"LEARNING IS HOW WE SHOULD DO BETTER": FIRST-YEAR WRITING SHARED CURRICULA, TEACHER LEARNING, AND AGENCY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to center the experiences of first-year writing educators in one program with a shared curriculum. Guided by social theories of learning and scholarship and practices in writing studies and writing program administration, I conducted qualitative surveys and interviews with teaching-focused faculty and graduate teaching assistants to ask how they connected their agency, learning, and goals with a shared curriculum. This led to conversations about how a shared curriculum both supplies and limits possibilities for learning and agency in a writing program, specifically involving program materials, professional development, and program revision. Resulting from what I learned with and from the educators participating in my research, I suggest that writing program administrators consider how to consistently learn from the expertise that teachers have and create more opportunities where teachers can influence the program's design.

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CHAPTER 1: RESEARCHING A SHARED CURRICULUM

Encountering First-Year Writing

To start writing this dissertation, I first need to explain who I am and how I am related to the research. To do this, I will reflect on my experiences with first-year writing (FYW) through several meaningful and different experiences. These, as I explain, have shaped my conception of FYW and its possible curricula, bringing me to my current research around the shared curriculum in the Writing, Rhetoric, and Cultures Department (WRaC) at Michigan State University (MSU). Throughout this project, I refer to college-level educators interchangeably as either educators or teachers. This is language I prefer, and I feel it is more widely applicable to educators across ranks and positions.

My first encounter with first-year writing (FYW) or first-year composition was through mentoring in "jumbo" FYW classrooms as an undergraduate embedded mentor at California State University, Chico (CSU, Chico)—a unique course design by Kim Jaxon (2017) later described by Kim Jaxon, Laura Sparks, and Chris Fosen (2020). These jumbo courses, which borrow a workshop component from Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson's (2007) studio approach, were intentionally scaled up as a "provocation to the field's focus on class size," relying on three supporting structures:

> a small workshop (ten students led by a mentor) that meets "outside but alongside" the jumbo class, writing mentors who participate in the large course, and an intentional design focused on community-building and various forms of participation that distribute labor and expertise among class members. (Jaxon et al., 2020, p. 116)

In my mentor role in these classrooms across several semesters, I worked with students, other mentors, and the class's teacher to learn in community. Looking back, it was a rich and varied experience of learning—one where I was learning about responding to students, teaching practices, what FYW can be, and pedagogical structures through my participation in the course as a mentor. That is, while I was primarily supporting students in my role, I was also learning alongside and with them.

Continuing to my MA program at CSU, Chico, I was able to apply my pedagogical experience as a mentor by designing a FYW course with other graduate students in my cohort as part of a semester-long "Teaching Composition" course. To do this, we reviewed the learning goals of the program together, observed other teachers, reviewed syllabi and materials from different teachers in the program, developed a shared teaching philosophy for ourselves that applied to the course, created assignments and scaffolds, and planned a few activities to support the work of the course. Importantly, we were given support and feedback throughout this designing process from the expert teacher who was teaching the graduate course we were in, but we had agency to design our course in the way we wanted to so long as we were intentional about our decisions and anticipated how they would support students and their learning. After successfully creating our curriculum and interviewing to teach in the program, my colleagues and I taught the course, though we all made some changes and adaptations to our course to fit our personal approaches and values. After our first semester teaching, those of us in my cohort who continued teaching FYW redesigned the course to address what did not work in the curriculum, or to try new things that we noticed in our continued observations of other FYW courses (through roles as graders, researchers, or embedded mentors). This was a highly iterative and collaborative process supported through by a sense of agency.

After these experiences, I arrived at MSU as a PhD student eager to continue thinking about and designing FYW curriculum with new colleagues. However, through our multi-week orientation, I soon realized this is a different kind of FYW program. Specifically, it has a shared curriculum with a set of projects to teach. These projects are admittedly similar to the ones that I taught before, but I noticed how little my past curriculum could fit into the overall curriculum and its philosophy here. For example, while I had semester-long research groups in my past course, the shared curriculum at MSU, conversely, is more focused on individual writing and storytelling. For example, the first project of the course is a "Learning Narrative," which invites students to tell the story about "their own histories as learners" (Writing, Rhetoric, and Cultures Department [WRaC], n.d.). The second project, the "Cultural Artifact," invites students to "inquire into cultural values in which they are implicated as learners by choosing an everyday object as the focus of guided exploration" (WRaC, n.d.). I did try, briefly, to blend my course design with the shared curriculum after adhering to the shared curriculum closely for a year; however, when I would bring something from my old course into this curriculum, it was always an awkward retrofit because it was built over WRaC's curriculum, treating my past course as an overlay rather than an integral part of my WRaC course design. That is, while I wanted my past experiences to guide and support my current work, instead I felt I needed to set them aside to prioritize what the program advertised to students, and to represent the program's curriculum as being inherently more valuable than my course design.

At the same time, whenever I did deviate from the curriculum, I noticed myself making these changes without consultation or advice. While collaboration and observation was how I learned to teach, the structure of the shared curriculum pushed me to be more reclusive. I worried that the small liberties I was taking with the curriculum would result in me no longer being able

to teach if anyone found out what I was doing. I also worried about teaching the shared curriculum correctly—that is, delivering a course that is consistent to how the shared curriculum was described to me. My worries resulted in me not seeking opportunities to collaborate, which also made learning about teaching insular. It felt like my past work was ultimately unimportant in this new context—even though I now recognize how unique and important it is. For example, by the time I arrived at MSU, I observed six distinct first-year writing courses through my mentoring and research—not individual class sessions, but entire courses from the first day of class to the final. These courses all looked very different in their themes and assignments, and were taught by a range of teachers from graduate students to faculty with more than 30 years of experience. While this past experience should have given me at least something to contribute to course design and curriculum, instead it felt inapplicable or incompatible with the shared curriculum.

After teaching for two years, I began working with the first-year writing administrative team as a graduate assistant (which is the role I am still in as I write this dissertation). While I felt isolated and constrained by the curriculum as a teacher in the program due to my past experiences influencing my perceptions of the curriculum; in working with the administrative team, I gained what I felt I lost: it is an inherently collaborative space where we constantly thinking about students, teaching, the curriculum, support, the university, and much more involving FYW. Unlike my experience teaching in the program, in this administrative role I am allowed to pursue my interests and represent my experiences. However, my experiences as a teacher have followed me, making me wonder if other teachers had similar experiences and what we may be able to do to build community and better support learning.

In reflecting on this research process overall, two quotes from participants (who I will discuss later) have captured the essence of my project. The first is from Douglas, a graduate teaching assistant who inspired the title of this dissertation when they reflected on the complexity of teaching, learning to teach, and program support. Specifically, they offered suggestions about approaching professional development differently, ending their suggestion by saying "I don't know. Learning. Learning is how we should do better." This comment, while brief, gets at what the heart of this dissertation is: A recommendation to learn and do better within our contexts and given our capacities. Across this research I learned a more nuanced understanding of shared curricula and advocate for more learning to happen between members of the community.

The second quote is from Genevieve, a teaching-focused faculty member whose insight captured my learning throughout this dissertation process, particularly in relation to my past experiences with open curriculum. In reflecting on her own experiences with different models of curriculum, she said:

> in a system that's wide open, it can be both freeing and can feel like a prison [...] it's freeing in the sense that if you are someone who enjoys the creative part of teaching, and wants to put in the time to re-see curriculum, then it likely feels freeing. [...] that's one approach. But if you have someone who's less inclined, either doesn't want to put that kind of time in, or simply doesn't enjoy [...] the creation of curriculum in the moment, or [...] this is not a skill set they have, you will likely have a class that is lacking in some way, inevitably [...] However, in my experience, teachers love freedom, and they love to do things their way. And especially if they've worked in primarily systems that are wide open, they believe that anything that's structured like what [WRaC] has is inhibiting or

> limiting [...] And as a result, a person can feel less inclined or can be unwilling to hear or entertain the benefits of a more structured system.

