



2013

"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, trodrigue@salemstate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte>



Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, Rhetoric and Composition Commons, and the Secondary Education and Teaching Commons

Recommended Citation

Rodrigue, Tanya K. (2013) ""Listening Across the Curriculum: What Disciplinary TAs Can Teach Us About TA Professional Development In The Teaching of Writing"," *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 2 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte/vol2/iss2/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.





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

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.

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 by the absence of formal training in writing instruction at the university level. The consequences include inadequate assessment practices and insufficient instruction in research-based writing, all resulting in ineffective teaching.

The TA research participants in this case study are not representative of TAs at all institutions, yet the knowledge gained from them provides helpful insight for higher education. The research findings reveal the importance of providing disciplinary TAs with professional development for writing instruction in either WAC TA professional development programs or other TA training programs. Professional development is needed to help TAs develop their pedagogical identity as teachers of writing and more fully understand the responsibilities that writing instruction in the disciplines demands, which is important for institutions with or without a WAC program. Further, this research strengthens the claim that WAC TA professional development is both essential

and important for working toward achieving WAC goals in the future, and most importantly, for helping undergraduate students develop strong writing habits and practices.

Current Study

The research I present here is a small portion of a large research project that was driven by four major questions: (1) how are disciplinary TAs trained in the teaching of writing? (2) what pedagogical practices do they use while working with student writers and student writing? (3) how do disciplinary TAs conceptualize writing and writing instruction? and (4) what kind of support or training might they want or need to more effectively work with student writers? I sought to explore these questions in three ways: two case studies, the first consisting of interviews with eleven TAs and the second consisting of interviews with nine faculty from various disciplines at the same institution of higher education, and observations from all-university TA orientation at said university. Due to space constraints, this article will only draw on the TA case study.

The university technically has a WAC or a writing in the disciplines (WID) program, yet it does not declare it as such. The program manifests in requirements of a writing-intensive² (WI) course³ and two writing-designated courses. Some TAs—including one in the TA case study—work with instructors in a WI course or independently teach a WI class. This university does not offer WAC instructor professional development workshops or seminars, nor does it employ a WAC administrator. Neither the university's writing program or the English department is affiliated with the WI courses or instructors (both faculty and TAs) who teach them.

Research Methods

The TA case study can be more specifically described as a single instrumental case study, one that is concerned with a small group of people and is bound by a

² According to a multitude of sources, the most popular kind of WAC program takes the shape of writing-intensive courses in the disciplines.

³ The requirements for a WI course at this university include the use of writing as a means to learn, a focus on multiple aspects of writing such as organization and usage, various writing-oriented assignments such as collaborative projects or reading responses, and a minimum of four writing assignments that total at least 4,000 words (the word requirement for each assignment is 1,000). In a WI course, instructors must return at least three writing assignments with comments and corrections within two weeks. The course is limited to 25 students.

particular place and/or time (Creswell 73). The case study is comprised of individuals who teach at the same location. Although these interviews occurred during a specific period of time, the case study is not time-bound because TA research participants agreed to answer questions after interviews.⁴

I recruited TAs across the disciplines by circulating a call on the university graduate student listserv for volunteer participants. I scheduled individual interviews with eleven graduate instructors, with the exception of three TAs in Chemistry that requested I interview them together. I interviewed TAs over a period of four months, January 2008-April 2008. The TA participants are eight doctoral students and three master's students. They study and teach in various disciplines including Philosophy, Religion, Communication, Chemistry, Biology, Education, History, Art History and Sociology. In this article, I will refer to each participant by the name of his or her discipline *plus* TA. For example, I refer to the TA from History as History TA.

The interviews were transcribed, categorized, and holistically analyzed and interpreted (Yin 109-138). The interview questions served as broad categories. Interview responses were first categorized according to the corresponding interview question category. After the responses were grouped in these broad categories, they were further organized into two tiers of subcategories. The first tier of subcategories was "yes" and "no" categories, as most interview questions initially called for a "yes" or "no" response. Subcategories of the "yes" and "no" categories emerged based on elaborations of the initial "yes" or "no" response or follow-up question(s). One interview question—"how would you define successful and unsuccessful writing?" did not warrant a "yes" or "no" response. The responses to the question were broadly categorized under "conceptualizations of writing," a category that yielded two subcategories: writing as grammatically correct and writing as a meaning making. A cross-analysis of categories, subcategories and individual participant biographies yielded patterns and themes. These patterns and themes were then analyzed and interpreted.

