2013

Exploring Identity-based Challenges to English Teachers' Professional Growth

Heather C. Camp

Minnesota State University, Mankato, heather.camp@mnsu.edu

Recommended Citation

T/W

Exploring Identity-based Challenges to English Teachers' Professional Growth

Heather Camp
Minnesota State University-Mankato

Introduction
Teacher Development and Identity Construction

Research on pre-service teacher education indicates that identity construction is an important facet of becoming a teacher. To establish oneself as a teaching professional, a person must craft a teacher identity out of the personal and professional discourses that surround him/her. This idea is consistent with contemporary theories of identity construction, which posit that the self is discursively constructed, made and remade by the various discourses that encompass the person. Such discourses--"pattern[s] of thinking, speaking, behaving, and interacting that [are] socially, culturally, and historically constructed and sanctioned by a specific group or groups of people" (Miller Marsh 456)--are constantly intermingling, wrangling for ideological power and dynamically shaping one another. To construct an identity, an individual must integrate these diverse discourses, weaving them together to form a dynamic but cohesive sense of self. On one hand, this twining process has the potential to promote psychological development, leading to the attainment of "an expanded, integrated self, more diverse and richer in the possibilities for action that these multiple identities afford" (Brown 676). Yet, it also may produce identity destabilization and fragmentation, leading to uncertainty, distress and stymied psychological growth (Brown).

New teachers are confronted with the task of adopting new discourses, and of forging relationships between old and new strands of their identities. Succeeding at this process facilitates the development of a secure and satisfying professional sense-of-self: research indicates that the attainment of an integrated identity helps teachers transition into and find satisfaction within the teaching profession (Alsup; Schempp et al.), teach effectively (Danielewicz), and nurture students' self-development (Borich; Boy and Pine). Further, it suggests that attaining a cohesive identity better prepares teachers to champion educational reform (Alsup).

Yet, research also suggests that accessing this array of rewards can be difficult (Alsup; Brown). As teachers seek to integrate their teacherly roles with other discourses that contribute to their sense of self, they may encounter identity conflicts that work against a sense of identity cohesiveness. Encountering such conflicts can lead to emotional turmoil and stunted professional growth, even leading some student teachers (and practicing teachers) to leave the teaching profession altogether (Alsup; Hong).

Growing awareness of the importance of professional identity construction and the psychological labor it demands has led to an upsurge in scholarship on pre-service teacher identity formation (Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop). Scholars have explored the significance (Malderez et al.) and difficulty (Brown) of constructing a coherent identity through teacher education courses and student teaching experiences; examined the role of reflection in professional identity formation (Sutherland, Howard, and Markauskaite); studied the identity work of non-native English speaking teachers (Lim); called on teacher educators to foreground identity work in teacher preparation (Lipka and Brinthaupt; Miller); and proposed pedagogical principles and practices to this end (Alsup; Danielewicz; Hasinoff and Mandzuk; Timostsuk and Ugaste; Walkington). This scholarship has drawn attention to the complexity of identity construction for pre-service teachers and offered educators insights into how they might support these students through this important work.

Less attention has been paid to the continued identity work of teachers, the ways teachers' identities evolve beyond teacher education courses and student teaching experiences. The supposition that identities are always "unfinished and in process" (Holland et al. vii) presents the need for researchers to study other junctures in which teachers' identities develop, particularly professional development experiences, which have the potential to—may even be designed to--shape teacher identity.

One such professional development experience is the Master's Degree. Master's programs often introduce teachers to broader disciplinary conversations that have bearing on their work. Master's coursework may familiarize teachers with a range of concerns and projects that compose a discipline and introduce them to new ways of theorizing about and researching classroom practices and broader education-related issues. Additionally, course and degree writing requirements (including the Master's thesis) may demand that they try out unfamiliar knowledge-making practices, participating in disciplinary conversations and activities as knowledgeable and authoritative scholar-teachers. To do so, they must appropriate new discourses, experimenting with disciplinary language and genres and the subject positions they afford. A key desired outcome of this process is the augmentation of teachers' identities: through the reading and writing they do, teachers ideally will come to see themselves and their work differently, recognizing their kinship to a larger disciplinary community and feeling empowered and knowledgeable enough to apply its perspectives.

This article explores identity-based challenges that may hinder English teachers enrolled in Master's programs from achieving this goal. It presents a case study of a secondary teacher enrolled in a graduate-level composition theory course situated in a content-area Master's program. The article details this teacher's efforts to integrate new discourses with established discourses, particularly through his work on the two major writing projects assigned in the course. Based on the analysis of his experiences, this article suggests that identity conflicts can impede teachers from integrating a disciplinary identity into their sense-of-self, thereby limiting the benefits afforded by the Master's degree. In particular, it suggests that dissonance between discourse norms and values, concerns about community allegiances, and assumptions about language, difficulty, and power can hinder teachers from appropriating disciplinary discourse and combining it with more familiar discourses that circulate in their schools. It concludes with recommendations for supporting the identity work of teachers enrolled in Master's programs in order to facilitate teachers' professional growth.

Identity Development and Academic Writing

Throughout the article, particular attention is given to the role that academic writing plays in teachers' identity development. Studies of college writers on both the undergraduate and graduate level have shown that academic writing is an identity-shaping activity; students make important decisions about self-representation and identification when they write for college, and such choices contribute to their ongoing efforts to compose a cohesive sense of self (Casanave; Herrington and Curtis; Ivanic; LeCourt; Prior). Likewise, when teachers write for their graduate courses, they begin to work out their relationship to a discipline's discourse, determining if it has a home among the repertoire of discourses that construct their identities. The writing that they do allows them to experiment in this regard; through this work, they may make strides toward an "expanded, integrated self, more diverse and richer in . . . possibilities for action" (Brown 676). Alternatively, they may retreat from identity change, thereby missing out on key opportunities for professional growth.

In scholarship on identity and writing, the former potentiality, represented by the term *identity hybridization*, often emerges as a key aspiration for college writers. Leaning on poststructuralist beliefs about identity fluidity and multiplicity, writing scholars assert that teachers should help students retain and utilize their diverse backgrounds, even as they acquire new ways of thinking, speaking, and being within the academy. The potential benefits of hybridization for English teachers enrolled in Master's degree programs are compelling: as they pair their developing facility with disciplinary discourse with the more familiar discourses circulating in their schools, they open up opportunities for new understandings, increased empowerment, collaborative knowledge-making, incisive critique and institutional change.

