papers. She informed the class that if the source uses this kind of language, make it clear in the paper that it is the language of the source, not the language of the writer.

This type of confusion is somewhat endemic to the work of a writing teacher, suggests Angie. When thinking about culturally responsive teaching, “the first thing I think about is how I respond,” she says. “I respond to the specific of the individual and the way they present themselves in writing. I don’t think it’s realistic in general to think that you can know your students well enough to be completely responsive. You just can’t know. On the other hand, I feel like I do that because I welcome, I open up to possibilities...So many of the readings in TCW lead you to believe that everything you do in composition is teaching students to step out of their own voice and into another one. So, maybe by definition, [composition is] not responsive. There’s that possibility. How does that possibility affect every day if you’re still in the composition classroom? If you’re still teaching writing?”

Bethany suggests that the best answer to Angie’s questions with regard to training is simply to bring awareness. She argues, “I think bringing up the idea in Practicum might be really useful for just making grad students aware of how they speak and how they act. As someone who is really a conservative implant in a very liberal community, I’m really hypersensitive to it because it is not my collective. But, I’m also a part of [this community] as a graduate student and a scholar, so I’m really aware of how I speak because I don’t want my opinions to offend
someone. But, I also want to take in their ideas.” Recall, however, that the Practicum was designed to focus on the “practice of teaching writing itself: the work of managing the classroom, devising meaningful assignments, assessing student work, and keeling on top of the paper load.” Therefore, the weekly agenda engaged related topics: reading difficult texts, commenting on essays for revision, grading essays, preparing the research paper, reviewing research project steps and expectations, working with research steps and assignments, the research project and prospectus, and grading the research portfolio. Furthermore, the daily agenda of the Practicum was typically determined based on GTA concerns; thus, if the GTAs did not suggest a discussion of issues related to culture, those issues were likely to not be addressed.

TCW, however, was not so driven by GTA classroom-specific issues. The objectives of Teaching College Writing, according to the course syllabus, are as follows: “to provide a rhetorical and historical framework for teaching writing; to explore competing theories of writing pedagogy so that we can test and formulate our own; to develop a repertoire of effective teaching strategies; to promote the habit of reflective teaching; to appreciate the professional and intellectual work required for effective teaching; and to understand composition and rhetoric as a discipline, and writing studies as a broad area of study.” There is, in this course then, not a specific commitment to culturally responsive teaching. Rather, there is an exploration of various pedagogies and theoretical frameworks that inform the teaching of writing so that the GTAs might develop their own pedagogies, their own identities as writing teachers.

Nonetheless, while the training courses did not outline specific parameters for study of culturally responsive teaching, each of the GTAs saw some value in including this way of thinking into the training and acknowledged receiving some insight into CRT discourse—even if the journey they took was not labeled such.
Emergent Themes: Data Analysis and Interpretation

Contradictions. Critical theorists argue that education should facilitate a movement toward freedom by examining the realm of contradictions that—as a consequence of social, historical, political, and/or cultural realities—keep one bound or oppressed (Giroux, 2003). Thus, the first theme that emerged was that of contradictions, particularly in response to the research questions.

A major contradiction emerged in this study, and it is captured in the GTA’s response to the following question: Do you feel adequately prepared to teach FYC or basic writing in a multicultural classroom context? The response was overwhelmingly, “Yes, but I still don’t know what to do.” Despite their celebration of TCW and overall sentiment that their training was effective, each participant openly critiques the training process in general for sometimes failing to give them a firm sense of what to do, especially as it relates to issues of multiculturalism. If the training leaves them longing for knowledge about action, why do they still claim the training adequately prepares them to teach in a multicultural classroom context?

One possibility is the role of the “plague of nostalgia.” Shulman (1994) notes, “This condition is marked by a common symptom—the firm belief that whatever the educational problem, the best way to combat it is by reinstating the ways through which the observers had been taught when they were the same age as their students” (p. 14). In many ways, what the GTAs learn reinforce what they believe about the roles of teachers and students already. For instance, Angie shares about her commitment to conventions in writing, “This is how I learned to unlock writing.” Thus, it is logical to her that her students must learn the rules of writing in the same way that she has in order to “unlock” writing—by learning the basics as taught by her teachers. Bethany also uses her success as a writer as the framework for her teaching. She shares
with her students that she produces “what my professor’s tell me” and expects that they will do the same: “I am your audience.” This isn’t malicious by any means; she admits, “It seems grammar is common sense to me…” Finally, Chelsea’s nostalgia is related more to the nature of the relationships established in her class: “In those years of studenthood, we become conditioned to the classroom. We draw close to the teachers who inspire us and shy from those who intimidate or bore us.” She is haunted early on by her suspicions that students are shying away from her: “Why won’t they talk to me? I certainly want to talk to them.”

This plague of nostalgia also leaves the GTA participants trapped in traditional understandings of the roles of teachers and students, in distinguishing those identities. As Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) warn, “Identity is a powerful influence on our motivation. We do things we would otherwise not do because we adhere to certain roles—teacher, parent, friend” (p.302). Therefore, while they are willing to acknowledge that they don’t know something in class, Angie, Bethany, and Chelsea identify as the enforcers of the rules of writing and/or thinking nonetheless. This is a part of how they distinguish themselves as the teacher, even if they use an ostensibly non-authoritarian approach to classroom management and instruction. Chelsea, for instance, shares that her student who uses the vernacular “crick” instead of the standard English term “creek” and identifies this as a part of his home culture (“That’s how people say it where I’m from”) struggles with his writing. Particularly, she says he struggles with “sentence mechanics and kind of striving for that academic tone, but [is] really disorganized.” Clearly, Chelsea’s sense of duty or responsibility led to her assessing this students’ writing as deserving of low marks: “He got really close and was actually at the point where he couldn’t pass.” While she celebrates this student’s effort to work within a particular discourse community in class (i.e. she informs the other student that use of a dialect is not an indicator of one’s level of
intelligence), she associates this student’s abilities to organize and his struggle with mechanics with his cultural identity as embraces her identity as the assessor, or “rule” enforcer. This moment was one like the many that Lillis and Turner (2001) identify as traditional in FYC: “When students’ texts match the academics’ expectations of what academic writing should be, i.e. when they meet the institutionally embedded socio-rhetorical norms of scientific rationality, language remains invisible. When texts don’t match such expectations…it is the student-writer’s language use that becomes the ‘problem’” (p. 65).