Research Findings and Implications

My research yields several important findings about disciplinary TAs' and their perceived responsibilities and pedagogical identities. First, all of the TAs' primary responsibility is to work with student writers, yet none of them said they received

⁴ I did not ask any participants follow-up questions after the initial interviews.

formal training in writing instruction at the university level.⁵ The extent to which these TAs teach writing and feel like it is their responsibility to do so is dependent on several interrelated factors: (1) teaching experience; (2) perceptions of themselves as teachers and teachers of writing; and (3) training in and/or experience with writing instruction.

The exploration of how these disciplinary TAs approach the teaching of writing reveals that those with pedagogical training and extensive experience working with student writers—some of which were in classes they autonomously taught—are more likely to actively teach writing, feel a sense of responsibility to do so, and have a broader understanding of the various purposes and functions on the writing spectrum. In fact, some of these TAs are already working to achieve some of the goals of the WAC movement—positioning writing as a vehicle of critical thinking and meaning making, redefining good writing as grammatically correct, and discussing disciplinary writing through the lens of genre.

Education TA and Philosophy TA are good examples of TAs who actively teach writing and are already working to achieve WAC goals. Education TA is a former elementary school teacher. She had pedagogical training in her undergraduate Education program and in professional development programs at the elementary school where she taught. Currently, she is a doctoral candidate who specializes in literacy studies, and thus is well informed about the teaching of writing and reading. When she began her doctoral program, she worked as a TA with a professor. Now, Education TA autonomously teaches a course to undergraduate students studying to be secondary education teachers. She says she tries to “unteach” the idea that writing only involves “grammar and spelling,” and extend students’ understanding of the writing spectrum (Interview). She states, “I try to get them to see writing as a process of knowing and a process of learning because that’s also how I’d like them to use it in their classes. I explain that writing can help you transform what you know so you know it better, you know it deeper, you know it thicker” (Interview). As an instructor teaching future teachers, Education TA says it’s her responsibility to future generations of

⁵ Many research participants had pedagogical training in writing instruction prior to graduate school. Several previously taught elementary or secondary education, or in the case of Sociology TA, taught leadership workshops. Several disciplinary TAs had specific training in the teaching of writing. For example, Chemistry TA3 says she was trained to teach writing while working as a high school Science teacher prior to graduate school, and Religion TA2 and Communication TA were trained as peer writing tutors at their undergraduate institutions and worked in their respective writing centers (Interview).

teachers and students to help them understand what good writing is, and to stop the perpetuation of the idea that good writing is simply grammatically correct writing (Interview).

Similarly, Philosophy TA is a fourth year doctoral student, has completed coursework, and is beginning to write his dissertation proposal. Although he has not had formal training in the teaching of writing, he has ample teaching experience at the university level and has spent a significant amount of his pedagogical life working closely with student writers and student writing. He was a teaching assistant with a professor in a WI course for five semesters and has autonomously taught a freshman-level WI course for three semesters. Like Education TA, Philosophy TA teaches writing as a means to learn. He says, “I think one of the main things we do in the humanities is to get students to think clear and have clear ideas, and one of the ways in which we develop our ideas is to write them down” (Interview).

Both Philosophy TA and Education TA recognize disciplinary-specific genres and work to help their students understand writing in this way. Philosophy TA says, “(Students) need guidance especially if (the teacher) expects something different from (their) students than say an English teacher does or a history teacher does” (Interview). Education TA, unlike Philosophy TA, identifies disciplinary-specific writing as *genres* and assigns her students a genre analysis essay. She says, “Good writing is situation-specific. We launch into the idea that there isn’t generic good writing. What I try to help them see, which is really hard, is that good writing in science is different than what counts as good writing in English and in all the disciplines” (Interview). The acknowledgement of disciplinary-specific genres, Education TA claims, is essential for elementary school teachers because they “have to teach everything” (Interview).