Yet, research findings on students' ability to achieve identity hybridization (and, by extension, teachers'

ability to do so in graduate school) call into question these possibilities. For example, Ashley's research provides examples of working-class undergraduate students using "*literate arts*, *manipulations*, *games,* and *tricks*" to participate in academic writing without abandoning other allegiances (516). While she claims that such moves might be construed as moments of empowerment (given the self-awareness displayed by students as they execute these strategies), the examples she provides—conformity, mimicry, depersonalization, misrepresentation—are a far cry from more healthy forms of identity hybridization most teachers would hope for their students. Ivanic and Casanave report that the adult students who participated in their studies of writing and identity felt ambivalent, alienated, and compromised as they struggled to make academic/disciplinary discourse their own. Indeed, Casanave suggests that lack of identity reconciliation played a central role in her case study student's decision to abandon her graduate program after her first year of study.

These troubling findings call for more research on the extent to which academic writing aids or impedes identity development, as well as explorations of how it might be adapted to better serve this end. To meet the needs of English teacher educators, studies focusing on the role of writing in secondary teachers' professional development and identity formation would be particularly useful. Notably, current research on teacher development provides limited insight into the relationship between academic writing and identity formation. Occasionally, discussions of writing emerge—journals, online discussion boards, statements of teaching philosophy, and capstone writing projects have all surfaced—yet writing rarely takes center stage. This study takes academic writing as its focus, considering how graduate writing assignments factor into the expansion of teachers' identities.

Theoretical Framework

Learning and Identity

A central assumption informing this research is that language, learning, and identity are inseparably connected. Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory, focused on "legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice," explores this tripartite relationship, foregrounding the connection between learning and identity. According to Lave and Wenger, learning occurs as individuals participate more and more fully in the practices of a community. Individuals entering a community begin by engaging in peripheral forms of involvement; with time and effort, however, they may eventually advance to "full participation" in its many forms. Through this process, individuals develop new relationships, commitments, and competencies, changes that elicit learning and, more broadly, lead to a transformation of the self. "[C]hanging knowledge, skill, and discourse are part of a developing identity," they write, underscoring the interconnectedness of learning and identity (122).

Wenger elaborates on the process of identity construction through learning, stating that identity is formed through "negotiating the meanings of . . . experience of membership in social communities" (145). He suggests that the experiences an individual has within a community, and the negotiation that such experience demands, depend, in part, on the individual's "trajectory" in relation to the community. Wenger describes five types of trajectories on which an individual might embark, each of which has implications for identity development:

- "Peripheral" trajectories, movement that is confined to the margins of a community;
- "Inbound" and "Outbound" trajectories, entrance into and advancement within or movement out of a community;
- "Insider" trajectories, full participants' movement within a community as the community itself changes; and
- "Boundary" trajectories, movement that bridges multiple communities. (154-155)

Wenger's work suggests that the last type of trajectory—movement across community boundaries—may place particular demands on individual identity construction. Indeed, he posits that identity construction may be "one of the most delicate challenges" that boundary crossers face (154). To maintain a sense of cohesiveness across boundaries, Wenger posits, individuals must construct their identities as a "nexus of multimembership"— that is, they must build an intricate network that holds together the multiple ways of thinking and acting engendered by their participation in various communities (159). Wenger states that to build such a nexus, individuals must engage in "reconciliation," a process of forming maintainable connections between distinct and sometimes conflicting forms of membership (160). The connections created through this reconciliatory process may be harmonious or dissonant, easily maintained or demanding considerable effort; whatever the case, such connections must allow individuals to sustain a sense of self across boundaries and thereby continue on their trajectories of practice, of learning, within multiple communities.

Engestrom, Engestrom, and Karkkainen add to Wenger's ideas on traversing boundaries and multimembership by elaborating on boundary work's effect on intellectual growth. They explore this area in their research on expert cognition and learning. They foreground the cognitive demands of working across boundaries, proposing a *horizontal* model of expertise that, they say, is needed to complement the more common vertical models. They offer the following rationale for their project:

In their work, experts operate in and move between multiple parallel activity contexts. These multiple contexts demand and afford different, complementary but also conflicting cognitive tools, rules, and patterns of social interaction. The criteria of expert knowledge and skill are different in the various contexts. Experts face the challenge of negotiating and combining ingredients from different contexts to achieve hybrid solutions. The vertical master-novice relationship, and with it, in some cases, the professional monopoly on expertise, is problematized as demands for dialogical problem solving increase. (319)

To recognize expertise developed along the horizontal plane, Engestrom et al. coin a new set of terms--among them, "polycontextuality," the ability to manage tasks simultaneously in different communities of practice, and "boundary crossing," the ability to apply modes and tools for thinking valued in one community to other contexts. (Wenger characterizes the latter work as "brokering" and underscores the intellectual and identity-based challenges inherent in such work [109].) "Experts" are characterized as those who have developed skills in polycontextuality and are able to cross boundaries to shape their communities' shared practices and thought processes.

Together, Lave and Wenger's and Engestrom et al.'s ideas provide insight into the intersecting processes of learning and identity negotiation, particularly as they occur at community boundaries. Their account conceptualizes boundary work both as a rigorous intellectual activity, requiring expert discernment and skill, and a demanding identity-building enterprise, requiring coordination of diverse and, at times, conflicting dimensions of individuals' socially-constructed identities.

Language and Identity

The ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin further enrich this representation of identity negotiation and learning. Bakhtin brings *language* to the fore, suggesting that the internalization and interplay of social discourses is the mechanism behind identity development.

Bakhtin posits that identity is composed of social languages. He contends that the self is made out of the "heteroglossia" of the social sphere--the dynamic interaction of discourses in the world. He envisions discourses *contending* for acceptance and prominence, and he suggests that through this ideological battle, individual identity takes form. He uses the term "ideological becoming" to describe this identity-making process.

Bakhtin's explanation of ideological becoming is governed by two central concepts: "authoritative discourse" and "internally persuasive discourse." *Authoritative discourse* is discourse that is enshrined and untouchable. Bakhtin describes it as "religious, political, moral; the word of a father, of adults and of teachers" (342). It is discourse whose "authority was already *acknowledged* in the past," he writes, "It is a *prior*

discourse" (342). Authoritative discourse has not been submitted to critical deconstruction or creative remix. Instead, it enjoys distanced and unwavering veneration and allegiance.

In contrast, *internally persuasive discourse* is authoritative discourse that has been explored, questioned, and made one's own. It is a hybrid discourse, consisting of language that is "half-ours and half-someone else's" (Bakhtin 345). For authoritative discourse to become internally persuasive, an individual must "[populate] it with his own intention, his own accent. . .adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (293). *Ideological becoming*—the making of a self--unfolds through the transformation of "authoritative discourse" into "internally persuasive discourse." It is through "the process of selectively assimilating" that the individual integrates new social languages into the complex of languages that comprise his/her "own" identity (341). The outcome is a "*boundary* phenomenon" (Emerson 1983), a mosaic constructed from pieces of various social languages (249).