Angie has a similar experience with her African American student. She admits that, while familiar with the literature on how African Americans compose, when she reviewed his paper, “it is still not doing what [she] think[s] it should do for the specific context for this purpose of the writing.” Thus, she offers the following comment to the student: “I see how your mind is linking these things together, but here’s another strategy to try.” This comment cannot be received by the student outside of the context of the course. In other words, though offered as a suggestion, Angie’s course is authoritative in nature and she believes that success is associated with rigor and discipline. Thus, it is unlikely that (even if couched as a suggestion) her student would take this comment as a mere suggestion instead of as a dictate from the instructor to change. The bottom line, as Bethany puts it, is that “on the one hand, I have a standard that I have to pass them by. On the other, there is life experience that comes into play.”

Another possible reason for the GTAs’ celebration of their training as effective in terms of preparing them to teach in a multicultural context is the training’s emphasis on reflection. Before GTAs can respond to the various needs of culturally diverse students, they must first embrace reflexive (or reflective) practice about their teaching. Balester (2000) defines reflexivity as “an understanding of how our positions and backgrounds—including our culture, ethnicity,
gender, and race—contribute to, restrict, color, and even construct our ‘readings’ of culture and especially of others” (p. 126). This process of reflection in combination with action is understood as the Freirean notion of “praxis.” Freire (2003) proclaims, “Critical reflection is also action.” And, “Those who through reflection perceive the infeasibility or inappropriateness of one or another form of action (which should accordingly be postponed or substituted) cannot thereby be accused of inaction” (p. 128).

Each of the GTA participants engage in reflection as a consequence of her participation in the departmental training process. Angie’s reflective posture reveals a sense of openness in her to perspectives that are not only different from her own, but that might also suggest her perspective is problematic—i.e. after reading about and discussing the English conventions her position shifts from absolute reinforcement to consideration of the arbitrariness of those conventions. Moreover, she is especially concerned with making whatever change necessary to ensure the success of her students. She writes, “I guess what this signals at the halfway mark of the second term is my concerted efforts to truly cultivate a student-centered classroom.”

Bethany claims TCW forced her to think about her role as a teacher and “knowing and having to think about what is a teacher and what I want to do in my classroom is groundbreaking.” Finally, Chelsea reveals that the training was a place where “there was a kind of freedom to adopt whatever ideas you felt connected to in some way and then get to reflect on those.” This is very similar to the success achieved at Northern Arizona University, according to Bellanger and Gruber (2005): “Despite using a required reader, following assignment sequence, and applying rhetorical tools to the texts they were teaching, they had freedom within this structure to apply their own pedagogies, methodologies, and theories to teaching first-year composition” (p.133).
However, if the GTAs are still not compelled to act and act justly, then the experience of praxis does not exist. Again, Freire (2003) claims, “Critical reflection is action” (emphasis mine). Furthermore, a culturally responsive teaching framework cannot exist if there is no action. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) define culturally responsive teaching as “an evolution of sound educational practice that respects the principle that all cultures are significant to the construction of knowledge” (p. 283). But, as Gay (2000) argues, culturally responsive teaching must start with the thought that (among others) intention without action is insufficient. Therefore, the challenge facing the GTAs as they continue in their teaching journey is to identify and seize moments to act on their knowledge and appreciation of diversity.

Unfortunately, instead of seizing these moments to act justly, the GTAs struggle and seemingly unintentionally perpetuate the marginalization of those whose culture do not resemble that of the dominant culture. For instance, while Angie is aware of African American composition styles and suspects her student might be engaging such a rhetoric, she still claims, “It is still not doing what I think it should do for this specific context, for this purpose of the writing.” Thus, she pushes the student away from embracing this approach to writing instead of seeing it as an efficacy that, if celebrated, might strengthen his overall writing performance. As well, while Bethany celebrated the diversity present among her students, she exclaims, “I have a standard I have to pass them by.” Her response is then a retort, instead of framework for the instruction that must take place in the course.

This is not an indictment of Angie, Bethany, and Chelsea. Rather it is an acknowledgement of the challenge facing GTAs (and all teachers quite frankly) to work against the hidden curriculum, which is defined by Michael Apple (cited in Boyd et. al., 2006) as “the tacit teaching to students of norms, values, and dispositions that goes on simply by their living in
and coping with the institutional expectations and routines of schools day in and day out for a number of years” (p. 330).

Limited Commitment to CRT. The GTA participants in this study revealed an embracing at least two of Gay’s tenets of CRT (even if they did not use this phrase to explain their practice): culture counts and there is strength and vitality in cultural diversity. Angie acknowledges how important it is to know “where students are coming from” as she talks about the challenges assessing student work: “You don’t necessarily know where students are coming from. Even if you read this is how African Americans compose, well just because that’s true doesn’t mean it’s true across the board.” This comment suggests Angie is not only aware of how influential one’s culture is to one’s writing, but also that, when we consider various ethnic groups, we must consider the diversity that exists within those groups. Bethany also acknowledges the significance of her students’ identities and her challenges as a teacher to relate to her students: “I can’t begin to understand the experiences of my students in a lot of ways because I haven’t lived their lives and they haven’t lived mine...But, I don’t think this bleaching out [of my students’ cultures] has to happen if we teach our students about rhetorical situations.” Finally, Chelsea, in the rendering of the story of her student’s language use, acknowledges how students’ language is a sacred part of who they are: “A woman who was being interviewed said ‘crick’ and one of my students said, ‘I just think that whenever someone talks like that I just think you’re stupid. Another student said, ‘Where I’m from, that just how it’s said.’ So she had just said that makes her think that people are stupid and he said, ‘Well, that’s who I am.”