In opposition, TAs with little to no pedagogical training and who have never been autonomous instructors are resistant to the teaching of writing and do not feel it is their responsibility. The responsibility, they claim, is that of writing teachers or writing center tutors. Yet these disciplinary TAs—who expressed much frustration about writing instructors and writing center tutors— “teach writing” or “talk about writing” to some extent because those who they think are responsible have failed. These TAs position the teaching of writing as the teaching of grammar, perpetuating the dominant understanding of good writing as “grammatically correct”—the very definition WAC scholars have sought to dismantle since the beginning of the movement.

My interviews with History TA and Art History TA help illustrate the idea that a lack of pedagogical training and experience working with student writers is

related to the attitude that disciplinary instructors should not be responsible for the teaching of writing and that successful writing is grammatically correct. History TA has been a graduate instructor with a professor for several semesters and has not autonomously taught a course. As an undergraduate, she did not have to take the required writing course at her college, and hence, has never taken a writing course at the university level. She says “mechanical issues” and “grammar” are the biggest problem with student writing in her history classes (Interview). Although she states that she does not have the time to teach grammar, she does give her students a “writing talk” during her recitation class, blaming previous instructors as the reason for their deficiency (Interview). History TA explains,

I give them a writing talk after they hand in their first papers...I put the words, *there*, *their*, and *they're* on the board, and ask, what's the difference between these. I know this is really simple, and I don't blame you, I blame your third grade teachers or your high school teachers for not teaching you to write a tripartite thesis. That's where it really gets frustrating is the mechanics...if you can't get past that first step, if you cannot express yourself clearly in writing, even on a basic level, then you can't be expected to construct sophisticated arguments. (Interview)

She continues to place blame on those trained in writing and writing instruction for not helping her students become good writers.

We collectively gripe about (the writing center) as TAs. We want to be able to send them to the writing center to fix the grammatical, mechanical stuff because we've gotten papers back and we're like 'what the heck is this?' We say, 'forget what they told you at the writing center, this is how you you're supposed to structure your essay'. I don't know if the writing center is going on different methodology or they're much more of a literary bent or they're just morons. (Interview)

Similarly, Art History, a master's student with no pedagogical training or experience as an autonomous writing instructor, expressed a similar sentiment, listing the numerous “writing skills” students do *not* have. Interestingly, she uses the same example as History TA. She maintains, “(They lack) basic grammar. Spelling is terrible, and they have spell-check. I would say, ‘do you know you have spell check?’ Another thing, spell check, they'd have “there”, and they'd have the wrong “their”. I'd say to them, ‘yes, you have spell check but you have to be smarter than spell check’” (Interview). Like History, she places blame on writing center tutors. Art History TA explains, “They cannot get this help. We send them to the writing center, and they say the writing center doesn't help with that, which leads to us having to teach them basic grammar (in recitation classes

or during office hours) and that's really not what our goal in the class is" (Interview).

Interestingly, these interviews reveal that some TAs tacitly understand the teaching of writing in a much broader sense and actually teach writing in a way that extends beyond grammar, yet do not have the language to describe writing and the teaching of writing in these terms. Such findings demonstrate that TA training in writing pedagogy has the potential to help TAs develop language needed to discuss writing and writing instruction in a more complex way, and in turn, change their attitudes about writing instruction. I will continue discussing my interview with History TA, as she was instrumental in helping me recognize this connection.

In her interview, History TA seemingly only understands writing via the lens of grammar, but actually knows much more about the nature of genres and the teaching of disciplinary-specific writing. In fact, she both introduces students to history-specific genres and teaches them the tools, tasks and habits of mind related to writing in history. In her discussion about the writing center, she suggests she has knowledge about historical writing in terms of genre when she says, "forget what they told you at the writing center, is how you're supposed to *structure* your essay" (emphasis added, Interview). History TA suggests there are differences in writing in the disciplines by acknowledging that historical essays have a particular structure, a structure that tutors in the writing center might not be familiar with. In expressing that she is unfamiliar with how writing center tutors think about writing—"I don't know if the writing center is going on a different methodology or they're much more of a literary bent (Interview)"—she might recognize that writing center tutors are trained to help student writers in a particular way, and might not have the specialized history knowledge needed to guide them directly in writing in a history-specific genre.