Bakhtin's ideas extend the view of learning and identity development derived from Lave and Wenger's and Engestrom et al.'s work by highlighting the central role of discourse in self-development. His ideas suggest that discourse is the raw material out of which identities are made, and that discursive conflict, likely to occur at community boundaries, spurs identity (re)construction. Analyzing the interplay of discourses, then, can shed light on the work of nexus-building, of integrating disparate strands of an individual's identity into a cohesive whole. This interplay will be the focus of the case study discussed below.

Method

This study was carried out in an English department at State University, a research one land-grant university in the Midwest enrolling approximately 20,000 students. At the time of the study, about 80% of the student population was composed of in-state residents, with 4,700 of the students making up the graduate and law schools. MA and PhD program enrollment hovered around 150 students.

The MA and PhD tracks in English at State University resemble many other institutions in that the MA emphasizes breadth while the PhD emphasizes depth. The course requirements for the MA are flexible, allowing students to sample a range of courses within the field. In contrast, the PhD fosters specialization: PhD students are encouraged to select a field of study early and assemble a supervisory committee that can support their academic interests by the end of their first year. While the MA and PhD are tailored for different purposes, graduate students select from the same course options. Thus, graduate courses can contain MA and PhD students from different sub-disciplines in English who are at varying stages in their programs.

The research data was derived from a year-long IRB-approved study of graduate student writing and identity development. The study tracked two samples of students over the course of one academic year, from their initial enrollment in one of two graduate courses in English, *Approaches to Composition and Rhetorical Theory* or *Composition Theory and Practice,* through their next semester of graduate study. The study sample consisted of five males and six females: ten were pursuing PhDs in English (Composition and Rhetoric, 5; Literature, 2; Creative Writing, 1; Literature/Film, 1); one was pursuing an MA in English with a concentration in the teaching of English; and one was pursuing a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction with an interdisciplinary emphasis in writing. Participation was voluntary and the researcher did not have any ties (as teacher, intern, or student) to the courses from which research subjects were recruited.

Data collection for this project consisted of conducting interviews and collecting and studying the academic writing of research subjects for one academic year. Research subjects were interviewed five times over the course of the study: three times during the first semester (beginning/middle/end) and two times during the second semester (beginning/end). Interviews were held in the interviewer's office on campus, except when the research subject had his/her own office and preferred to be interviewed there. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, with questions adapted to the point in the semester in which the interview was taking place. Research subjects were asked about their writing histories and academic trajectories, current

writing challenges and successes, purposes for course writing assignments, factors that advanced and impeded their writing development, experiences with course-specific writing venues (e.g. online discussion boards, peer response groups), and future writing goals. On select occasions, interviews were supplemented with an e-mail exchange or digitally-recorded follow-up conversation between interviewer and interviewee.

In addition to being interviewed, research subjects submitted course-related writing assignments and professionalization projects as data for the study. The materials analyzed in this article were drawn from one of the courses from which research subjects were recruited, *Approaches to Composition and Rhetorical Theory*. This course acts as an introduction to composition and rhetorical theory and draws in a range of students from the English department. At the time of the study, students enrolled in the course differed in the fields with which they identified, in length of time in the graduate program, and in experience with the subject matter.

The coursework for Composition and Rhetorical Theory included reading eight texts, submitting weekly writing (either by posting to the course's online discussion space or by submitting a hard-copy two to three page reading response) and completing two larger writing projects, the Journal Project and the Final Project. The Journal Project required students to select and study a five-year period of a composition journal (or a journal closely related to the field), noting common themes and analyzing the journal as a rhetorical context. The Final Project, the "culminating project for the course," was supposed to be "15-20 pages of sustained inquiry, equivalent to a traditional seminar paper though they need not take that form" (Syllabus).

Key questions guiding the coding of interview transcripts and writing artifacts were as follows:
- What does *writing development* mean for the research subject?
- How do components of the individual's identity factor into his/her writing development?
- What hinders this individual's writing development?
- What helps this individual's writing development?

Based on this analysis, the researcher developed five case studies illuminating the role that identity plays in graduate writing development. Each of these case studies illustrated well a theme that emerged across the data: graduate students' efforts to combine more familiar discourses that comprised their identities with new discourses to which they were being introduced. Moreover, all of the case studies shed light on the role of dissonance in identity development and the need to resolve this tension in order to progress.

For this article, only one case study was selected to explore the relationship between identity negotiation and English teachers' professional growth. This case study was chosen because, in contrast to the other cases included in the larger study, it looked closely at the experiences of a secondary school teacher pursuing an advanced degree alongside his English teaching career. Other study participants were following "inbound" trajectories, pursuing advanced degrees generally on a full-time basis, as a means to beginning a profession in academia. In contrast, the teacher profiled here was pursuing a "boundary" trajectory, actively participating in both secondary teaching and graduate school contexts.

Focusing on a single case study offers some advantages as a research methodology. It allows for a close analysis of the aids and impediments that may impact a teacher's ongoing professional development. It allows for the examination of details that would likely have to be glossed in an article exploring convergences between multiple students' experiences. Furthermore, the case study approach facilitates reflection on the unique experiences of a particular type of student, in a particular context, at a particular developmental juncture. The rich perspective provided from this analysis is a key benefit of this research methodology.

At the same time, this analytical approach misses the insights that a more comprehensive and panoramic view of teachers' professional identity development might provide. Tracking more teachers' experiences through Master's programs would help determine whether the experiences documented here are unique or characteristic. Furthermore, zooming out from the case study—following the teacher through the duration of his program, for instance--would better capture how the experiences documented here fit among a broader constellation of experiences that contributed to the teacher's professional growth.

Other strengths and weaknesses of the study are evident in the data collection methods. Pairing interviewing with artifact analysis provides a fuller account of the way that identity manifests itself in students' graduate work and reflection on that work. Yet, the study is limited in that it omits other perspectives on students' growth, most notably, the teacher's. This perspective may have complicated the narrative of stymied development presented here. Additionally, the researcher did not attend the class in which the student was enrolled, and thus lacked access to the student-student and teacher-student interactions that might have informed the case study data analysis.

In spite of these limitations, the findings reported here are valuable in a number of respects. They square with those mined from the other case studies emerging from this study while illuminating professional identity development as it relates to a secondary context. Thus, the case study captures the complex and challenging process of discursive identity negotiation evident across case studies while illustrating what this process might look like for secondary teachers. Additionally, by moving beyond the pre-service teacher years to study the professional identity development of an experienced teacher, this case study opens up a new and important avenue of research in teacher education.

Analysis

Discourse Tensions

Jeff was a high school teacher who enrolled part-time in a Master's program in English with an emphasis in the teaching of English after seven years of teaching on the high school level. He was working on this degree part-time while teaching English, Speech, and Drama in the small town where he lived. He characterized *Approaches to Composition and Rhetorical Theory* as his "first real composition [theory] class."