The participants value diversity and understand the role that culture plays in informing students’ writings. However, the remaining four understandings remain a challenge. Embracing the idea that conventional reform is not enough is thwarted by the GTAs’ commitment to
adhering to the demands of the department as articulated in the *Student Guide to English Composition 101 & 102* and the dictates of their instructors. As Bethany shares, "I have a standard that I have to pass them by.” Thus, while she takes liberties in her approach to classroom instruction and attempts to create a classroom climate that is welcoming to all students, her assessment is quite traditional—she uses a rubric based on the one provided in the *Student Guide*.

The third understanding—intention without action is insufficient—is difficult to embrace because the GTAs have felt ill-prepared to actually act. As Chelsea confesses, when her student conflates low-income with single-mother and trouble teen, she “didn’t know what to do.” So, she, “literally stuck with sentence mechanics issues” instead of addressing the harm of conflation in any substantive way in the classroom. Angie also struggles with such confrontations. She recalls simply feeling icky after an Orientation session that required an evaluation of student essays that were just “abhorrent with sexist language.” The training did not offer her any sense of how to address these issues.

Finally, with regards to the role of grades as a symptom not a cause of achievement, the participants in this study still place a high value on the students’ products being aligned with their notions (which mirror traditional notions) of the “Ideal Text” (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1999). As aforementioned, the challenges faced by Chelsea’s student who identifies with those who use the word “crick” were his responsibility to correct. He alone had the obligation to improve. Similarly, in Angie’s class, she reveals that when reading the writings of her African American student, she was able to see and thus appreciate the tradition of African American composition in his work, but she still thought the work was insufficient: “It is still not doing what I think it should do for this specific context, for this purpose of the writing.”
The exposure of the participants’ struggle to embrace CRT beyond the surface-level appreciation of diversity in general is again not an indictment. It is intended “not to induce guilt or liberal, knee jerk responses but to deepen our sensitivity to the vast array of ways we may be complicitous with the inequitable treatment of others and to open ourselves to knowing the limitation of our own perspective and our need for the other.” This is also in keeping with the goal of portraiture. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (1986) reminds us, “The relationship between researchers and practitioners [creates] opportunities for the empowerment of both parties,” (p. 26).

**Summary**

This chapter provided a narrative of findings for this study. In the section titled *A Portrait of GTA Training*, the details of GTA training were described from the voices of the trainers as well as the GTAs so that clarity about the training process—the courses, the expectations of those courses, and the daily regime of those courses—was obtained. The way that the GTA participants depicted the training process informed their interpretations of the training’s ability to prepare them sufficiently to teach in a multicultural classroom context.

According to Angie, the training was as effective as any training could possibly be. Her contention is that the greatest lessons learned are those learned through experience; thus, discussion of the challenges that African American students face in composition courses, for instance, did not prepare her sufficiently to handle the real challenge of assessing a student’s paper that employed African American rhetoric. Bethany, on the other hand, felt quite prepared by her training to address issues of diversity and difference. She also, however, acknowledges how integral another class—Race, Gender, and Culture—was to her growth as a teacher and her preparation to handle challenges related to multiculturalism. For Bethany, the success of the
training lies in its effective promotion of reflection—especially considering how relevant the
teacher's identity is to the instruction—and its ability to enhance awareness of critical issues in
composition instruction even if solutions were not provided. Similarly, Chelsea valued the
training (particularly Teaching College Writing), and attributes her ability to handle conflict in
her class about language and culture to the knowledge she gained from the readings.

Overall, the GTAs found that their training did indeed help prepare them to teach writing
in a multicultural context. However, each also believed a more direct discussion of culturally
responsive teaching could enhance their training. They concurred that exposure to culturally
responsive teaching was achieved despite the absence of the actual phrase in readings and
discussions.

The next chapter will provide summary, discussion, and conclusions to this study based
on the findings presented in this chapter.
Chapter Five

Summary, Discussion, and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief summary of the research study and a discussion of the findings as they relate to the theoretical framework shaping the research. The summary and discussion are followed by *Implications for Practice and Future Research*. While the study focused on GTA training, data obtained provided insights about the application of culturally responsive teaching in first year composition and raised questions about enrollment practices at urban institutions of higher education.

Summary of the Study

First year composition courses have historically functioned as gatekeepers to higher education and proponents of the status quo. As such, many minority students—particularly African American and Latino students—have experienced limited success in FYC (Ball & Lardner, 2005). Suggestions about the cause of such disparity are varied and range from the devaluing of the home languages of minorities (Matsuda, 2006; Smitherman, 2006) to the presence of systemic practices determined to reinforce the social class structure (Crowley, 1998). GTAs—and all literacy instructors for that matter—must then employ pedagogies that ensure that “no student is excluded from full participation in classrooms and in the learning activities contained therein regardless of ethnic, cultural, or linguistic difference” (Boyd et al., 2006, p. 330).

The purpose of this study was to determine graduate teaching assistants’ perspective on their preparation to teach FYC in a multicultural teaching context. It further sought to establish a
place in FYC teacher training and practice for culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and an increased focus on critical theory as a lens for evaluation and critique of composition pedagogy. Particularly, the study sought answers to the following questions:

(1) What type of preparation is provided to graduate teaching assistants to help prepare them for teaching writing in a multicultural classroom context?