I recognized, in hearing Genevieve talk about open curriculum, that my past experience caused me to see this shared curriculum as inhibiting or limiting—which makes sense because I am also someone who enjoys designing and thinking about curriculum. Throughout this research, however, by listening to my participants talk about learning through the shared curriculum and what their experiences were, I have started to see shared curricula in a more nuanced way—understanding that it is not inherently restrictive or limiting, and that it can support teachers' learning and help them to recognize their agency. There are still constraints and considerations in this, of course, but I better recognize the potential of curriculum in relation to teacher learning rather than seeing it only as a constraint.

Research Background

First-year writing is a site of learning and tension for teachers and students alike. As a general education course, there are many assumptions about the purpose of FYW, resulting from institutional demands and expectations coupled with the courses being staffed by teachers in a range of disciplines and subdisciplines, including rhetoric and composition, literacy studies, professional and technical communication, creative writing, literature, and everything in between. As a course that is taught by new and experienced educators alike, it has the potential for collaboration and learning that transcends academic ranks and disciplinary expertise, inviting a range of teachers to share their assets and approaches with each other. In this dissertation, I focus on a "shared curriculum," which results from a collaborative model of administration in a writing program that actively positions FYW as a legitimate and meaningful teaching project.

Before talking about shared curriculum, though, it is important to discuss collaborative administration to identify some of the philosophies around it. Collaborative administration, as described by Jeanne Gunner (2002), "is more an idea than a single structure, plan, or model," acting as both a "political concept" and an "organizational design" that then carries a definition that "is necessarily unstable" (p. 254). There are still aspects of collaborative administration that give it general characteristics, such as it entailing "ideological critique, a restructuring of institutional power, and, in practice, a sharing of authority" while emphasizing "community, shared responsibility, and open exchange of information, ideas, and criticism" (Gunner, 2002, p. 254). In other words, collaborative administrative models tend to offer ways to distribute power, responsibility, and learning throughout the program's community, acting as an alternative to what was "the traditional model of program administra-tion as a defined hierarchy, with a [writing program administrator] WPA reporting to a chair and department and directing faculty" that was more prevalent before the 1990s (Gunner, 2002, p. 254). As an idea, collaborative administration then is flexible and situational, meaning it needs some contextualization and description.

In the context of the program I am studying in this research, the most immediate example of collaborative administration is present in WPAs being a part of an "administrative team" rather than there being a sole director. This team usually consisted of a Director (tenure-track), Associate Director (non-tenure-track), and at least one PhD student. Around the time of my research, this configuration was in flux. For example, in the year before my research there was an academic specialist who served as the Online Curriculum Coordinator since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, during the year of my research, there were 3 graduate students (including me) representing both PhD and MA students, serving as Graduate Research

Assistants or an FYW Fellow. Another example of collaborative administration in the program was it being supported by the First-Year Writing Advisory Committee. This committee was facilitated by the program's director, but the majority of members were teachers who primarily taught first-year writing. Additionally, in recent years, the FYW Advisory Committee has created smaller working groups with specific foci (e.g. antiracism or program assessment), which are often led by faculty members.

This program's model of administration, then, merges two "collaborative structures" described by Gunner (2002):

1. "'Flattened' Hierarchies," where "individual faculty members take on individual duties, sharing the work and consulting as a group to direct the program" (p. 258). This captures the co-directorship and administrative team dynamic, as well as support from a committee.
2. "Professional Training Tracks," which "employ graduate teaching assistants as part-time administrators" (p. 258). Since the program in my research is situated in a writing studies department where some graduate students have an interest in WPA work, these positions are "sites of theoretical study of writing program administration," where graduate students are collaborators who "work in teams to design and teach/facilitate practica, working with less experienced peers on pedagogy and curriculum for freshman writing courses" (p. 258).

Due to the size of the program, too, many faculty members were not a part of administration and decision-making within the program. So, while collaboration is inherent in the design of the program, it is not a practice and responsibility distributed across the majority of teachers within

the program's community. This is not a critique, but rather an acknowledgement of a challenge and obstacle for administrators in a program

I also want to make note here that collaborative administration is not a cure-all that inherently solves all of the issues with power in a writing program. As Gunner (2002) argues, "No structure can 'automatically' transform program administration into a completely sane and equitable process" (p. 260). Instead, "the reality of unequal power relations needs continual surfacing, acknowledgment, and negotiation" within collaborative models, which are still affected by "forces [that] exist in social relations" such as "Gender bias, communication breakdowns, promotion credit, a clash between collaborative program and hierarchical institutional structures, resistance to change, exploitation of labor, and power differentials" (Gunner, 2002, p. 260). In other words, collaborative administration carries its own problems with inequity and power even while being "a statement about power relations" (Gunner, 2002, p. 260). This, to me, invites inquiry into collaborative administrative practices to better understand how particular structures are understood and interacted with in a community. In my research, then, I am specifically looking at a result of collaborative administration: a shared curriculum, which falls between standard and open curricular structures. In particular, because it is a model that is both unique and ambiguous, it is useful to understand how teachers interact with and experience it.

Curriculum

When I say "curriculum," I am referring to the planning and practice of teaching. This includes assignments, theories or beliefs, language, learning goals and outcomes, instructional materials (including assigned texts), policies, assessments, and practices. Curriculum "is a structure that constrains not only the activities of those involved – primarily teachers and

students, but also those who design curricula or attempt to achieve certain goals with them" (Young, 2014, p. 7). Constraints here are literal and not necessarily negative—they are factors that guide decisions. Importantly, though, curricula also "make some things possible to learn that most of us would find impossible to learn without them; at the same time they set limits on what is possible to learn [...] they have particular purposes" (Young, 2014, p. 7). Curricula, then, are a way to frame learning—emphasizing some aspects at the expense of others; focusing toward some goals while necessarily ignoring others. Talking about students' learning in relationship to curricula, Michael Young (2014) explains how "boundaries are not just constraints, they are also a set of possibilities not only about what students can learn but about how they can progress in their learning" (p. 8). This is also true for teachers' experiences with curriculum, as they are a kind of pathway toward particular goals, offering guidance along the way and introducing new approaches to teaching that a teacher may not have otherwise considered.

Program curricula are always on some continuum from standard to open, with shared curriculum being somewhere in between. A standard curriculum is one that is often influenced by requirements and commitments that exist beyond a program and may define the kinds of texts, assignments, assessments, policies, activities, etc. that teachers are required to use, sometimes controlling both the content of a class and the delivery of that content. On the other end of the continuum, an open curriculum is one where teachers design their own curriculum and have control over most aspects of their class. There are still shared structures like learning goals, the classroom space and its technologies, and program or university policies in an open curriculum; however, teachers may have agency over assignments, instructional materials, practices, and (to some extent) learning goals, theories, and beliefs.

A shared or common curriculum is between standard and open curriculum—with some aspects (e.g. practices and instructional materials) being completely at the discretion of educators, while others (e.g. course learning goals and assignments) are decided by the program and its administrators. The shared curriculum studied in this dissertation (explained below) has shared learning goals, assignments with reflections, a sequence for teaching the projects, some theories and beliefs, and practices. Examples of shared theories and beliefs include:

- processes of writing are more important than products,
- evidence-based reflection or metacognition should be taught and used throughout the course to guide and recognize learning,
- and storytelling is more equitable to students than genre-based writing.

In other words, these theories and beliefs largely capture disciplinary ideas in the field of writing studies, representing the expertise of writing studies' educators, scholars, and administrators who have spent more than 15 years collaboratively developing and revising it. Shared practices typically enacted these theories and beliefs. For example, peer review is a central component of the curriculum that teachers are expected to facilitate as a way to promote revision and understand how other writers influence writing processes. Additionally, peer review provides student writers with evidence to document their learning, which they can then use in their reflections.