Jeff brought a strong "teacher" identity to the class that often served as the filter through which he responded to course content. He frequently related online discussion board topics to his high school classes and, on discussion board and in interviews, used phrases like "as a teacher" or "because I'm a teacher" to articulate his point-of-view. Furthermore, both of his major course projects were oriented toward the high school.

Jeff also brought a well-established "intellectual identity" into the course. He saw himself as a thinker, someone interested in and good at learning. Schooling in general and writing in particular were areas in which Jeff felt he excelled and were competencies for which he sought affirmation. He acknowledges in a reading response, "With all my writing, I crave praise. I want people to say 'Good job Jeff,' and it's through this feedback that I feel empowered." To a large extent, Jeff's educational experience had provided him with this empowerment. He reports that he "could always write more and better than most people in [his] peer groups," that as an undergraduate, he "never had a problem writing and feeling uncomfortable writing," and that his graduate work had been "received with adulation." These positive educational experiences had led him to feel confident as a thinker and a writer. Thus, in his first interview, he could exude a positive and nonchalant attitude toward writing, proclaiming, "Put a pen to the paper and start writing. I mean it has always been easy for me to write. Give me a moment's notice and tell me what you want to write and I'll write something, no problem."

Early in the course, Jeff's "teacher" and "thinker" identities were challenged when he encountered disciplinary discourse and its underlying "pattern[s] of thinking, speaking, behaving, and interacting." He noticed differences between the discourse that circulated in high school and the disciplinary discourse that was represented in class discussions and course texts. One difference Jeff noticed was that theory received greater attention and admiration in the course than was common in his high school. In course readings, theory was prominent. Scholars displayed enthusiasm toward and dexterity with theoretical musing. This treatment of theory did not resonate with Jeff's values and experiences. Jeff stated that he was "coming from a different place than most of the other people [in the class]," continuing, "[In high school,] you are on the front lines of education, whereas in college you are kind of back away from the front lines. . . . It's a different atmosphere.

. . . And it is hard to--I feel like I am so grounded in, I don't know, the real world, the practical world." Jeff's comments suggest that his high school teaching experience had led him to appreciate discussions of teaching *practices* and to value concrete applications of theory.

Thus, a central question for Jeff was often "How can I apply [the reading] to what I'm doing?" This focus seemed lost in the heed paid to theory in course texts. Thus, he relayed that he felt disoriented by and distanced from disciplinary discourse. "It's almost [like I'm] drowning in the comp theory," he admitted, continuing, "It just feels so separated from my everyday teaching experience."

Jeff also observed a disjunction between the professional vocabulary he used in the high school and the specialized terminology and references used by scholars in the field of Composition and Rhetoric. Jeff aligned himself with the former and felt ambivalent about the latter, as his following interview comment suggests:

> [Disciplinary terms are] like a badge you wear. If you use these words then you become one of these people in this field. And if you don't use these words, you know, then you're kind of outside. That's how I felt, starting out, you know very outside the loop because I don't use those words. And no one I know in education uses those words. You know very rarely do you come across in a high school "pedagogy"; we just don't use "pedagogy," we use "education," we use "schools." Those are our words.

At times, Jeff's ambivalence toward disciplinary discourse manifest itself as annoyance with "jargon." He reported that he had repeatedly made fun of the word "pedagogy" when he first heard it and that, more recently, had e-mailed a friend a list of "all the buzzwords in pedagogy and composition," a list that contained "all the words that are on my list of words I hate." He characterized use of jargon as "almost a joke within the system" that required individuals to "play along" in order to participate in the field. Despite the frustration he showed toward disciplinary discourse, Jeff said that he was learning from course texts and admitted that he hoped to acquire some fluency in disciplinary discourse.

Part of Jeff's ambivalence toward disciplinary discourse seemed to relate to internal conflicts that emerged through acquiring its perspectives and vocabulary. His comments suggest that familiarity with composition theory impacted his perception of his associations with colleagues and provoked feelings of alienation and powerlessness. In interview comments on an assigned reading, he remarks,

> If I went to my principal and if I went to my superintendent and said, "Look at what this person says about assessment and assessing standards," they wouldn't get it, they wouldn't understand it, they wouldn't care, they'd kind of dismiss it. I feel kind of isolated for that reason as a teacher. . . . No one else is taking these classes, no one else has read these books, no one else has done the [National] Writing Project, no one else has done these things. . . . I'm totally isolated from these other people. I talk to them about these things and [they say], "That sounds neat," but they have no frame of reference that I have [sic]. It is frustrating in that sense.

Interaction with disciplinary discourse, then, introduced Jeff to ideas that he felt were neither understood nor valued by his high school colleagues. The effect of this experience was to make him feel distanced from his peers at times, even leading him to question his professional identity and place of belonging, as suggested by subsequent comments. Elaborating on his feelings of dislocation, Jeff observes, "You know, I feel like I'm in-between--I'm no longer just a high school teacher teaching in my happy little classroom Englishly, but I'm not quite at the graduate student, to the level of some of these people who've done this for a while are either. And so I'm torn."

Discourse and Power

Debilitating assumptions about the power differential between high school and college contexts characterized Jeff's discursive interactions in the course, both as a reader and as a writer. Traces of these assumptions surfaced in our first interview, in comments he made on the difficulty he was having with assigned readings. Discussing his discomfort with course texts, Jeff stated, "I guess it takes a while to get used to the

whole graduate voice these people [use.] These are PhD dissertations, these people are specialists in their fields, and they have a certain way of communicating, which is a little bit different than high school. It's like night and day from what I'm used to reading." Jeff's comments align him with the high school and place him in a distant, and subordinate, position to the "specialists in their fields." His comments denote a disparity in power between the two contexts, with the "specialists" having the upper hand.

Because Jeff saw the "graduate voice" and scholars' "certain way of communicating" as markers of expert status, he associated the ability to understand and use the specialized language of the discipline with intellect and scholarly legitimacy. As a result, when reading and writing disciplinary discourse proved difficult for him, his identity as a smart thinker and able writer was called into question. Comments made during his mid-semester interview reveal these feelings of self-doubt and identity instability:

I get lost [in the reading] and I have to go back and read again and I don't know if it's just me. I feel embarrassed admitting that. . . I've always felt very grounded and secure that I am smart and that I am intelligent. I've always felt that way and I've always had people tell me that. And so to me, it's always been part of my identity . . . . So if I'm running into problems with this text, and I'm in this classroom with twenty other people, and none of them are having problems with the text, then it's my problem. I'm not intelligent enough to get it. I don't understand it. It's about me. And I can't admit that to myself, that that's true.