(2) Do GTA’s feel adequately prepared to teach FYC or basic writing in a multicultural classroom context? More, specifically, to what do they attribute their feeling of preparedness or lack of preparedness?

(3) What do GTAs understand about culturally responsive teaching and how does their understanding shape their pedagogy?

In order to secure answers to these questions, three white, female GTAs in English—Angie, Bethany, and Chelsea—at a public, urban university were selected as participants in the study. Each participant was a first year graduate students at the university, but one was a doctoral student while the other two were pursuing Masters degrees. All participants professed an interest in teaching and agreed to be observed in training and while teaching, kept a reflection journal about her experience, and submitted copies of completed assignments for the training courses.

A research methodology called Portraiture was used in this study because it is committed to the rich description that traditional ethnography demands, but the portrait is shaped by dialogue between the researcher and the participant(s). Furthermore, portraiture is a structured approach to research that focuses on context, voice, relationships, emergent themes, and the aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This approach to data collection supports the exposure of voices otherwise unheard and thus welcomes various methods of data collection so that this end is achieved. As characterized by Chapman (2005), it is “a response to the marginalization and
sterilization of teachers, administrators, and students in schools. The portraiture method rejects flat, stereotypical explanations for school success or failure and depicts the multiple layers of contexts represented by events and people.”

Portraiture also rejects the tendency toward pathology and requires a search for goodness. Thus, the relationships formed between the researcher and the participants were not threatened by the historical penchant of empirical research in education of focusing on what educators do wrong and/or what is not working in a school or classroom. A methodology that highlights the relationship between researcher and participants was necessary in light of the amount of time the researcher and participants spent together and in light of the access to the participants’ personal and academic writings.

The study revealed that, according to the participants, GTA training at the university does effectively prepare GTAs to teach in a multicultural context. The notion of effectiveness was measured by the level of and amount of difficulty each participant had resolving challenges they associated with cultural difference. Although the participants describe the training as effective, they, nonetheless, identified shortcomings of the training—Angie, for instance, admits that training can only do what trainings can do; one needs experience to be able to handle specific issues—and admitted that the training could be enhanced by the inclusion of direct instruction about culturally responsive teaching and/or concentrated studies of a particular culture or cultures.

Overall, the participants felt prepared to teach in a multicultural classroom context, even though they shared stories of not knowing what to do in certain instances. For example, recall Chelsea’s reflection about Appalachian culture: “Because I’ve read some of that work I feel more capable of addressing urban Appalachian needs. Maybe I don’t though. Maybe I just
realize that it’s an issue and I see it as a phenomenon that needs to be addressed... I think we have talked about gender and sexuality, but I still don’t know what to do with issues of class and racial and ethnic differences.” Chelsea, Angie, and Bethany all admit that the training was helpful for moments like these, but each also attributes something else to their readiness for such moments. For Angie, it is the wealth of experience she has had as a teacher; for Bethany, it is the supplement of exposure to the ideas gained in a course called Race, Gender, and Culture; and, for Chelsea, it is her prior knowledge of Appalachian culture, which she studied as an undergraduate.

Discussion of Findings: A Second Look at the Portrait of GTA Training

The writing practicum, according to Dobrin (2005), is complex in conceptualization and function. Dobrin says it’s the place where GTAs are introduced to “composition theory, research methodologies, pedagogical theory, histories of composition as a discipline, and larger disciplinary questions about writing…” (p.2). Miller et al. (2005) offer a more vague claim about the practicum; they claim it is the foundation of lifelong professional development. Bellanger and Gruber (2005) have yet another, more philosophical, take on the practicum; they claim it is the course that helps (or should help) GTAs realize their freedom. Whether descriptive statements are concrete or abstract, most English departments employ some practicum or practicum-type course as preparation for teaching FYC.

The GTA training process at the university begins with a pre-teaching Orientation session and is followed by a two-quarter long Practicum course and a course called Teaching College Writing (TCW)—both of which are completed while GTAs teach sections of first-year composition. As Dobrin (2005) asserts about the training of GTAs in general, this practicum is indeed an introduction to theory, history of composition, and pedagogy. However, the
supplement of TCW provides a more in-depth examination of rhetoric and composition as a field and is, according to Dr. Landow (its instructor), an immersion “in the debates that animate the discipline.” It was designed, she says, to “prepare [GTAs] to teach and offer them the framework they needed to teach college composition and to be able to talk about it in thoughtful ways when they go out onto the job market.” Thus, while the course is preparation and support for the teaching obligations GTAs have, it is also intended as professional development for the GTAs as future members of the professorate.

The Practicum is also a support system for GTAs. It is student-centered and student-driven. While the students are given reading and writing assignments, the course is interpreted by the research participants as a “vent session,” as a course “valuable for practical issues like dealing with students when they don’t show up, figuring out how to order your books, figuring out how to enter letter grades like NP or withdrawals, and then putting out lesson plans and hearing feedback from the whole class.” This is quite a contrast from the description of TCW. As Bethany claims, “Teaching College Writing gives you the theoretical reasons why our pedagogy and curriculum are set up the way it is.”

For the participants in this study, TCW is the place where they make sense of what they do and how they do it. Although the Practicum is designed to tackle more directly the “how to” aspects of teaching, the affirmations offered about TCW outweigh those offered about Practicum. Furthermore, there was greater transfer of knowledge from TCW than from Practicum. Angie shares, “I embraced a lot of Patricia Dunn’s Sketching Living…I asked my students to talk about their writing experiences in terms of metaphor and to draw and that sort of thing. And I got that in TCW…”; Bethany discusses issues of rhetorical grammar in her class, a
concept to which she was exposed in TCW; and Chelsea directly talks of Peter Elbow with her
students, a scholar to whom she was introduced in TCW.