History TA also acknowledges that there are particular methods, methodologies and kinds of arguments involved in the writing of historical essays, and interestingly enough, privileges them over good grammar. When discussing how she grades student papers, she says, "When I start line editing your paper, it means your ideas are good and your arguments are solid...and you have all of your methodological ducks in a row" (Interview). Her description clearly demonstrates she defines good writing as more than just proper grammar.

Perhaps more importantly, History TA teaches writing and reading skills needed for historical writing and recognizes them as "goals" in history. History TA teaches both close reading and analysis in a disciplinary-specific way. She describes historical readings, specifically primary or what she deems as "strange"

or unfamiliar sources, as being very difficult to comprehend, and says the ability to read these sources is a “skill” in her discipline (Interview). In an effort to teach her students how to comprehensively understand sources, she models the analytical work needed to do so. She says, “I ask them the same kinds of questions they should be asking themselves when they’re working with documents. I get them to think about reading a document from a different angle” (Interview). History TA helps guide students in using concepts, situations or events as a lens to read previous situations or events in medieval times.

John Williams, a history professor at another university, affirms these goals as being central to the discipline and defines writing as the means to carry out these goals. In “Writing History: Informed or Not by Genre Theory,” Williams (2005) writes,

Certainty, in history, the real work of the discipline is reading and interpreting texts in writing...and genre expectations in history—comparing textual sources, interpreting the contexts for those documents, creating reasonable interpretive arguments based on textual evidence—in fact describe the very work at the heart of the discipline. (64)

He continues, “...teaching history writing is in fact teaching history” (64). Thus, History TA teaches writing in a more complex way than it might seem in her interview, as she teaches students some of the tools they need to think, read and ultimately write in the discipline. Yet in order for her and other TAs like her to recognize this fact, she needs to learn language that will help her identify and articulate her tacit knowledge.

The Consequences of Underprepared Disciplinary TA Writing Instructors

While the research suggests that TAs like History TA and Art History TA would strongly benefit from professional development, it also reveals that those TAs who identify themselves as teachers of writing would as well. None of the TAs interviewed had a thorough understanding of the responsibilities that writing instruction demands. This lack of understanding may emerge from the absence of discussion about writing instruction and ineffective TA professional development at the university level. The findings reveal several consequences that occur when TAs do not have proper training in the teaching of writing: insufficient guidance in helping undergraduates work with sources in research-based writing and ineffective assessment practices.

None of the TAs interviewed formally teach students how to research, use or document sources citing one or more of three reasons: lack of time, lack of

resources or not part of his/her teaching responsibilities. In her biology class, Biology TA said she did not have the time in class or in office hours to teach students about research. She said many students “overused sources” in their most recent paper: “half of the paper were citations” (Interview). Biology TA blames herself for students’ heavy source use. She says, “I didn’t talk about citations beforehand, so part of it is probably my fault” (Interview). The disciplinary TAs who claimed it was not their responsibility to teach students how to handle sources pointed to English courses or the writing center as spaces where students should learn about research-based writing.

Although many said they did not teach research and source use, several TAs claim they “informally” do so to various extents. The Chemistry TAs make suggestions as to where students can find appropriate sources and define plagiarism early in the semester. Chemistry TA2 states, “In the beginning, I stress the importance of never plagiarizing. Their ideas should be their own ideas that reflect the thoughts that are going on in their head, not anybody else’s” (Interview). Art History TA said she expected the freshman in her survey course to know how to evaluate sources, research and use sources for research-based writing, yet once she discovered that they did not know how to do so, she reluctantly had to teach them. She describes her pedagogical practices: “I would explain to them how to go online and show them how to use the library website. I told them to go to the librarian or go to the information desk.” Despite her efforts to “teach” students how to research, Art History TA reveals: “They wouldn’t do it. As a result, I had a lot of plagiarism. It was very frustrating” (Interview).

Despite their inability to distinguish between “talking” and “teaching,” these TAs seemingly understand that teaching students at least something about source use is important, despite the extent to which that is possible and the reasons why. Yet other disciplinary TAs, notably and surprisingly those who perceive themselves as teachers of writing and are writing instruction advocates, avoid teaching source use altogether by not assigning research-based writing. The stated reasons are the assumptions that: (1) students don’t know how to handle sources; (2) students don’t know what a “good” or a “bad” source is; and (3) students plagiarize.