Rather than recognize difficulty as a symptom of being a newcomer to a discourse, here Jeff interprets struggle as a sign of intellectual deficit.

Writing Difficulty--The Journal Project

Jeff's inexperience with disciplinary discourse, paired with his assumptions about language, power, and difficulty, set him up for trouble with course writing. In both of the major course projects, his perception of disciplinary discourse impacted his assessment of assignment expectations and shaped his attempts to meet/avert those expectations.

The journal project was the first major assignment of the course. For this assignment, students were required to compose an oral and written report on a five-year period in a journal related to composition and rhetorical theory. Their task was to "characterize the journal in terms of what it offer[ed] people who are interested in the field" through addressing a series of questions provided by the instructor. The project seemed aimed to expand students' knowledge of research activities in the field, acquainting them, in particular, with the range of purposes and subjects addressed in a single professional venue. Additionally, it worked to furnish them with a rhetorical lens for reading composition scholarship that would enable further disciplinary participation. A logical audience for the assignment would be the professor, class members, and the writer him/herself.

Jeff struggled through the journal project, noting that he attempted to begin the piece multiple times, without success, before forcing the piece out in a single sitting to meet the project deadline. Jeff's difficulty originated, in part, from his perception of the assignment's requirements: he saw it as a call for students to approximate disciplinary writing, to write like the "specialists in the field." He explains,

You know, normally writing is so easy for me, and I can just write. Anything comes out, and I like what I write. And then I was writing that journal thing, and I was going, I don't know how to approach this. I don't know how to write like this, how to write this intellectual academia style, and fit into that genre. It was frustrating because . . . I thought, these people write like this, they write with these complex sentence structures and all these allusions and quotations and references. And I don't write like that, so am I missing something?

Jeff's assumptions about the assignment requirements seemed cued by his other interactions with disciplinary discourse in the course, e.g. experiences with assigned readings and class discussions; additionally, he stated that the research component of the assignment shaped his perception of the project demands.

Jeff questioned his ability to mirror the writing of the scholars he was reading; he was keenly aware of the differences between his writing norms and their own, and these differences discouraged him from working on the Journal Project.

Jeff's difficulty with the assignment also stemmed from concerns about his ties to the high school. His comments suggest that he associated rhetorical decisions with larger choices about self-identification and community allegiance, that the content and style of his piece communicated something about his relationship to the high school and the field of Composition and Rhetoric. Jeff stated that if he altered his discourse to produce the "intellectual academia style" called for by the assignment, he would be choosing to distance himself from the high school and composing, instead, for what he characterized as a "tight," "elevated" audience who wrote in "a hidden, sub-genre of our culture, this whole composition theory."

Jeff indicated that he had reservations about writing for this audience. He disapproved of their insularity. He felt that their penchant for jargon made their work inaccessible to most people, including high school teachers, and that they used writing to "reach the people who already agree[d] with [them]." He argued that the inaccessibility of their work limited its ability to effect change in the school system, and he was frustrated by this disconnect.

Despite these concerns, the power differential between the high school and the university, partnered with the power of the teacher-as-evaluator, prevented him from dismissing disciplinary discourse and writing freely in his "own" voice and style. He saw the conventions of disciplinary discourse as markers of intelligence, and he wanted to maintain (or rescue) his identity as an intelligent person. Writing provided the means through which to do so. Jeff's efforts on the assignment seemed to move him toward a compromise: he ultimately wrote a piece that satisfied himself and, he felt, the assignment expectations. "My voice and style was there," he observed, characterizing the piece as "a little more accessible than what we've read." At the same time, he pointed to his more formal introduction and conclusion, in which he drew a story from Greek mythology, as evidence of his attempt to meet disciplinary discourse standards, and he acknowledged that he tried to incorporate some of the "the lingo, the language" from class into his analysis. Jeff's comments suggest, then, that in spite of his ambivalence and insecurities, the piece allowed him to experiment with integrating discourses and to try out a new, hybrid identity within it.

Writing Difficulty—The Final Project

The "culminating project for the course" was the Final Course Project. The assignment description conveyed that the projects would vary, reflecting students' "different places in [their] intellectual and teaching lives" and their unique academic goals and interests. The teacher offered sample approaches to the project, suggesting that students might explore "a critical concept," "a set of focused questions about a moment in the history of composition," or "a particular moment in our lives as teachers, students or writers"; however, students were encouraged to design the project in a way that would suit their own purposes. Regardless of their take on the assignment, students were told that their projects should "showcase [their] careful thinking and voice even as they bring other voices to bear on the ideas at the center of the project" (Syllabus).

Jeff used the Final Course Project to explore the anti-intellectual sentiment in his high school. An assigned course reading provided the impetus for this exploration: one scholar's analysis of anti-intellectualism in the college classroom resonated with his experience in the high school classroom and motivated him to explore the topic on that level. To do so, Jeff collected a range of materials from research subjects (high school students enrolled in one of his English courses): an "all-class writing" on intellectualism, a "day-in-the-life" survey, a survey exploring anti-intellectualism in the high school, and interviews with select research subjects. To supplement this information, Jeff surveyed high school teachers about the anti-intellectual sentiment in his high school.

If the Journal Project was perceived by Jeff as a high stakes moment, the Final Course Project was even

more so. He stated that the project was "much more stressful academically, thinking [about] how to approach it and how to write in such a way that is going to be considered academic and intellectual." The assignment description and its treatment in the course might have contributed to Jeff's anxiety: the guidelines stated that the piece should represent a student's "best work as a thinker and writer," and the scaffolding leading to the final draft—including a 30-45 minute "research share" and time set aside in class for a draft workshop—raised the bar for the project. Moreover, the page length set it apart from other course projects, and the requirement to bring in other scholars' voices suggested a kinship to assigned readings. These features worked to crystallize Jeff's assumption that the project was intellectual proving ground, a test of Jeff's competence as a scholar.

That Jeff was reading the assignment in this way is suggested in his comments on the stress he was feeling around the Final Project. Exploring the source of this stress, he states:

> The stress [of the Final Course Project] comes from me because I want to perform at a level that I think I need to perform at. That level has not been defined by [the teacher,] it hasn't been defined by the class, but it has been defined by me reacting to what I've read in the class and what other people are talking about in the class. I want to be on that level. I don't want to feel like I'm not there. So I put this pressure on myself.

Here and elsewhere, Jeff's remarks about the Final Course Project blur the boundaries between language use and being. While initially expressing concerns about writing performance ("I want to perform"), his final comments center on identity ("I want to be"). From his perspective, the Final Course Project would not only assess his writing ability but would also determine whether *he* was an intellectual equal to disciplinary "insiders."