The participants in this study were simply more engaged in TCW, which is not
surprising. The GTAs valued their training in TCW because it was the site for participation in
what Phelps terms the “PTP arc”—practice-theory-practice—(cited in Fischer, 2005). As Odum
et. al. (2005) reveal, the GTA’s greatest task is to develop a pedagogy that operates as his or her
“enactment of a theoretical position.” TCW allows that because it is a course consumed with the
Freirean notion of praxis, and, as Villanueva (1997) argues, this is what is necessary in order to
truly engage students in writing discourse.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

GTA training and teaching First Year Composition are arduous tasks. The training that
GTAs received in this study is noteworthy in that it engages reflection, which creates a posture
of readiness to embrace culturally responsive teaching in each participant. However, while each
participant concurred that the training was effective, they each agreed that it was insufficient.

While discussing her engagement of Homi Bhabha’s The Location of Culture, Bethany
acknowledges a tension that exists when considering academic writing—the erasure of cultural
identifiers in language. She says that one of her classmates claims that academic discourse
bleaches out one’s heritage because of the language used. Angie, also questions the role of
academic writing as a devise of power. She says, “So many of the readings in TCW lead you to
believe that everything you do in composition is teaching students to step out of their own voice
and into another one. So, maybe by definition, it’s not responsive.” While these comments reflect
the realities of composition as espoused by many theorists, they also beg a question about
culturally responsive teaching that Ladson-Billings (2006) suggests is a problem: “Yes, but how do we do it?” As Delpit (1995) so articulately asserts:

If we are to successfully educate all of our children, we must work to remove the blinders built of stereotypes, monocultural instructional methodologies, ignorance, social distance, biased research and racism. We must work to destroy those blinders so that it is possible to really see, to really know the students we must teach. (p.182)

While I agree that attitude adjustment and a shift in how we think “about the social context, about the students, about the curriculum, and about instruction” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p.30) are preeminent, answers to the question must be proposed.

Angie, Bethany, and Chelsea each understood the implications of culture in their students’ writings. They took courses and completed readings on the role that culture plays in discourse—particularly academic discourse. In fact, a shift did indeed occur: Angie, for instance, went from a staunch proponent of teaching the basics to a believer that conventions are arbitrary, Bethany went from dutifully grading papers to “examining her comments closely and keeping her biased opinion out of it,” and Chelsea went from desperately seeking emotional reciprocity from her students to caring about them anyway. Yet, these shifts, I would argue did not change their perceptions of good, acceptable writing. For Angie, African American rhetoric was still unacceptable. For Chelsea, the logic associated with the language of people who use the word “crick” (as her student does), remained disorganized and something to be fixed.

In order to remedy this dissonance with CRT, the writings that students produce, must be inclusive of alternate language styles/forms—this calls for accepting not only vocabulary differences, but also organizational differences and different approaches to logic. This can actually aid teachers in their ability or inability as the case may be, to “distinguish between
language difference and language disability” (Perry, Steel, & Hilliard, 2003, p. 66). It is not sufficient, nor is it just, to acknowledge, for instance, that there is an African American way of composing (as Angie does), and then assess that composition style based on traditional standards of writing that set white, middle-class language practice as the norm. When we (composition instructors) assign papers while reinforcing rules like “don’t write like you talk”, academic writing remains oppressive. The exclusive use of Standard Written English (SWE) ignores the significance, the value, of language as a reflection of one’s culture and identity. It further ignores the notion “that some important dimensions of intended meaning probably cannot be translated from AAVE [or other languages] to Standard English” (Ball & Lardner, 2005, p. 49).

The language barrier formed by the conflict between linguistic styles employed in the home and community cultures of cultural and language minorities and that of formal educational settings creates what seems to be a daily boader crossing regime for students. Success in academic writing seems to be contingent upon these students’ adaptations of dominant linguistic (cultural) styles (Perry, Steele, & Hillard, 2003). However, as Bethany argues, this bleaching does not have to take place. The erasure of students’ identities only occurs when their language is seen as error instead of efficacy. Instead of developing strategies to erase difference (i.e. obediently reinforcing grammar traditions), critical writing pedagogy should work to promote inquiry about why certain groups’ linguistic varieties are more or less valued than others. “It’s time for new thought on the Language Question, time to move beyond the simplistic thinking of the twentieth century, time to move language conversation to higher ground” (Smitherman, 2006, p. 136).

_The Relevance of Context._ The University that served as the site for this study exemplifies the complexity of issues of access today. Though not an open-admissions
university, 10.4% of its freshman class for 2007-2008 was African American. 50.4% of these African American freshmen, however, failed to demonstrate competence in English and/or Mathematics as determined by the university’s admissions standards and had to enroll in the academic program of the Center for Access and Transition (CAT)—an institutional bridge designed to help ready students for enrollment in degree granting programs at the university. Thus, half of the African American students admitted did not have full access to the college’s degree granting programs.

While this study did not focus solely on the experience of African American students, this reality—that 50.4% of them are filtered out of FYC—explains the seemingly limited diversity that is present in the First Year Composition courses. Furthermore, a commitment to culturally responsive teaching requires that teachers appreciate the presence of multiculturalism. If, however, there appears to be no or limited diversity among the students, the tendency to overlook the needs of those whose identity do not match that of the dominant culture may arise.

The greatest challenge, however, is that classrooms are spaces for socialization in the U.S. Thus, whether or not “other” cultures are present in great numbers, classrooms have the potential to be transformative when instructors and institutions commit to multiculturalism. As James A. Banks acknowledges in the “Forward” to Geneva Gay’s Culturally Responsive Teaching:

“An important goal of multicultural education is to improve race relations and to help all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to participate in cross-cultural interactions an in personal, social and civic action that will help make our nation more democratic and just. Multicultural education is consequently as important for
middle-class White suburban students as it is for students of color who live in the inner city" (Gay, 2000, p. vii-viii).