Importantly, the shared curriculum has relatively little oversight and assessment directed at teachers. While teaching-focused faculty (which is how I refer to non-tenure-track faculty, a designation used by the Union of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty [n.d.] at Michigan State University for faculty whose contracts prioritize teaching) and academic specialists write annual reviews, and graduate students write and submit reflections to the FYW Director, these reflective

moments are not used to determine if teachers are adhering to the shared curriculum. For this reason, the shared curriculum within my study leans more toward an open curriculum because surveillance or micromanagement is unnecessary—that is, teachers seem to be generally trusted to make changes to the shared curriculum within their classes. Still, people who enter the program are encouraged to teach the typical shared curriculum for the first semester or two before making innovations or big changes so that they can share similar experiences with other teachers in their cohort. This shared experience of the curriculum is an important aspect of professional development in the first year, where teachers meet regularly in mentor groups with their cohort and a member of the admin team to talk about and debrief on their teaching.

Program Context

My research takes place at Michigan State University, a large, public, R1, and predominantly white institution in East Lansing, Michigan. The first-year writing program, which is situated in WRaC (a writing studies department), had over 70 teachers from various writing-related subdisciplines at the time of my research. In our unpublished application to the CCCC Writing Program Certificate of Excellence, Julie Lindquist, Joyce Meier, Michael J. Ristich, me (Keaton Kirkpatrick), and Roland Dumavor (2022) documented that the FYW program typically serves 7,000–8,000 students in over 300 sections per year across three course types: a standard first-year writing course, a university-designated "developmental" writing course (which students opt into through a directed self-placement module), and an Honors version of FYW. Since then, enrollments have only increased, resulting in more teachers being hired into the program to primarily teach our standard first-year writing course, WRA 101: Writing as Inquiry. All courses in the FYW program are primarily taught by teaching-focused faculty members. The next largest population of teachers is graduate students (from both WRaC

and the English Department), and the smallest is tenure-track faculty. For example, referencing the program's listserv around the time of my research, there were about 5 tenure-track faculty, 10 graduate students, and 60 teaching-focused faculty. These numbers are approximate because the listserv is not strictly representative of who is teaching, but it gives a sense. If there are any changes now, it would be that there are more teaching-focused faculty members, fewer graduate students (due to a pause in admissions for the Ph.D. program), and about the same number of tenure-track faculty.

The shared curriculum itself is story-based and entrenched in writing studies pedagogies—including a focus on "developing understandings of rhetoric, literacy, and culture" through an approach that is "rhetorical, inductive, and inquiry-based"—with a goal to "prepare students not only to approach new writing situations with confidence, but also to teach them the uses of rhetorical concepts for making sense of their world" (WRaC, n.d.). These attributes are expressed through five main projects usually taught in the following sequence:

1. **The Learning Narrative Project** invites students to engage inquiry as a means to discover and communicate new knowledge about something they already know pretty well: their own histories as learners. In telling their stories of learning, this project ask students to consider their experiences with learning in and out of school to encourage them to reflect on the relationship between their learning histories and their present lives. In this first experience with college writing, students learn that their experiences both in and out of school can be useful as resources for academic inquiry–even as the narrative itself will eventually become a useful resource for academic inquiry, especially as a resource for the final reflective narrative.

2. **The Cultural Artifact Project** invites students to engage inquiry as a means to discover and communicate new knowledge about their influences. The moves of this project ask students to inquire into cultural values in which they are implicated as learners by choosing an everyday object as the focus of guided exploration. This experience gives them further practice in processes of inquiry (formulating questions and forming theories of cultural value). In this project, students explicitly extend their inquiries into the practices and values of learning revealed in the first project into wider cultural contexts. By way of the first two projects, which guide students through systematic inquiry into personal experiences, FYW students are introduced to research as a process of discovery for which strategies can be practiced and learned.
3. **The Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project** invites students to engage inquiry as a means to discover and communicate new knowledge about their ambitions and professional futures. This project enables students to learn about the literacy practices of a profession or discipline of their choice by looking at textual products as cultural artifacts to understand the textual products of disciplines as cultural and rhetorical. It combines the self-discovery aspect of the Learning Narrative Project with the inquiry process of the Cultural Artifact Project. The Professional/Disciplinary Literacies project invites students to continue asking the questions implicit in the first project (What am I doing here, and what resources do I bring to the project of my education? What do I need, and how do I achieve my goals?), and to put these in relation to discoveries about the literacies of disciplinary and professional cultures. The ultimate goal of this project is not so much to create a report on any given profession's literacy practices, per se, but to help students to begin to know the professional cultures they hope to join and to use both the

information they discover and their processes of inquiry to make informed decisions about their ongoing literacy development.

4. **The Remix Project** invites students to engage inquiry as a means to discover and communicate new knowledge about their audiences by way of working in a new mode, genre, or collaborative capacity. This project builds on the learning of the preceding projects by making rhetorical moves implicit in these projects the explicit focus of attention. It asks students to create a product that helps them be more aware of the purpose, audience, medium, mode, and/or genre of the rhetorical product they make. It invites students to experience and reflect further on processes of invention and arrangement and further develops inquiries into relationships between rhetorical purposes, audiences, and resources (material, conceptual, and ethical). While students often create outstanding rhetorical products (movies, podcasts, live presentations, etc.), the goals of this project are to invite students to take risks, to undertake new writing experiences, to negotiate new ways of working, to make the most of mistakes they make along the way, and to use these experiences to formulate goals for how to use problem-solving strategies to inform their ongoing development as writers.
5. **The Experiential-Learning Documentary (ELD)/Reflective Learning Narrative Project** invites students to engage inquiry as a means to discover and communicate new knowledge about themselves as writers. This project, the culminating experience toward which the previous projects have been directed, takes students' own situated and in-process learning as its object of inquiry. It invites students to reflect on the development and uses of their learning over the course of the semester: to make claims about what they have learned, to set goals for their ongoing learning, to propose the means for achieving

> those learning goals, and to use the evidence and examples they have created throughout the semester to support each of these types of claims. This assignment builds directly from all of the activities of the semester by inviting students to cite examples from early and final drafts of their assignments, their proposals, their peer-review sessions, their student/teacher conferences, etc. The ELD/Reflective Learning Narrative Project is designed to empower students to investigate and celebrate their successes and to make the most of their mistakes by setting goals that emerge from reflecting on their activities that went less well than they had hoped. (WRaC, n.d.)

Each of these projects is followed by a written, evidence-based reflection where students document their learning in the project. These project-based reflections can be seen as a smaller version of the final Reflective Learning Narrative (which reflects on the semester rather than a particular project). To support the writing of these projects, most teachers also have the same assignment components. This usually contains a proposal, draft, peer review, revised draft, and reflection. There are different approaches to these components. For example, some teachers include multiple rounds of peer review per draft, conference with students, assign revision plans, or ask for multiple revised drafts.

First created over 15 years ago, WRaC's shared curriculum has been developed and reiterated over time, though its original inquiry-based focus and five-project structure have remained. Importantly, when the curriculum was initially created, it was only a couple years after the American Thought and Language Department became the Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures Department. This renaming captured the split in the department's faculty, with some representing American studies, and others writing studies. This split in faculty resulted in "two very different visions of what writing-as-general-education should be," with American studies

faculty leaning toward content-based writing instruction based on their expertise and writing studies faculty leaning toward inquiry-based courses based in "student choice and interest" (Lindquist et al., 2022). The latter is the model that was promoted through the early version of the shared curriculum, which was developed alongside the creation of the department's FYW program.