Jeff certainly didn't feel like an intellectual equal going into the project. Comparing himself to the authors of course texts and to his classmates had led him to view himself in a way that impeded his advancement on the assignment. He questioned his right to assume a scholarly identity in his writing and to make assertions about his research topic. "Having the authority [to be] able to say, 'I'm an authority on this issue,' that's also been a struggle," he related about the Final Project, continuing, "Who am I to, who is giving me the authority to be able to write something and say this? . . . Because we read these books and, like I said before, they're way up here, and I'm kind of a fledgling underneath."

Jeff's research topic exacerbated these concerns. Researching anti-intellectualism provided him ample opportunity to ruminate on his location on the intellectual—anti-intellectual continuum. His comments suggest discomfort with identifying as an intellectual and highlight the role writing played in this determination:

> I'm writing about anti-intellectualism, but I feel like I'm also an anti-intellectual at times. I struggle with myself as a teacher, wondering if I'm fitting the bill for being an intellectual. When I'm writing, am I doing enough research? Am I approaching this in an intellectual way? Am I doing this for the sake of academics or am I doing this just because it is a grade in the class?

Here, questions about intellectual identity quickly evolve into questions about writing. To be an intellectual, Jeff's comments suggest, his writing must meet a lofty standard that even encompasses his motivation for writing (done "for the sake of academics").

Jeff's view of himself as a "fledgling underneath" contributed to the other major trouble he had with the Final Course Project. He struggled to integrate other scholars' voices into his writing. He said that he worried about his ability to use scholars' ideas in a way that would meet their approval. Imagining them as his readers, he stated that he wanted to "[do] them justice" but was concerned that they might feel "misquoted or out of context." He attributed this problem to a problem with authority, stating: "[I]t's that authority thing. Do I have the authority to use these voices?"

The final form of Jeff's project provides a telling answer to this question. Partway through the research

process, Jeff decided to use his research materials to compose a video documentary rather than a seminar paper. Jeff had never produced a documentary before, but he was experienced at making videos and was technologically literate in other ways as well. He ran a side movie-making business for weddings and other occasions, was active in a National Writing Project technology consortium, and, in general, could state that "[he'd] always done stuff with technology." His comfort with technology made a documentary an attractive option, particularly in light of the vulnerability he was feeling around disciplinary discourse.

Jeff pointed to issues of representation as one factor that motivated him to make a documentary—he liked the idea of his audience "actually seeing [students] and hearing them and being able to judge for [themselves] where [the words are] coming from." At the same time, he acknowledged that discomfort with disciplinary writing also played a role in his decision: "I did a documentary instead of a standard seminar paper because I feel much more adept at making movies than I do at writing formal academic papers. I can write and write well and write forever if I'm comfortable with the setting, but I just couldn't feel confident as I started writing this paper," he explained. His comments indicate that greater fluency in an alternative discourse guided him toward the video project. Making a documentary was a compelling alternative to wrestling with unfamiliar discourse conventions, particularly when doing so had important implications for self-understanding.

Discussion

Jeff's experiences suggest that like pre-service teachers, practicing teachers may encounter challenges with identity construction, specifically as they grapple with new discourses introduced in their Master's programs. Interaction with disciplinary discourse in a Master's program may trigger identity work, launching teachers into an unanticipated cycle of *ideological becoming*, as established and emerging discourses compete for status and approval. Teachers who experience discursive tension through this process may be uncertain how to proceed. Some may *want* to experiment with disciplinary discourse practices but see them as "authoritative," erudite and impenetrable, extending beyond their package of knowledge and skills. Others may feel able but disinclined to do so, viewing disciplinary discourse as pompous and unnecessary, or, alternatively, unrepresentative of their concerns and commitments. Still others may feel that disciplinary discourse alters their sense of purpose and belonging within their secondary school context, even undermining their sense of professional self-efficacy. The case study presented here suggests that teachers may experience some or all of these emotions at different points within their graduate programs, or even within a single semester.

These responses may inhibit teachers from turning authoritative discourse into internally persuasive discourse. Teachers may shy away from trying out new "pattern[s] of thinking, speaking, behaving, and interacting," relying, instead, on more comfortable discourse practices. Such seemed to be the case with Jeff, when he reverted to a more familiar communicative medium for the final project. While this move enabled him to complete the final assignment, it also served as a way to side-step difficult discursive work, including the task of claiming the authority to participate in a disciplinary conversation and situating one's voice among other scholars' voices. In instances like these, disciplinary practices remain distant and foreign to the teacher, rather than becoming recognizable, malleable, and useful, appropriated for his/her own purposes. As a result, professional development is impeded; secondary teachers may leave a course or program without the benefit a new vantage point, informed by the interplay between old and new discourses.

At the same time, Jeff's experiences suggest that even when conflict and tension exist, teachers can operate within this tension and begin to establish a nexus of multimembership that brings together multiple discourses. Jeff undertook this work in the shorter, informal writing assignments he completed for the course when he drew connections between course readings and his teaching experiences. Even in the formal writing assignments, while struggling with added pressure and uncertainty, Jeff was able to pursue research areas that were personally meaningful and professional relevant, thereby continuing his nexus building.

What factors aided him in this process? Particularly with the Journal Project, Jeff's advancement

toward multimembership was supported by the texts he chose to study. Jeff attributed his success at integrating his "voice and style" into the journal project to the accessibility of the publication he chose to review. *The Quarterly*, a publication of the National Writing Project, modeled discourse norms (including values, interests, genres, linguistic choices, identities) that more closely resembled his own. These norms suggested options for his own work, helping him experiment with tone, structure and vocabulary while working within a writing style that aligned with his sense-of-self. Jeff's experiences with the Journal Project suggest that assigned texts play a key role in identity hybridization. Texts offer individuals points-of-entry into new discourses; they model different ways of being within a discourse and help newcomers envision how certain discourses might fit within the suite of discourses that comprise their sense-of-selves. When texts resonate with an individual, the individual may be more confident and willing to experiment with new discourse practices.

More evident in this study were the factors that impeded Jeff's identity development. Assumptions about language and difficulty hindered Jeff's ability to appropriate disciplinary discourse. He interpreted his difficulty as a sign of intellectual inferiority rather than a function of initiation into a new community of practice. This interpretation diminished his confidence and hampered his willingness to take risks as a writer that may have fostered the integration of his identities.

An absence of peers and mentors with whom he could relate also seemed to contribute to Jeff's identity struggles. He commented that he felt distanced from fellow high school teachers, who had not participated in similar professional development experiences; separate from others in the course, whom he felt were on a different "level" in their facility with composition theory; and detached from the writers whose work he was reading for the course, whose discursive norms he did not share. His comments suggest that he felt alone in his struggles with disciplinary discourse, a situation that may have intensified his sense of dislocation and discouragement.