Philosophy TA explains his reason for not assigning research-based writing: “The worry is that a lot of students go to the web, and it’s easy to plagiarize once you start going to the web. They don’t know bad sources from good sources” (Interview). Education TA also has concerns about plagiarism. She assigns “alternative” forms of the research paper such as multi-genre reports and I-search papers rather than “traditional” research papers because she claims

students are unable to accurately summarize sources without plagiarizing. Education TA explains: “I don’t do traditional papers because if I do, they’ll be crap. I’ll get a bunch of crappy papers” (Interview). She further discusses how her tutoring work with university students from across the disciplines affirms her statement.

Sometimes (students) ask me to edit their papers or help them with their papers and I’m just appalled...(The papers) don’t make sense. Students struggle to read something, internalize it and put it back together in their own way, in a coherent way. It’s like you’re reading these words that are strung together that you know came from some journal article, and the way that (the student) has strung it together kind of makes sense, but not really. (Interview)

Although Education TA defines these issues as directly related to research, she suggests students also have difficulty with other writing-related activities such as reading, synthesis, summary and argumentation. Education TA likely knows that explicitly teaching writing-related activities can help students work ethically with sources yet she opts not to do so seemingly due to her concerns about plagiarism. The disciplinary TAs in this case study suggest that a fear of plagiarism leads to pedagogical abandonment or causes pedagogical paralysis. Addressing this fear in a TA professional development program would not only help TAs understand that teaching source use is a critical part of teaching disciplinary writing, but it would also alleviate the fear and anxiety related to plagiarism.

The absence of the teaching of research-based writing and its related activities in disciplinary courses, regardless of the reason, has severe consequences. First, undergraduate students are not learning how to work ethically and responsibly with sources, leading them to seek out instruction on their own or plagiarize. Student plagiarism fuels what contemporary culture has identified as the “plagiarism epidemic,” a problem largely described in terms of cheating, ethics and morality (Howard et al. 178). In turn, the role of pedagogy in plagiarism prevention continues to be obscured. Second, the differences in disciplinary researched writing genres and the conceptualization of writing as a situated act are ignored. Third, English/writing teachers become the scapegoats for students’ difficulty with writing effective and successful college essays.

The last research finding I will discuss is related to assessment. The research reveals that TAs use questionable and unreliable assessment practices as a result of the absence of training or guidance. None of the disciplinary TAs interviewed said they were trained in the grading of writing at the university level. Several disciplinary TAs claim faculty mentors did not discuss the grading of

writing because they “trusted” them—a statement I heard from TAs (but not faculty) time and time again during the interviews. Philosophy TA states, “The experience I’ve had—the attitude is ‘I do my work and you do yours.’ No professor looked over my shoulder and said let’s make sure we’re on the same page as far as grading is concerned. It’s always been “we trust your judgment” or its “I just don’t care” (Interview). Religion TA2 echoes Communication TA, as she says she occasionally speaks with her mentor professor about her assessment practices, but most of the time, her professor declares, “I trust you” (Interview).

Without guidance, TAs construct their own assessment practices. Although a couple of research participants use rubrics, the majority use recollection and intuition as assessment tools. Sociology TA explains “(Because we’re not trained on how to grade), “one of the things I do is use the process that I went through. I became a better writer working with people who were English teachers. The feedback I get from them is the feedback I try to give my students” (Interview). Religion TA2 uses the same strategy. She says,

...90 percent of my skill of grading papers comes from personal reflection on the ways my teachers graded my papers. A huge percentage goes back to about four different professors or even high school teachers. (I say to myself), ‘How did they grade my papers and what did I like about how they did that?’ Then I try to implement that. (Interview)

History TA and Religion TA1 also grade writing based on their intuition, or rather what they “know” is a “good” argument, “strong” evidence or a solid thesis statement.

There are numerous consequences of using recollection as a method of grading student papers. First, the TAs’ understanding of the relationship between writing and grades is viewed only through the lens of their own work, that work being written mostly in *English* courses in *English-specific* genres—not in disciplinary courses or disciplinary-specific genres—and for many, more than 15 years ago. The idea that previous instructors are models rests on the assumption that their assessment practices are the “right” way to grade all genres of writing—a suggestion that masks the many different forms and functions of disciplinary writing. Also, the disciplinary TAs neglect to account for unstable memory, the circumstances that shape the work they produced and the teacher’s grading criteria. In addition, recollection as a method prevents grading consistency across courses and disciplines.