The early version of the shared curriculum had learning goals and a five-project sequence, but it still was inflected differently through a number of themed courses. Due to "an increasing number of international students, ongoing program assessment and work, and growing enrollment at the university," a program review was initiated by the FYW administrative team and First-Year Writing Advisory Committee to learn from undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, and university advisors (Lindquist et al., 2022). Through this, they learned that advisors believed the course themes related to students' majors, that students were enrolling into sections that fit their schedules, and that courses were based more on the teachers' interests and expertise instead of students' choice and interests (Lindquist et al., 2022). In considering these factors together, it was decided that there was a need to "build on the strengths of the curriculum while also charting new paths to supporting student learning and access," resulting in revising the learning goals and removing the thematic FYW variants (Lindquist et al., 2022). In total, this collaborative and inductive research process started in 2013, with the revised learning goals and shift to a single "Writing as Inquiry" course being approved by the department and "requisite college and university curriculum committees" by 2015, and debuted in 2016 (Lindquist et al., 2022). This is the version of FYW that persists today.

Administration

With time, different directors and committees of teachers reiterated the design of the curriculum; refining the projects, materials, and learning goals of the course. Perhaps the biggest shift resulting from these changes was an increased emphasis on reflection throughout the course and at the end of the semester. More gradually, the program has grown toward a learner-centric philosophy around inquiry, story, and reflection within the curriculum. The basic structure of the course having five projects and a focus on writing as a process have persisted across the different iterations, becoming more supported over time. For example, a course shell was created at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic with materials and contextual framing around projects and activities to help onboard teachers to the curriculum during a time when regular professional development (like the orientation) and the future of FYW during the pandemic were uncertain. Notably, each director had a different sense of the shared curriculum itself—what it afforded, constrained, prioritized, and required from them as directors and how they communicated or taught about it to teachers. These perspectives, too, shifted over time throughout their roles as directors in response to changes in the program, field, and world—meaning the shared curriculum's materials and how they were shared were regularly shifting.

As mentioned earlier, given the size of the program, its administrative team was also large. At the time of my research, the program was led by a Director, Associate Director, and three graduate students with various roles and responsibilities. This team worked collaboratively and represented tenure-track faculty, teaching-focused faculty, PhD students, and MA students.

Research Context

Research Questions

I chose to research this particular program and its curriculum because it is a unique blend of standard and open curriculum, making it a unique program to research in terms of learning and agency. Specifically, my research was guided by two expansive questions:

1. How do writing teachers experience a shared curriculum, specifically in relation to their learning and agency?
2. Based on participant experiences, what should WPAs be aware of when designing support for writing teacher education?

With these questions, I was especially curious about how a shared curriculum—being neither open nor standardized—would impact teacher agency. Too, I was able to collect data around experiences broadly, but connect those to teacher support directly. The first question is more inductive, then, while the second attempts to apply what I learn to writing program administration. In general, though, I designed my questions to collect a range of data around experiences, trying not to overdetermine what participants wanted to talk about so I could learn from them, find organic patterns between their experiences, and then connect those to think through how to revise support in a writing program.

Scope

My research focuses on one first-year writing program's teachers. Among my participants, there is a blend of graduate student teachers and teaching-focused faculty members (one of whom holds a dual position as a program administrator) varying considerably in terms of their experience teaching within and outside of the program. My focus on teachers gives me the

opportunity to direct my writing on the interconnected experiences of this one group within a specific program's context. I focus on the experiences of teachers, in particular, because their interactions and interpretations with the shared curriculum directly impact students.

So, while I could have invited administrators, teachers, *and* students to participate in my research for a more complex view into how people experience a shared curriculum and how that might affect decision-making about the program and its curriculum, I wanted to narrow my scope to research teachers' experiences first because they are the primary mediators of a shared curriculum who work between administrators and students. Too, I was particularly interested in teacher education and what teachers learn in a program with a shared curriculum—something I could not address at length if I also focused on representing students. I imagined that teachers' relationship and learning about the curriculum impacted their classrooms and determined experiences for students, meaning that directing focus to teachers allowed me to think also about how to support students.

By starting with teachers, then, I could understand what their experiences were with a shared curriculum before moving more explicitly to other groups (something I believe future research should pursue). This is to say that—in a more robust study supported by more time, resources, and collaborators—students would and should be another group connected to program decision-making as important contributors to discussions around shared curricula. Additionally, with my focus on teachers, broader administrative contexts are not as central as they should be. For example, as detailed above in the program context, university advisors, college committees, university committees, and the department are also important in conversations about curriculum—especially since FYW is a general education requirement. Recognizing that I cannot address all of the components and groups surrounding and influencing a shared curriculum, then,

I decided to choose one group (teachers) and one area (their learning and, in extension, agency) to go in depth about their experiences with the shared curriculum. This, admittedly, relates to my own experiences as a teacher within the program and my resultant inquiries about how this shared curriculum might affect other teachers.

Overview of Chapters

In my **Literature Review**, I discuss key social theories of learning in relation to teaching and identity that influence my research. I then discuss some of the institutional considerations affecting WPA work and curricula, conceptualize teacher agency and what affects it, and consider how designing curriculum is a part of the social practice of teaching. My **Methodology and Methods** chapter overviews my inductive research design, where I describe using a qualitative description methodology and analyzing data thematically. Additionally, I explain my use of surveys and semi-structured interviews to collect data. In my **Discussion on Learning, Agency, and Shared Curriculum** chapter, I discuss what I learned through the interviews I conducted, structured by themes I identified in my data analysis. In this chapter, I explain how participants interacted with the materials of the shared curriculum, discussing the interconnections between their learning, sense of agency, and the shared curriculum. This leads me to also identify some boundaries to learning and agency for teachers within their classrooms and in the program overall. In the **Reflections and Applications** chapter, I revisit and reflect on my original research questions to discuss what I learned and how it might apply to writing program administration. Specifically, I reflect on where agency is less available in the shared curriculum I researched, discuss where that makes learning less applicable, and apply that learning to identify potential ways that WPAs can reimagine their work to both learn with and from the teaching community they are embedded within.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Summarizing my research questions and program context discussed in the previous chapter, my research is primarily about teachers, their experiences with a shared curriculum, their expertise, and their influence on a program. Given my experiences and the scope of this research discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter is split in two sections. In the Theoretical Influences section, I discuss the social theories of learning and identity that influenced my research. These are how I came to the research and how I conceive of learning, which influenced my study's design. In the Writing Programs and Curricula section, I engage WPA scholarship more specifically to discuss teacher learning and agency in writing programs.

In this chapter overall, I connect scholarship on social theories of learning, curriculum design, and writing program administration to form the foundation for my research on a shared curriculum. I take a partly interdisciplinary approach here to focus more on learning broadly, which I then extrapolate to connect to first-year writing and shared curricula. I draw from high school contexts when discussing teacher agency and curriculum, for example, as the scholarship in K–12 contexts is relevant when considering how teachers adapt or work with more highly constrained curricula mandated by stricter conditions (e.g. standardized testing and state-wide curricular mandates). While the shared curriculum in my research is much more open by comparison, the experiences of working with a defined curriculum are conceptually similar through the process of educators working with materials they did not create.

This chapter, then, is about learning and considerations that affect how I think about shared curricula and its potential impact on learning. It is more learning-centered than WPA-centered because my focus in this dissertation is on teacher learning. This is compatible with and overlaps with WPA scholarship (as WPAs are invested in supporting teachers and their learning),

but it starts from a different place. I use the first part of this chapter to explain how I am approaching this research as someone who is influenced by learning theories. Specifically, I engage theories as a means to consider power and community in relation to program curricula.

Importantly, unless specifically stated otherwise, I am looking at "shared curricula" in this chapter as a broad concept. References to shared curricula, then, are **not** directly about the model of shared curriculum that I focus on in my research. This chapter, instead, is more about how I understand the concept of a shared curriculum and its potential influence on learning.