Conclusion

Jeff's struggles suggest that disciplinary discourse can be difficult for secondary teachers to integrate into their identities, and that faculty should assist teachers through this process. Graduate faculty who work with practicing teachers should develop teaching practices that facilitate nexus-building, polycontextuality, boundary crossing, and identity hybridization. To this end, as they select course readings, graduate faculty might consider how students will respond to a piece's content and form. Questions like the following may prove helpful: "What image of the author will students compose as they work through this reading? How might students relate to that individual? What discourse practices is the author modeling? How familiar will students be with these practices? What audience is the author invoking? How will students see themselves in relation to this audience?" In grappling with these questions, the goal should not be to eliminate all texts that don't align well with students' discursive norms; rather, the goal should be to 1) adopt a range of texts, showcasing the diverse means of full engagement within a discipline, 2) supply ways of interacting with difficult texts (guided questions, background information, analytical methods) that will help teachers be able and critical decoders of disciplinary discourse, and to 3) anticipate when assumptions and disjunctions might get in the way of teachers' exploration and appropriation of disciplinary discourse. The diversity of students within a single classroom certainly makes it difficult to select texts that would help every student forge a connection with disciplinary discourse; nevertheless, seeking a range of text types, and choosing texts based on one's knowledge of the student population, should still be a goal.

Faculty can also strive to provide adequate structure and clarity in the writing assignments they design, thereby abating some of the writing uncertainty that students may experience. Wisely, Jeff's teacher ordered the major assignments from less to more difficult, with students writing first to personal, proximate audiences and then to more public audiences. Yet, the assignment prompts could have been more specific in describing the audiences for whom the students were writing and the purposes for which the writing was serving. The

final assignment was deliberately open-ended, leaving graduate students the freedom to chart their own course; yet, this freedom seemed generally unhelpful to Jeff. He may have benefitted from more concrete guidelines and genre examples to guide the development of his project. Faculty have the challenge of extending graduate students enough freedom to get them personally invested in their projects while also offering the structure to promote their writing success.

Even when these preconditions are met, faculty should anticipate that difficulty with reading and writing will occur and, thus, should choose reading and writing assignments and discussion topics that help students work through moments of difficulty. Faculty should 1) help teachers see disciplinary writing as a community-bound activity, defined by epistemological and methodological assumptions, genre expectations, and stylistic norms and 2) share research and facilitate discussions that explore the challenges and rewards of participating in this community.

Faculty can also work to normalize difficulty through the assignments they give. With its emphasis on thinking about difficulty differently, Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori's "difficulty paper" seems especially suited to this purpose. Salvatori's impetus for creating this assignment was her desire to push students "to learn to see that their difficulties were not a sign of inadequacy but markers of a particular kind of understanding" (85). To this end, in the undergraduate and graduate courses she teaches, Salvatori "assigns a difficulty paper for each new reading. Students are supposed to hand in a one-or-two-page typed account of a particular difficulty or moment of disorientation . . . they have encountered reading a particular poem, or essay, or short story, or theoretical text" (85-86).

Using Salvatori's assignment as a point of departure, teachers might be asked to write one or more "difficulty papers" in a given semester, using them to account for the frustration or discomfort that they experience while working through an assigned reading or writing assignment. This assignment may be particularly effective if the faculty member also participates, openly discussing one of his/her own moments of difficulty with a text. Such a move may help teachers recognize that disciplinary participation does not have to mean absolute assent or understanding, thereby increasing the likelihood that teachers will see such participation as an option for themselves.

Identity modeling is another key to helping teachers effectively reformulate their identities in response to new discourses. Notably, Jeff was one of only two secondary teachers in *Approaches to Composition Theory*; he would have benefitted from exposure to more models of hybridized identity construction in this course, including faculty and peer mentors. Given that identity is always comprised of multiple threads, the task of the teacher is not to seek out and showcase individuals who have multiple dimensions to their identities but to make the process of identity negotiation, engaged by all, more visible in the classroom.

This study suggests that identity negotiation may impact the efficacy of secondary teachers' experiences in Master's programs. It offers a glimpse into one teacher's struggles to appropriate disciplinary discourse in his academic writing. Notably, a broader view of Jeff's graduate work reveals that he continued to make progress in his Master's program, pursuing points of connection between old and new discourses in other ways. Taking this view into account, the research findings in this study appear both hopeful and sobering. Jeff, and other teachers like him, move forward in their coursework, in spite of the identity conflicts they experience. Yet, they do so at considerable emotional costs. By attending to identity matters in teachers' Master's programs, faculty members can help enrich teachers' professional identities and alert them to the benefits of taking part in multiple communities of practice.

Works Cited

Alsup, Janet. *Teacher Identity Discourses: Negotiating Personal and Professional Spaces*. Mahwah, NJ: NCTE-LEA, 2005. Print.

Ashley, Hannah. "Playing the Game: Proficient Working-Class Student Writers' Second Voices." *Research in the Teaching of English* 35.4 (2001): 493-524. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. Print.

Beijaard, Douwe, Paulien C. Meijer, and Nico Verloop. "Reconsidering Research on Teachers' Professional Identity." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 20.2 (2004): 107-128. Print.

Borich, Gary D. "Dimensions of Self that Influence Effective Teaching." Lipka & Brinthaupt 92-117.

Boy, Angelo and Pine, Gerald. *Expanding the Self: Personal Growth for Teachers*. Dubuque: WM. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1971. Print.

Brown, Tony. Negotiating Psychological Disturbance in Pre-Service Teacher Education. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 22.6 (2006): 675-689. Print.

Casanave, Christine P. "Cultural Diversity and Socialization: A Case Study of a Hispanic Woman in a Doctoral Program in Sociology." *Diversity as Resource: Redefining Cultural Literacy.* Ed. Denise E. Murray. Alexandria: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 1992. 148-182. Print.

Casanave, Christine P. *Writing Games: Multicultural Case Studies of Academic Literacy Practices in Higher Education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002. Print.

Danielewicz, Jane. *Teaching Selves: Identity, Pedagogy, and Teacher Education*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001. Print.

Emerson, Caryl. "The Outer Word and Inner Speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and the Interalization of Language." *Critical Inquiry* 10.2 (1983): 245-264. Print.

Engestrom, Yrjo, Ritva Engestrom, and Merja Karkkainen. Polycontextuality and Boundary Crossing in Expert Cognition: Learning and Problem Solving in Complex Work Activities. *Learning and Instruction* 5.4 (1995): 319-336. Print.

Hasinoff, Shelley and David Mandzuk. "Bonding, Bridging, and Becoming a Teacher: Student Cohorts and Teacher Identity." *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 51.3 (2005): 231-245. Print.