Conclusion

Disciplinary TA professional development in writing pedagogy at the institutional level is essential for preparing TAs for their responsibilities and ensuring undergraduates receive a quality education. The research participants demonstrate TA training in higher education will clearly benefit disciplinary TAs and more importantly, undergraduate students. My study reveals possible objectives for WAC TA training or TA professional development programs that attend to writing instruction: to help disciplinary TAs (1) recognize themselves as teachers of writing; (2) understand what writing instruction in the disciplines entails and demands; (3) learn about the various functions and purposes on the writing spectrum; (4) understand writing as disciplinary-specific; and (5) develop the language needed to articulate their tacit knowledge about disciplinary writing and writing instruction.

As several TA research participants did not distinguish between “teaching” and “talking” about writing, another objective may be to help TAs understand the difference between pedagogical practices that are informed by theory, philosophy and research, and pedagogical practices that are informed by what Paulo Friere would call the banking of knowledge. TAs need help in developing a writing pedagogy that is informed by composition-rhetoric theory and practice as well as their disciplinary histories, traditions, theories, philosophies and writing genres. Thus, a TA training program comprised of disciplinary faculty, disciplinary TAs and compositionists would be most conducive for disciplinary TAs’ pedagogical development.

Perhaps most importantly, the empirical data reveals the many consequences that arise when disciplinary TAs do not have formal training in the teaching of writing at the university level. Without direct guidance, TAs have a nebulous understanding of their responsibilities as instructors, are ill-prepared to work with student writers, and use unreliable pedagogical practices. On a larger scale, a consequence of ineffective training is that pedagogy, pedagogical development and writing is not valued in higher education and thus not identified as a way to address institutional problems such as plagiarism. Further, inadequate training leads to the perpetuation of ideologies that the WAC movement has sought to deconstruct since its inception, namely the notion that English teachers are solely responsible for the teaching of writing and that good writing equates to grammatically correct prose. Finally, the most significant consequence of them all: undergraduate students are not learning how to communicate effectively and successfully, a severe detriment in college and in the workplace, and a failure of higher education. Disciplinary TA professional development in writing instruction is essential for the success of both higher education and the WAC movement, and

more explorations of TAs and their important role in teaching writing is needed at the institutional level.

Works Cited

- Robert Abbott, Jody D. Nyquist, Donald Wulff, and Jo Sprague, eds. *Preparing the Professoriate of Tomorrow to Teach: Selected Readings in TA Training*. Ed.. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Pub., 1991. Print.
- Biology TA. Personal Interview. 29 February 2008.
- Chemistry TAs. Personal Interview. 20 March 2008.
- Communication TA. Personal Interview. 18 March 2008.
- Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2007. Print.
- Education TA. Personal Interview. 3 March 2008.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972. Print.
- Hedengren, Beth. *A TA's Guide to Teaching Writing in All Disciplines*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004. Print.
- Howard, Rebecca Moore, Tricia Serviss and Tanya K. Rodrigue. "Writing from Sources, Writing from Sentences." *Writing & Pedagogy* 2.2 (2010): 178-192. Web.
- History TA. Personal Interview. 3 March 2008.
- Philosophy TA. Personal Interview. 5 March 2008.
- Religion TA1. Personal Interview. 13 February 2008.
- Religion TA2. Personal Interview. 13 February 2008.
- Rodrigue, Tanya K. "The (In)Visible World of Teaching Assistants in the Disciplines: Preparing TAs to Teach Writing." *Across the Disciplines* 9.1 (2012). Web.
- Sociology TA. Personal Interview. 29 February 2008.
- Strenski, Ellen. "Writing Across the Curriculum at Research Universities. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. 36(1988): 31-41. Print.
- Williams, John. "Writing History: Informed or Not by Genre Theory?" *Genre across the Curriculum*. Eds. Anne Herrington and Charles Moran. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2005. Print.
- Yin, Robert. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003. Print.