Theoretical Influences

Legitimate Peripheral Participation

This section focuses on theories of learning rather than teaching because my dissertation explores how educators learn about teaching within a program rather than how they are taught to teach—that is, how they learn about teaching outside of classrooms. This draws on Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's (1991) early work on legitimate peripheral participation, which they describe as an "an analytical viewpoint on learning, a way of understanding learning" (p. 40). Legitimate peripheral participation is a process whereby "the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). In other words, participation in actual or legitimate practices of a community leads to learning and gaining expertise within that community, resulting in gradually fuller participation.

With its focus on practices and participation within communities, legitimate peripheral participation is a productive concept when thinking about shared curricula and their connection with learning to teach writing. Specifically, this is because it is a learning theory whereby

learning is an "integral constituent" or a part of "engagement in social practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 35). With teaching as the social practice in a writing program's community of educators, learning is an ongoing and irreplaceable part of teaching. This idea—that learning and practices are integral and co-constitutive—sets the foundation for why "apprentices learn mostly in relation with other apprentices," through their shared "work practices instead of by strongly asymmetrical master-apprentice relations" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 93).

Peer learning is particularly salient in teaching communities to organize the community so peers teach each other by "engaging in practice, rather than being its object, [which] may well be a *condition* for the effectiveness of learning" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 93). Educators, then, can learn through sharing practices with other teachers—through engaging the practice of teaching—rather than being told what or how to teach. This creates what Lave and Wenger (1991) term as a "learning curriculum," which "is a field of learning resources in everyday practice viewed from the perspective of learners" that leads to situated opportunities for developing a practice; this differs from a teaching curriculum that "is constructed for the instruction of newcomers" (p. 97). Put differently: "the purpose is not to learn *from* talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 109). A learning curriculum facilitates learning *to* talk within a community, while a teaching curriculum emphasizes learning *from* talk. Based on this, a shared curriculum in a writing program might meld learning and teaching curriculum—giving shared practices and language to those teaching a shared curriculum by telling them what to teach.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation and Shared Curriculum

Being both a learning and teaching curriculum, a shared curriculum can be limited in the same ways a teaching curriculum is. Namely, "a teaching curriculum supplies—and thereby limits—structuring resources for learning, the meaning of what is learned [...] is mediated through an instructor's participation, by an external view of what knowing is about" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 97). Similarly, since a WPA usually holds multiple employment positions (as teacher and administrator, for example) or a single position as an administrator, the curriculum they develop as a resource represents an external view of what knowing is about within the program's community because the WPA's movement toward fuller participation in one community (teachers or administrators) can lead to increasingly partial participation in another.

The quality of shared curriculum as a model in some places and a requirement in others raises another consideration about the potential for members (especially newcomers) in a writing program's community to influence or affect the curriculum and practices in meaningful ways. This aspect of making change within communities is something that Mary Lea (2005) critiques as being "not particularly theorised" in Lave and Wenger's theories of legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice (p. 189). Specifically, Lea (2005) suggests, some people in academia will "always find themselves excluded and at the margins" because "certain ways of making meaning are privileged to the exclusion of others," leading to questions about how the practices of newer and excluded members, "not only those of the old-timers, also contribute to the community of practice" (p. 188–189). This resonates with asset-based approaches to teaching, which embrace experiences and perspectives that students bring into the classroom rather than viewing them as obstacles.

While Lea (2005) is specifically talking about classrooms and the position of students, the same concerns should resonate throughout academic spaces—including those spaces where teachers learn about teaching. That is, if a teacher's practices are misaligned with a shared curriculum or if their "different language practices might contribute to marginalisation and exclusion from a community of practice" (Lea, 2005, p. 191), then what opportunities do they have to influence a shared curriculum beyond adjustments within their individual classrooms? This attention to the "margins of a community of practice" should make us wonder about "how the discourses, genres and practices of what are termed newcomers are integrated into those of the established community" (Lea, 2005, p. 188). The practices newcomers bring to a community can be positioned as assets that lead to contributions rather than being practices that are in need of change or remediation. Lea's (2005) critique suggests that the goals of communities of practice within higher education—for both students and educators—may prioritize acculturation over learning; excluding those who resist or are perpetually misaligned with pre-existing practices and community values.

Identity and Learning

WPAs and program leaders must carefully consider what participation means and how it affects learning within a community. In a project by Wenger (2009), **meaning** (learning as experiencing), **practice** (learning as doing), **community** (learning as belonging), and **identity** (learning as becoming) are offered as the four "components necessary to characterize social participation as a process of learning and of knowing" (p. 211). Notably, three of these components—practice, community, and identity—may require new members to conform to existing norms. That is, when someone joins a community they need to learn what to do, how to belong, and who to become in order to participate and gain membership. While someone can

reject prescribed identities to enact their own practices and still be a member of a community, it will have repercussions on their participation. This is why Lea (2005) suggests that some people may choose to enact peripheral participation differently, with some "choosing to remain on the periphery [...to] retain power, and maintain their own sense of identity, in the learning process." (p. 190). By deciding what learning is meaningful and prescribing what people must do and who they must become in order to find a sense of belonging within the community, then, acculturation seems like a feature of communities of practice.

To avoid rendering acculturation as a prerequisite for participation, we must resist the urge "to cause learning, to take charge of it, direct it, accelerate it, demand it, [...] to do something about it"; instead, we must understand learning as "something we can assume – whether we see it or not, whether we like the way it goes or not" (Wenger, 2009, p. 214). In other words, learning is a natural and unstoppable phenomenon—not something that we produce, but something that we affect. By stepping back and embracing this perspective, we can "value the work of community building and make sure that participants have access to the resources necessary to learn what they need to learn in order to take actions and make decisions that fully engage their own knowledgeability" (Wenger, 2009, p. 215). This is a more self-driven learning process, where learning is supported and "mastery resides not in the master but in the organization of the community of practice of which the master is part" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 94). Thus, a learning community is not one where learning is overly controlled, but rather where learning is practiced and made central, apparent, and supported.

So, while learning involves changes in practices, identities, communities, and what is meaningful; the goal in a learning community should not be acculturation toward dominant practices. Instead—based on Wenger (2009) and Lave and Wenger 's (1991) ideas on

distributing access to resources for more self-directed learning and positioning mastery in the organization of the community—a learning community could meld values and perspectives in a space of reciprocal learning around co-constructed purposes. For this model to be successful, however, there need to be some safeguards that position equity and justice as immovable values and goals of the program and its community. Someone should not be offered agency to, for example, learn about how to better oppress multilingual students' languages. The community will still build values that delegitimize some forms of learning, then—the difference is that what is seen as legitimate or illegitimate are based on the community rather than only those who have the most power. As members of the community, those with power still influence the community and its learning; however, they are one influence among many.

While Wenger (2009) ambiguously compresses learning and identity, stating they (as well as practice, community, and meaning) "are deeply interconnected and mutually defining," meaning any concept could be central with the others peripheral (p. 211); Na'ilah Suad Nasir and Jamal Cooks (2009) argue that learning and identity are separate concepts, yet have "deep implications for one another" (p. 44). Importantly, the concepts' distinction from each other makes their connection more apparent. This, I believe, is a broadly applicable distinction and valuable to extend the discussion of learning in Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger's (2009) work. While Nasir and Cooks (2009) have a very different context than my research (they focus on high school student athletes), their discussion of learning and identity extends beyond their context and provides a useful frame for thinking through how learning and identity are related. As my research pursues questions about teachers' learning and agency as they experience a shared curriculum, Nasir and Cooks (2009) provide a helpful understanding about how learning is connected to identity, and how identity (in relation to a community) can impact learning.