Herrington, Anne and Marcia Curtis. *Persons in Process: Four Stories of Writing and Personal Development in College*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 2000. Print.

Hill, Heather C. "Learning in the Teaching Workforce." *The Future of Children* 17.1 (2007): 111-127. Web.

Holland, Dorothy, William Lachicotte Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain. *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. Print.

Hong, Ji Y. "Pre-Service and Beginning Teachers' Professional Identity and its Relation to Dropping Out of the Profession." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26.8 (2010): 1530-1543. Print.

Ivanic, Roz. *Writing and Identity: The Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1998. Print.

Lave, Jean and Etienne Wenger. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Print.

LeCourt, Donna. *Identity Matters: Schooling the Body in Academic Discourse*. Albany: State University of New York, 2004. Print.

Lim, Hyun-Woo. "Concept Maps of Korean EFL Student Teachers' Autobiographical Reflections on their Professional Identity Formation." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 27.6 (2001): 969-981. Print.

Lipka, Richard P. and Thomas M Brinthaupt, eds. *The Role of Self in Teacher Development*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999. Print.

Lytle, James. "Investment Options for Inservice Teacher Training." *Journal of Teacher Education* 34.1 (1983): 28-31. Print.

Malderez, Angi, Andrew Hobson, Louise Tracey, and Kirstin Kerr. "Becoming a Student Teacher: Core Features of the Experience." *European Journal of Teacher Education* 30.3 (2007): 225-248. Print.

Miller Marsh, Monica. "Examining the Discourses that Shape our Teacher Identities." *Curriculum Inquiry* 32.4 (2002): 453-470. Print.

Morson, Gary and Caryl Emerson. *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of Prosaics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990. Print.

Prior, Paul. "Contextualizing Writing and Response in a Graduate Seminar." *Written Communication* 8.3 (1991): 267-310. Print.

Prior, Paul. "Literate Activity and Disciplinarity: The Heterogeneous (Re)production of American Studies around a Graduate Seminar." *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 4.4 (1997): 275-295. Print.

Prior, Paul. *Writing/Disciplinarity: A Sociohistoric Account of Literate Activity in the Academy.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998. Print.

Salvatori, Mariolina R. "Difficulty: The Great Educational Divide." *Opening Lines: Approaches to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. Ed. Pat Hutchings. Menlo Park, CA: Carnegie Foundation, 2000. 83-91. Print.

Schempp, Paul G., Andrew C. Sparkes, and Thomas J. Templin. "Identity and Induction: Establishing the Self in the First Years of Teaching." Lipka and Brinthaupt 142-161.

Sutherland, Louise, Sarah Howard, and Lina Markauskaite. "Professional Identity Creation: Examining the Development of Beginning Preservice Teachers Understanding of their Work as Teachers." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26.3 (2010): 455-465. Print.

Timostsuk, Inge and Aino Ugaste. "Student Teachers' Professional Identity." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26.8 (2010): 1563-1570. Print.

Tom, Alan. Reinventing Master's Degree Study for Experienced Teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education* 50.4 (1999): 245-254. Print.

Vygotsky, Lev. *Thought and Language*. Rev. and Ed. Alex Kozulin. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1986. Print.

Walkington, Jackie. "Becoming a Teacher: Encouraging Development of Teacher Identity through Reflective Practice." *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 33.1 (2005): 53-64. Print.

Wenger, Etienne. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

About the Author
Heather Camp is Associate Professor of English at Minnesota State University, Mankato, where she also directs the Composition Program. She has published in *Assessing Writing, Teaching English in the Two-Year College, The Writing Lab Newsletter*, and *Composition Studies*. College writing teacher development is currently a central focus of her research.

T/W

Listening Across the Curriculum: What Disciplinary TAs Can Teach Us About TA Professional Development In The Teaching of Writing

Tanya K. Rodrigue
Salem State University

Over the past couple of decades, several compositionists have argued that disciplinary TAs are in fact teachers of writing and should be involved in writing across the curriculum (WAC) efforts and conversations. In "Writing Across the Curriculum at Research Universities," Ellen Strenski (1988) claims that TAs' responsibilities—"interactive learning, coaching in the higher thinking skills, and providing a communication channel to integrate the course," are all related to writing instruction and advocates support for TA writing pedagogy (49). In 2004, Beth Hedengren published *A TA's Guide To Teaching Writing In All Disciplines*, clearly positioning TAs as writing instructors and providing them with pedagogical guidance. I (2012) extend Strenski and Hedengren's claims in "The (In)Visible World of Teaching Assistants in the Disciplines: Preparing TAs to Teach Writing," claiming disciplinary TAs, both those who assist a professor or autonomously teach a course, are in fact de facto WAC faculty because of the multitude of ways they work with student writers.[1] Due to an increase in WAC programs and graduate student instructors, I argue TAs will have more responsibility in teaching writing and a stronger presence in WAC efforts in the future, and thus discussion and development of WAC TA professional development is essential at this moment in time.

Compositionists easily translate disciplinary TAs' responsibilities as those of a writing instructor and confidently assign TAs with the pedagogical identity of a writing teacher regardless of whether or not they are involved in a WAC program. Yet an important question remains: do TAs in the disciplines perceive themselves in the same manner? There is no existing scholarship that provides insight into how disciplinary TAs perceive and define their pedagogical responsibilities and identities, and the factors involved in these perceptions and definitions. The qualitative research I present in this essay seeks to fill this gap in scholarship. It provides an opportunity for us to listen to and learn from disciplinary TAs. Such knowledge is important when considering TAs' role in local and national WAC efforts and the development of WAC TA training or other professional development programs that address writing pedagogy.

My research, which is comprised of interviews, offers a glimpse into the minds and pedagogical lives of a dozen disciplinary TAs from a Northeastern doctoral-granting university that expresses a strong commitment to training graduate instructors for their teaching responsibilities (yet does not offer WAC TA professional development). The interviews reveal a strong connection between embracing or rejecting the pedagogical identity of writing instructor, and pedagogical training and experience in the teaching of writing. More specifically, my findings suggest that TAs' perceptions about their responsibilities related to writing instruction are dependent on the amount of training they have received as well as their teaching experience. None of the TAs in this study have had formal training in writing instruction at the university level, but many have received training prior to graduate school. Those who have had professional development and ample teaching experience are more inclined to perceive themselves as writing instructors and feel responsible for teaching writing than those who have not. The interviews also reveal that disciplinary TAs—both those who perceive themselves as teachers of writing and those who do not, and by extension, undergraduate students, are negatively affected

---

1   TAs assess writing, explain writing assignments, give students feedback during the writing process, hold peer review sessions, and/or brainstorm with students. Other responsibilities such as leading discussions, holding recitations, supervising laboratories and running slide presentations play an indirect role in guiding student writers.