The participants in this study believed their training was effective in preparing them to teach in a multicultural classroom context. However, the practice of the University in filtering out of the degree granting programs students who reveal a lack of readiness caused the participants’ classrooms to be very racially and linguistically homogenous. Were they ready for those classes? Absolutely! Yet future studies of preparedness at institutions where there is no such “sanitizing” of the student population upon admission or where there is a greater sense of diversity among the student population are needed.

Furthermore, institutional leaders’ ideas about the function of FYC greatly impacts curricular decisions. Because this study focused on the GTA experience particularly, questions about the institution’s role in embracing and/or devaluing culturally responsive teaching could not be answered.
References


Center, C. (2004). "Explaining my opinion by my own words": Considerations for teaching linguistically different basic writers. Teaching English in the Two Year College, 31(3).


APPENDIX A

Teaching College Writing Syllabus

Winter 2009: 15 ENGC 730 001: Teaching College Writing, Mondays 1:00-3:45, McMicken 568

Objectives & Expectations
- To provide a rhetorical and historical framework for teaching writing.
- To explore competing theories of writing pedagogy so that we can test and formulate our own.
- To develop a repertoire of effective teaching strategies.
- To promote the habit of reflective teaching.
- To appreciate the professional and intellectual work required for effective teaching.
- To understand composition and rhetoric as a discipline, and writing studies as a broad area of study.

Expect to write steadily about the issues we're studying, share some of your writing with classmates, listen to and participate in discussion, and enact the model of studentship you desire from your own students.

Required Readings & Materials
Course pack, available online at www.shop.CoursePacksEtc.com. Click on the UC logo and choose our pack. The cost is $36.95 + shipping.

Requirements
Attendance and participation are first order requirements. You are permitted one absence during the quarter; subsequent ones may affect your final grade at my discretion. "Participation" signifies contributing meaningfully to discussion and practicing good listening. It also means reading the required materials, preparing and editing your writing in advance of class, and submitting assignments on time.

1. Weekly response cards (8 total) and one response paper as basis for leading discussion (30% total):
   4x6 Index Cards (I'll supply the cards) (format: handwritten; 15%): Select one reading from the current week and write a response that includes, on one side, your name, name of article + author, and thesis; on the other, a close reading of some aspect of the selected essay (a phrase, example, key word, etc.). Do not attempt to summarize or respond to the whole article—instead, focus on a detail that you find curious, interesting, confusing, troubling, and so forth. Please write legibly; if you can't, please type.

   Response paper: (format: one page, single-spaced; 15%): Response to a current reading—questions it raises for you, implications for teaching composition, points of interest or concern (bring copies for every class member). Your paper will be the basis for leading class discussion on the chosen article. You will not read your paper aloud but can refer to it as a guide for leading us through the ideas. Your job as leader is much like your task as a teacher in your own classes: get the conversation going, highlight key passages and ask questions, and, if you wish, assign us a very brief task to do in order to generate discussion. Do not summarize the article or outline it in detail; assume that we've read and are ready to discuss the material. No card due when turning in response paper.

2. Exploratory multi-modal project (15%) about any aspect of writing instruction, and a one page, single-spaced rationale in which you describe your purpose, goals, problems, and successes. Comment, too, on how this project affected your thinking about composing. One goal of this assignment is to encourage play and creativity; as such, I do not expect a polished product. I expect a good faith effort to stretch your understanding of composing by experimenting with visual and/or digital tools. Possible forms this assignment might take include a short video, a sound piece or oral essay, a blog or wiki, a photo project delivered via PowerPoint, and so forth. We'll visit the Student
Resources and Technology Center in Langsam where we'll get an overview of available equipment and software and how to use it. This assignment is due the last day of class, during which we'll showcase our work.

3. **Teaching Portfolio (55%)**: Teaching portfolios—hard-copy or web accessible—are frequently requested from job candidates, used for tenure and promotion, and solicited by teaching award committees. To become acquainted with this important form of pedagogical documentation, you'll compile materials during the quarter that represent your current teaching practices. This is a work-in-progress, a beginning step toward a professional portfolio that you should expect to supplement and revise during your graduate studies and beyond. Your goal is to collect artifacts and examples of what you do as a teacher and to reflect critically on them. More specifically, the contents of your portfolio will include the following:

   a) **Teaching Philosophy Statement** (format: 1-2 pages, single-spaced): Articulates the principles that inform your teaching methods. Should be the first document in your portfolio. We'll do an in-class peer review of the first draft.

   b) **Response Strategies** (format: 4-5 pages, double-spaced): In preparation for this essay, ask students to sign a waiver, granting you permission to use their essays for research purposes (sample waiver form is below). After securing permissions, make copies of several student papers with your comments on them. Analyze your response patterns and strategies in relation to a select few of these student papers. Develop your analysis in the context of our readings about teacher-response. When submitting your first draft, be sure to include the student essays along with your paper. This paper will go through (at least) two drafts.

   c) **Syllabus, Rationale, & Peer Review** (no designated length): Develop a syllabus in your area of interest that puts composing at the center of a general education course aimed at sophomores. Composing—whether in relation to written, visual, or audio texts—should be a meaningful part of the course and not merely a tool by which you test students' knowledge of the material. Your syllabus should include a description or set of objectives, required texts, assignment descriptions, and a calendar based on the Spring 2009 schedule (no policy statement required). In addition, write a one-page single-spaced rationale for your course: Why did you design it as you did? What were your goals? What difficulties did you encounter? What theories of writing inform your course? Finally, you will write and receive a peer review of this assignment.

A note on portfolio grading: I'll read and grade your portfolio holistically, focusing on conscientiousness, attention to detail, thoughtfulness, and critical engagement with the material. I expect that you will draw from our readings both by quoting directly and by referencing debates/issues generally. Please include drafts and revisions in the final portfolio.