In their study on high school student athletes, Nasir and Cooks (2009) found that the "relationship between identity and learning seemed to be mediated by engagement, persistence, and goals," where athletes who had access to resources to develop their identities or receive social support "set goals that supported particular kinds of learning" or "persisted in difficult learning moments" (p. 58). In other words, learning their identities within their practice and their identities to other people within the community gave them opportunities to learn. In contrast, those without these resources had less access to learning.

To better define the opportunities some people are given within communities to create practice-linked identities, Nasir and Cooks (2009) name three kinds of identity-developing "resources": material, relational, and ideational. Defining these, they write:

> By *material resources*, we mean the way in which the physical environment, its organization, and the artifacts in it support one's sense of connection to the practice. *Relational resources* refer to the positive relationships with others in the context that can increase connection to the practice. *Ideational resources* refer to the ideas about oneself and one's relationship to and place in the practice and the world, as well as ideas about what is valued or good. (Nasir and Cooks, 2009, p. 47)

These identity resources name the variables affecting the processes of creating identities in relation to communities—and which variables, on the flipside, communities control to dictate who can make community-related identities. Predictably, as Nasir and Cooks (2009) found with their high school student athlete participants, "such resources [are] not offered to the same degree" for everyone who wants to join a community (p. 51); yet when they are "readily abundant for newcomers," the result is "positive identity and learning trajectories" (p. 55). So,

these identity resources affirm and support people in creating community- or practice-related identities, but they are not evenly distributed.

An example of inequitable distribution of identity resources is described with a student athlete, Gozi, who a coach perceived as "being both lazy and a goof-off" because of "a mistake he had made under the misdirection of a more senior teammate" in the past (Nasir & Cooks, 2009, p. 55). Coupled with "Gozi's tendency to be a bit distracted in practice," the coach did not expect much of him and "virtually [ignored] him during practices, except to be punitive when he perceived Gozi to be goofing off" (Nasir & Cooks, 2009, p. 56). In this case, the coach (holding power) believed that an identity as an athlete was improbable for Gozi due to a mistake he did not apologize for coupled with a tendency to be distracted. This resulted in "not [making] strong connections with the other athletes, in part due to the way he was marginalized" by the coach (affecting relational resources); being kept "in the 200- and 400-meter races," despite Gozi wanting to run the 100-meter sprint (affecting material resources); and having less access to "the kind of rich feedback on his performances or on thinking or feeling like a track athlete" compared to other student athletes (affecting ideational resources) (Nasir & Cooks, 2009, p. 56). In this case, the person in power was able to decide membership in the community by removing access to relational, material, and ideational resources—making an identity within the community almost impossible to create. This case highlights how the practice is not always the most consequential aspect to learning, since Gozi "began to think about taking track more seriously," had practice-specific goals, and wanted to be a track athlete (Nasir & Cooks, 2009, p. 55). Instead, what matters is that those wielding power can choose who will be a part of the community by selectively allotting identity resources based on arbitrary or implicit criteria. In

other words, those who have power within a community can influence the fate of newcomers based on their perception of if they are a good "fit" into the community.

In writing studies, this power to decide who is welcomed into a community is the kind of experience that Aja Y. Martinez (2016) describes through a combination of a stock story and counterstory centered on the character Alejandra, a Chicana graduate student. Stock stories "feign neutrality" and "avoid any blame or responsibility for societal inequality," gaining power because they are "repeated until canonized or normalized" (Martinez, 2016, p. 70). In contrast, counterstories—used as methodology—are told "by people whose experiences are not often told," serving to "expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege" (Martinez, 2016, p. 70). The stock story that Martinez (2016) writes, in particular, illustrates how identity resources can be withheld based on the criteria of "fit" into a graduate program.

In her two stories, Martinez (2016) writes about the composite character of a graduate student, Alejandra, who failed her program's qualifying exam that "serves a programmatic gate-keeping function" by assessing "students' potential for joining the professional conversation in the field of rhetoric and composition" (p. 71). In her stock story, she writes about a conversation between a faculty committee who "discuss the student, her portfolio, and her ability to continue in the program" (Martinez, 2016, p. 72). One faculty member, Tanner, repeats that Alejandra is "not a good fit" for the graduate program by explaining how Alejandra "rarely spoke in my class, and the few times she did, her comments always drew the material back to her comfort zone of social oppression, particular to race" (Martinez, 2016, p. 74). This tenured faculty member goes on to say "what does taking on Alejandra's lack of preparedness mean for us? More work" (Martinez, 2016, p. 75).

In her counterstory—which follows after the program's director recommended Alejandra "consider finishing the program with the M.A." and pursue a "Ph.D. in another program or field" (Martinez, 2016, p. 76)—we follow Alejandra's perspective in a conversation with her mother. In considering why she does not participate more in class, Alejandra explains how Tanner (the faculty member) would dismiss her contributions and "say things like 'Well that's not really rhet/comp material you're referring to,' when I'd cite sociologists who discussed the same issues but with race as a focus" (Martinez, 2016, p. 78). This is further complicated by the program's leadership claiming they brought her in because of her interdisciplinary "sociology background," which is countered by the faculty saying they are "unsure" if Alejandra is "a good 'fit'" (Martinez, 2016, p. 79). However, in the stock story, we heard that Tanner "raised a major concern about this student when [the faculty in conversation] were in committee meetings about new admits" (Martinez, 2016, p. 72). As Alejandra recognizes in her conversation with her mother, this is not based on Alejandra's "fit" in the field, but rather the faculty not understanding her identity:

> it's not like there are any other Latina/os or Chicana/os in the program, not as students or faculty, so their discomfort has to be about more than just the fact that I come from another field. I think it's because I'm the first Latina/Chicana/Mexicana they've ever had in their program, and they don't know what to do with me. (Martinez, 2016, p. 80).

In the stock story, this resulted in a change to the kinds of identity resources—through mentorship—that the faculty offered Alejandra, with Tanner asking another faculty if they "honestly have the time it's going to take to mentor an underprepared student like Alejandra?" (Martinez, 2016, p. 75). In this example, then, faculty withhold relational (e.g. mentorship) and ideational (e.g. labeling her as underprepared and a bad fit) resources because they do not know

how to work with a Chicana student they admitted for her interdisciplinary expertise—resulting in them attempting to pressure her into leaving the program with an MA rather than continuing to the Ph.D.

Taking Nasir and Cooks (2009) and Martinez (2016) together, identity and learning are heavily interconnected. Importantly, though—regardless of what learning takes place or is valued—it seems to be the past, current, and potential identities that decide community membership. That is, access to resources for learning and support depend on if a newcomer is perceived by those in power as having the potential to fit into a community. If someone is perceived as having potential to be a part of the community, then they are given identity resources to join; if not, then their access to resources are reduced, as in Alejandra's story (Martinez, 2016) as well as Gozi's experience (Nasir and Cooks, 2009). These examples illustrate how it is not only the practice or goals that decide membership within communities, but rather the decisions of those who control identity resources.

Learning and Acculturation

In this first section of my Literature Review, I have explored the different ways that learning is theoretically affected within communities and by those who have power. In these conceptions, learning that leads to participating in a community is potentially an act of acculturation, or the process by which people with less power are urged to assimilate into dominant cultures or fit particular identity expectations (respected by those with more power) in order to be recognized as legitimate participants. This acculturating process is not true for every community, but it takes intention to develop and sustain alternative structures. For example, in creating an Organizational Framework for Decolonizing Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), Gina Ann Garcia (2018) conceptualizes an element of the framework as membership. In this

context, membership "is grounded in an ideology of racial and cultural mixing (i.e., mestizaje), not with the intent of erasing difference or assimilating members, but instead with the intent of valuing and respecting all ways of being and knowing" (Garcia, 2018, p. 137). While this is for decolonizing HSIs in particular, it provides a useful alternative to assimilation models that is more inclusive and collaborative by encouraging members "from various racial, ethnic, cultural, national, and religious backgrounds and united by their desire to disrupt dominant structures such as white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, Christian dominance, and racist nativism" (Garcia, 2018, p. 137). While there are still common goals in such a configuration (e.g. "to disrupt dominant structures"), there are not certain ways sanctioned by those with the most power for how to do this work or how to belong in the community.

Power, then, is what matters in this context of learning and acculturation—it is the difference between sharing practices and identities and requiring them. For example, in another element of the framework, Garcia (2018) suggests:

> decolonized HSIs must aim for technological practices that are grounded in principles of liberation. This means that the curriculum, or what is taught, should center the experiences of racially minoritized people, including their history and current state of oppression, while privileging their ways of knowing. (p. 138)

This includes a recommendation to "utilize books, address topics, and teach histories that are racial/ethnic centric" (Garcia, 2018, p. 139). Immediately, this might appear to be an attempt at acculturation toward more liberatory teaching practices—after all, it calls for a centering of racial and ethnic materials. However, it is in conversation with other elements that distributes and disrupts power, like governance that rejects "centralized reporting structures, bureaucratic hierarchies, and single authority" as well as community standards that are "dynamic and fluid"

that “can and should be created by multiple people within the organization, including students, faculty, and staff” (Garcia, 2018, pp. 139–140). Putting these elements in conversation with each other, the people with the most power in a teaching community are not deciding which books, topics, and histories to teach unless the community decides to assign them that authority. Too, rather than exclusion or denial to identity resources being the way to ensure people are held accountable to the shared goals and practices of the community, restorative justice can be used to “facilitate networking and shared learn[ing], with the goal of healing the community, rather than criminalizing people who may have harmed others” (Garcia, 2018, p. 140). In other words, there are structures and processes in place to avoid acculturation of new members toward the values of those who have the most power and to instead bolster learning across the community.

While acculturation is not an inherent feature of a writing program (regardless of what kind of curriculum it uses), it is a possibility that should be prevented if a community wants to promote “an ideology of racial and cultural mixing [...] with the intent of valuing and respecting all ways of being and knowing” (Garcia, 2018, p. 137). WPAs—and especially white WPAs—have the extra responsibility to prevent learning from being rendered as acculturation toward the practices and norms that have benefited us. Returning to Gunner (2002), “the reality of unequal power relations needs continual surfacing, acknowledgment, and negotiation” in collaborative administrative models (p. 260). How can WPAs in a program with a shared curriculum engage this “continual surfacing, acknowledgment, and negotiation” in relation to curriculum and community? What practices and structures are in place to prevent the curriculum from being a reflection of a WPA’s values and goals rather than that of the community’s (including the students)? Most importantly in the context of my research, how is learning directed in writing programs—is it multidirectional, transmittal, something between these two, or something else?

Are opportunities for learning built on valuing and respecting all ways of being and knowing, or do they prioritize certain ways? These are the questions and concerns about learning and community that brought me to this research—though they are considerations I believe exist for any community within academia, not specifically the FYW program I am researching.

Writing Programs and Curricula

As I began doing in the previous section, I focus more on writing programs and curricula design in this second part of my Literature Review. While the previous section focused more on learning that influenced my research questions and design, this section focuses more on practical elements and considerations of WPA work in relation to my research—especially involving agency and curriculum design.

Working within Institutions

FYW programs have commitments to the university—especially students, teachers, and administrators—that influence their practices and possibilities. A shared curriculum is one method by which FYW can deliver on its promises in a way that is both assessable and communicable to those outside of the program, which is important in aligning with institutional context. In writing center administration, William J. Macauley, Jr. (2012) discusses the affordances and processes of connecting a writing center's assessment to its institution's statements, objectives, and goals. This alignment makes a writing center less "vulnerable to resource reductions, absorption into other institutional entities, and even the possibility of elimination," but it additionally creates opportunities for change or collaboration within institutions (Macauley, 2012, pp, 59–60). For instance, Macauley (2012) explains how writing centers can "challenge the status quo" through their assessments on assumptions about writing

that have “no empirical evidence to the contrary,” potentially influencing the direction of an institution by leading it to revisit “former assumptions as well as the goals of the institution itself” (pp. 62–63). In a hypothetical example, Macauley (2012) says a “writing curriculum [may be] based on the assumption that students enter the college with a certain level of writing proficiency. The curriculum reflects that assumption and faculty work from it,” but through using assessment a writing center “can help to confirm those assumptions or demonstrate that students are generally coming in with better or less developed writing skills” (p. 63). As a concrete part of a program’s identity, a shared curriculum can theoretically offer sources of data to assess (e.g. shared writing assignments across courses) while also providing examples of how the program is aligned to the institution in its statements as well as practices.

This alignment does not naturally happen, however. In doing this work, Macauley (2012) suggests mining priorities and language from institutional statements to “develop a *focus*” between the institution and the writing center (p. 61). To do this, writing center directors and staff should study “the order of topics” and “repetition” of values across an institution’s statements, objectives, and goals (Macauley, 2012, p. 67). This is an ongoing process, as writing center directors “must continue to develop assessments that make sense in the space between what the institution is saying, what it is doing, and the priorities and values of the writing center” (Macauley, 2012, p. 75). Importantly, in aligning the program with the institution, Macauley (2012) cautions that “writing centers’ missions can become [dispersed]” (p. 78). This suggests a program needs to be sure of its vision, values, and mission before it tries to align itself with the university. As long as writing center directors are deliberate about maintaining their center’s mission, the risk of losing some program identity is minimized, leading to better collaborations where the writing center is an “overt participant in the institution” (Macauley, 2012, p. 80). This

is a possible strength of a shared curriculum: It defines a program's practices rather than its mission alone, thus strengthening the identity of the program by explaining what the program is, why the program exists, and how it pursues its purposes through its curriculum. That is, by defining both practices and a mission, it seems that a program's identity would be more stable and less likely to be absorbed into the institution's mission.

If WPAs are careful in how they align with the institution while maintaining their program's identity, then alignment can offer programs support or opportunities to collaborate. In an FYW program context, Daniel Summerhill, Kelly Medina-López, and Sam Robinson (2021) talk about redesigning their program to be more antiracist and culturally relevant, focused on "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies." They chose this specific language and approach because it responded to their student population at a "diverse HSI" and aligned with their "goals as racial-justice educators," while also being an "an easy 'sell'" since the university already endorsed and offered support for it (Summerhill et al., 2021, p. 123). Even with this alignment, however, their proposal "generated multiple questions about pedagogy and grading and required revisions to satisfy the sub-committee" that approved curricular changes due to the proposal's antiracist components that required them to "jump additional hurdles to receive approval as compared to the more traditional [first-year composition] FYC course" (Summerhill et al., 2021, p. 125). This makes Summerhill et al. (2021) believe there is a need to educate external administrators and leaders "early on" in the process of program design "to introduce them to new concepts" like antiracism or decolonialism, as such concepts may not be as familiar as others that influence traditional pedagogies (p. 126).

Educating other administrators is particularly useful for developing the kind of full-campus support that Genevieve García de Müeller and Iris Ruiz (2017) identify as necessary for

addressing race in writing programs. Specifically, they found institutional strategies were seen as effective by their study's participants when those participants, the "institution, and writing program put effort into researching how to address race and ethnicity"; training was offered; and "racial diversity directives" were created (p. 36). These conditions do not exist for every program or WPA, and while the approach Summerhill et al. (2021) take to educate other administrators had eventual success at their institution, not every WPA has the same influence or support at their universities.