*******

Sample waiver form:

I, __________________________ (student's name, printed), consent that [your name here] may use my writing in this course for research purposes. Resulting research papers, conference papers, and/or publications may include short selections or entire excerpts from my writing. I do / do not (circle one) wish to remain anonymous in these research forums.

________________________ (student's signature) ____________ (date)
Course Calendar

W1, M 1/5  Points of Orientation
Connors; Faigley; Bloom; Heard; Teaching Composition Position Statement:
(http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/teachingcomposition)

W2, M 1/12  Writing Pedagogies (sign up for response paper)
Weisser; Miller; Dunn; Lundin

W3, M 1/19  MLK Holiday—no class (reschedule)
Some Key Texts
Crowley (2 essays); Bartholomae; Elbow, "Reflections"; Berthoff

W4, M 1/26  (Re)Composing Composition
Downs & Wardle; Yancey; George

W5, M 2/2  Multi-modal & Digital Writing
Comstock & Hocks: (http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/comstock_hocks); Sorapure
(http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/10.2/binder2.html?coverweb/sorapure/index.html); Sheridan & Hart-Davidson

W6, M 2/9  Response Strategies & Grading
Lunsford & Straub; Smith; Elbow, "Ranking"; Mountford

F 2/13  Draft of Response Strategies essay due (send to me via email by 2:00 p.m.; be
sure to put copies of student essays in my box or send electronic versions)

W7, M 2/16  Composing & Revising
Elbow, "Closing"; Perl; Sommers (2 essays); Alexander (http://cccc-
blog.blogspot.com/2008/09/queer-pedagogy-multiculturalism-must.html)

F, 2/20  Draft of Syllabus & Rationale due—send word attachment to me & peer
reviewer by 2:00 p.m.

W8, M 2/23  Teacher and Student Identities
Jarratt; Tobin; Lindquist; Moss & Walters

Peer review due—bring copies for me & peer reviewer to class today

W9, M 3/2  Style & Grammar
Glenn; Micciche; Weathers

Teaching philosophy draft due—bring 3 copies for in-class workshop

W10, M 3/9  Multi-modal projects due today—showcase in class

Final, W 3/11  Final Portfolio due in my office by 2:00
Course Bibliography


APPENDIX B

Teaching College Writing Syllabus

English 732: Teaching Practicum
Winter 2009 Section 001, F 11-12:50
Baldwin 741

Office: McMicken 245B
Phone: 556-6173/0462
Mailbox: McMicken 241 (7:30-4:30 MF)
Email: joyce.malek@uc.edu

Office Hours: TBA

English Office: 556-6173 (7:30-4:30 M-F)

Texts:

Your 102 course and materials: 101/102 Student Guide, The World Without Us, Rules for Writers

IMPORTANT NOTICE:
All course materials including the syllabus, schedule, assignment descriptions, handouts, and announcements can be accessed through our Blackboard site. I will distribute few if any copies of course materials. Please check our course site regularly for materials and updates.

Course Overview

English 732 continues the goal of English 731: to support you in teaching the first-year composition course. While our course is grounded in theory, our concerns are with the practice of teaching writing itself: the work of managing the classroom, devising meaningful assignments, assessing student work, and keeping on top of the paper load. We will have plenty of opportunities to discuss what's going on in your freshman composition sections, to share ideas, to assess what's working, what isn't, and why, and to prepare for the next week's work. In addition, to practice writing as a process of doing critical thinking as well as to model what to do in your composition courses, we will write nearly every class period, drawing from many of the strategies in Bean's text. Our Friday class is a chance to debrief, de-stress, get helpful feedback and suggestions, and practice writing activities.

Course Requirements and Assignments
- Full descriptions of the graded assignments are under "Assignments" on Blackboard.
- Due dates are listed below and on the Course Schedule

Class participation (20%)
This course is designed as a workshop; your active participation is expected. Please observe common sense rules of courtesy and be on time with required work, ready to discuss and write. Since this course is directly linked to your teaching, if you must miss class, please let me know in advance and see me about making up work.
Note: We will not hold class on Friday, March 13. Instead, we will determine an alternative date.
Class Presentation (20%: Due when assigned)
A group presentation on a chapter from Bean.

Three in-class informal Writing Activities (10% each: Due when completed or by 3/6)
Three informal writing activities designed for your 102 course that stimulate learning. You may draw from Bean and other texts, including Writer's Resource, but refine the activities to specific goals for the class period.

Midterm and end-of-term reflection (15% each: Due 2/13 and 3/16)
Two four to five-page papers reflecting on your teaching this term.

Summary of Requirements

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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
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<td>Presentation</td>
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<td>Informal Writing Activities</td>
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<td>Teaching Reflections</td>
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I grade on a standard 10/100 point scale:
90-93.5 = A-; 94-100 = A
86.5-89.5 = B+; 84-86 = B; 80-83.5 = B-
76.5-79.5 = C+; 74-76 = C; 70-73.5 = C-
66.5-69.5 = D+; 64-66 = D; 60-63.5 = D-
English 732 Weekly Schedule
- This schedule is flexible and subject to change as needed. I will notify you of changes in advance and will post to Bb

In-class writing activities due when completed or by 3/6: Refer to Bean Chap 6

Presentation of Bean chapter/activity due when completed

Teaching reflections due 2/13 and 3/16

For Friday, 1/9

Read Bean Preface and Chapter 8; skim chaps 1-3
- Reading/discussion questions for The World Without Us due on Bb
- Hand in Syllabus and Unit One Schedule
- Bring World Without Us

Important Note: I will divide the class beginning week five. Half will meet from 11:00 to 11:50 and the other half will meet from 12:00 to 12:50. We will meet as a whole class during week nine from 11-12:50 and again in week ten on Wednesday, 3/12.

Week One
F 1/9 What lies ahead in 102: Overview of the term; Application of Bean Chapter 8: Reading Difficult Texts
Homework for 1/16
- Bring a copy of writing you're working on

Week Two
F 1/16 Guest: Pam Person; Commenting on essays for revision; Looking ahead to next week: Exploratory Analysis
Homework for 1/23
- Read Bean Chapter 14
- Bring two copies of one unmarked student essay either from this term or last

Week Three
F 1/23 Grading Essay One; Looking ahead to next week
Homework for 1/30
- Review Bean chapters 4, 7, 9, and 10 for group presentations beginning Week 5

Week Four
F 1/30 Guest, Mica Darley; Looking ahead to next week: Preparing for the research paper
Homework for 2/6
- Bring 102 Student Guide to class
• Read Bean chapter 12: research papers
• Group One prepare presentation on Bean Chapter

Please Note: We will meet in two separate groups from week five through eight, 2/6 through 2/8. Group A will meet from 11-11:50 and Group B will meet from 12-12:50. We will meet as a whole class in week nine, 3/6, from 11-11:50.

Week Five
F 2/6 Group One presentation; Review Research Project expectations and steps;
Looking ahead to next week
Homework for 2/13
• Prepare mid-term teaching reflection
• Group Two prepare presentation on Bean

Week Six
F 2/13 Mid-term reflection due; Working with research steps and assignments;
Group Two presentation, Looking ahead to next week
Homework for 2/20:
• Group Three prepare presentation on Bean

Week Seven
F 2/20: Check in on research project progress; Group Three presentation;
Looking ahead to next week
Homework for 2/27:
• Collect rough drafts of research projects or prospectus
• Group Four prepare presentation on Bean

Week Eight
F 2/27: Discussion of research project or prospectus drafts; Group Four presentation; Looking ahead to next week
Note: Meet as a whole class next week from 11-12:45: looking ahead to the end of the comp sequence and next term

Week Nine
F 3/6 Looking ahead to next week—end of comp sequence; Grading the Research Portfolio; Course evaluations
Reminders:
• Collect research portfolios
• Prepare end-of-term teaching reflection due by Monday, 3/16

Week Ten: We will meet as a group from 11:00 to 11:50 on Wednesday, 3/12: room TBA
• Course assignments for spring term; Summing up 102
Assignment Descriptions for English 732
Winter 2009

Discussion Board Postings
I want to encourage the continued use of the discussion Board as a valuable resource, but I will not be collecting postings this term.

When you do post, please post regularly and respectfully. Remember that the DB is a public forum available to anyone in our class and to others I provide with access. Do not use the DB as a forum to complain about the course, me, or each other. You can edit or remove your posts, but you cannot post anonymously.

Mid-term and end-of-term reflection (15% each/30% total)
The purpose of this assignment is to give you an opportunity to think about your teaching composition 102 over the past several weeks. The first reflection is due at midterm on 2/13 and the second is due Monday, 3/16. Your reflections should be four to five pages, double-spaced, in 12 point font. You can choose how you'd like to present your paper: as a narrative essay, a report, an analysis, other?

Midterm Reflection:
While students in 102 have successfully completed 101, they are still "novice" college writers, making many of the same mistakes you noticed in their 101 essays. In addition, they are now required to read a lengthier, more challenging text than what they encountered in 101. You might notice that some of your students seem to have slid backwards, but remember our discussion about student development mentioned in Wilhoit (pages 166-170): development is never a straight trajectory.

In addition, you've had to adapt your teaching to UC students and might find that you are facing new challenges this term with the 102 curriculum and a new group. The reflections are your opportunity to take some time to consider how the term has been going and whether it is meeting your expectations.

Here are some questions to consider as you write your paper:
As you worked through the first assignment with your students and colleagues, what did you learn about this new group of your students, your approach, and goals for the course.

What went well? What surprised you? What challenged you?

What have you changed or how have you adapted your approach to teaching your students? What methods or materials seem to work for you?

What do you see as your style of teaching? Your strengths? What would you like to improve or develop over the next several weeks?

Consider rereading Wilhoit's brief section on Philosophies of Composition on pages 28-30 and your mid-term reflection form 731. How do you see your approach now? Finally, looking ahead to the next few weeks, what are you looking forward to? What are you most concerned about? What goals will you set for yourself?
End-of-term Reflection:
Now that you’ve finished your second term teaching composition at UC, think back over the past ten weeks. Here are some questions to consider as you write your paper:

What do you realize now about yourself and your teaching that you didn’t know ten weeks ago, twenty weeks ago?

Reading over your midterm reflection, would you say your goals and challenges remained the same or did they change? In what ways?

What teaching moment or moments are you most pleased, proud, or excited about and why?

If you had a particularly challenging or difficult moment or moments, how would you handle it today?

Finally, what are your concerns, questions, or expectations for spring term when you’re on your own? Are you excited? Nervous? A little of both?

Due dates: 2/13 and Monday, 3/16

Three In-class Informal Writing Activities (10% each/30% total)
Design three informal writing activities that you’ll use in class this term. You can draw the activities from Bean or another source, but refine them to address learning goal specific to the class. For each activity, write a two-page report that

- describes the activity with instructions that you provided to the class
- states the goal or objective the activity is designed to address
- discusses the outcome or success of the activity along with any refinements you’d make should you use it again

Due date: When activity completed. You can turn in the reports each time you complete the activity or hand them all in at the same time.

Small Group Presentation of Chapter from Bean (20%)
Prepare a brief 15-20 minute group presentation that summarizes your selected chapter and leads the class in a discussion or activity suggested by it. Your group can be as creative as you like. Post any handouts, links, or PP’s to Bb.

Due Date: When assigned in class