In a co-authored chapter from Staci M. Perryman-Clark and Collin Lamont Craig (2019), for example, Perryman-Clark recounts her experience as a Black WPA who served "as the only black woman on specific committees" (p. 3). In one experience, while Perryman-Clark was making "the case for diversity and inclusion learning outcomes to be embedded in every distribution area" to an "all white and cis-gendered" committee, her pleas were "quickly dismissed" on the grounds that they were "too prescriptive and not feasible for programmatic assessment" (Perryman-Clark & Craig, 2019, p. 4). On this same committee, her credentials were questioned by a colleague who also said she "needed checks and balances, a charge that was not made toward any other colleagues on the committee" (Perryman-Clark & Craig, 2019, p. 4). While this and other experiences call for "Afrocentricity as the foundation for understanding black perspectives and contributions to WPA work" (Perryman-Clark & Craig, 2019, p. 19), it also highlights how WPA agency and work is affected by race and racism, being "always and already race work" (p. 9).

This is all to say that programs and their curricula face institutional obstacles and limitations—a curriculum is never created and controlled by a sole WPA with an abundance of power. WPAs themselves are constrained, especially when they are marginalized or pursue

concepts that fall outside of traditional pedagogies. This signals the need for larger institutional changes that WPAs can take part in, as Macauley (2012) suggested. However, unlike the suggestion from Macauley (2012) for programs to find ways to align with the institution, García de Müeller and Ruiz (2017) indicate a need for the institution to be involved in something that is worth aligning to. Specifically, they conclude:

> The findings suggest that when writing instructors and institutions put resources and time towards researching and implementing race-based writing program strategies, [people of color] POC students benefit, POC academics feel supported, and white/Caucasian instructors are more able to address race in articulate and concrete ways. (García de Müeller and Ruiz, 2017, p. 36)

No matter how priorities are framed in programs, transformative work takes direct collaboration from the institution and its members for strategies to be effective. This kind of collaboration can be invited, perhaps, through Summerhill et al.'s (2021) suggestion of educating other administrators—though this can be unsuccessful if other administrators are unwilling to listen to WPAs (Perryman-Clark & Craig, 2019).

When alignment, collaboration, and education fail, a WPA can still work within and repurpose institutional systems (including curricula). This is a potential that la paperson (2017) examines while explaining how universities—and especially land-grant universities—are a part of ongoing colonialism, yet they carry the power to switch operations toward decolonialism. In making this argument, la paperson (2017) describes how university systems are complicit in "a project of settler colonialism—the seizing of Native land, the conversion of land into capital." Through using an example from the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) condemning boycotts from Palestine that intervene on Israeli settler colonial practices, la

paperson (2017) shows how "the settler colonial university's investments do not just stem from land seizures of a settler past but are active investments in the very future of settler colonialism." So, universities and their national associations have a history of colonialism, are currently complicit (if not actively pursuing) colonialism, and seek to invest in policies and decisions that engage colonialism. If universities are "land-grabbing, land-transmogrifying, land-capitalizing machines […attached to] war machines, media machines, governmental and nongovernmental policy machines," then members of the university must deactivate their "colonizing operations and [activate their] contingent decolonizing possibilities" (la paperson, 2017) In other words, universities are massive colonial machines—but these machines are designed and maintained by people who can control what they do. To pursue decolonialism with universities as they have been conceived means leveraging the machinery toward new goals.

Ethnic Studies programs offer examples of decolonial approaches applied to curricula, in particular. For example, Cati V. de los Ríos (2013) describes "curriculum as colonizer" because it has historically been "one of the primary instruments for maintaining the legacy of hegemony in U.S. schools" and "promoted the de-Indigenization and the assimilation of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os to the dominant culture" while also "rendering them as perpetual foreigners by divorcing them from their ancestral ties to the Americas" (pp. 59–60). Taking a decolonial approach to curriculum in response to this historic context, de los Ríos (2013) explains:

> Equitable curricular innovation includes a reconceptualization of subject matter and the active recovery, (re)imagination, and (re)investment in indigenous paradigms. Such innovation cannot merely involve additive approaches overlaid onto an already existent curricular framework that homogenizes, erases, and alienates. (p. 60)

In practice, this "intentionally allows for multiple voices—including long silenced ones—to enter the dialogical process of teaching and learning" offering "a space where re-humanization is cultivated and where curriculum and pedagogy affirm, fully, who students are as human beings" (de los Ríos, 2013, p. 71). This is to say curricula have colonial or decolonial potential. A curriculum is not inherently just or injust; beneficial or harmful. However, both the structures around the curriculum and the curriculum itself need to be reconceptualized for decolonization to be possible, as universities have been and are participating in settler colonialism (la paperson, 2017).

Agency

Before talking about what affects agency in teaching, it is important to briefly define how I am thinking about agency in this dissertation. I borrow from Effie Maclellan's (2019) conceptualization of teacher agency that draws on Hans-Herbert Kögler (2012), theorizing about how agency occurs between people. Broadly, agency is "the capacity to make principled choices, take action and make that action happen," with teachers' personal agency more specifically involving:

- capacity to effect real change (in other words to have at their disposal means of reforming and transforming educational practice for the benefit of learners);
- knowledge that they themselves wittingly caused change in others' learning (in other words a conscious understanding of their precise contribution to change);
- awareness of their *own* influences and powers to navigate within the milieu of institutional, political and societal structures. (Maclellan, 2019)

In this conceptualization, agency is always tethered to various internal and external considerations, and involves capacity for change and responsibility in relation to those

considerations. Of interest is how "teachers' agency can be enabled by autonomy," or "having choice in how to act" (Maclellan, 2019). This is not "some rampant expression of self, independent of authority, the environment, society or peers" but instead "a balance of individual freedom and the external constraints" (Maclellan, 2019). In other words, a teacher's classroom and decisions are always interacting with what surrounds them: the students, policies, pedagogies, curriculum, etc. However, agency is the capacity to make decisions that are the teachers' own within this context and with consideration of those constraints. As Maclellan (2019) suggests, agency as autonomy requires "critical reflection to check that they fully concur with the reasons for so acting," otherwise they act "independently or intentionally, but not with autonomy." In this, agency depends on fully understanding the context of teaching, the constraints that exist, how they relate to what a teacher believes, and how the teacher can act as a result.

Another aspect of agency that is relevant to my research is affect over those constraints. This is something that one of Scott Wible's (2019) participants discusses while talking about allyship, critiquing how administrators will hire "'a specific group of people,' but when it has to do with the inner workings of a department or a writing program, the decisions are still made by the white, Eurocentric people" (p. 90). This aspect of broader decision-making and capacity to affect it is important to "fully concur with the reasons for so acting" (Maclellan, 2019), as "Any policy that affects people of color, if it's created without directly consulting people of color, it's a useless policy" (Wible, 2019, p. 90). In other words—if people do not concur with policies that were never made for them—they should have agency to not only respond to that policy in their classrooms, but also affect it in the program. In these conceptions, agency is the capacity to

affect change in and around our classrooms for the purpose of benefiting students and their learning.

In a shared curriculum, teachers have agency over how they adapt and implement curriculum. In discussing a case study of a social justice-oriented middle school teacher's curricular freedom to incorporate critical composition pedagogy (which blends social justice education, critical pedagogy, and critical literacy), Nadia Behizadeh, Charity Gordon, Clarice Thomas, Beth Marks, Latricia Oliver, and Heidi Goodwin (2019) discuss how curricular freedom "is produced by contextual factors, not simply given by administrators" (p. 66) These factors are both large and small, including "curricular resources and pedagogical supports, trust between teachers and administrators, and student characteristics [e.g. racial and socioeconomic characteristics]" (Behizadeh et al., 2019, p. 65). Writing program administrators can help to develop or share resources, supports, trust, and information about student populations, but there are other considerations specific to FYW regarding disciplinary experience that can further affect what freedom is offered.

Writing about academic freedom over teaching FYC classes in two-year colleges, Annie Del Principe and Jacqueline Brady (2018) argue that "professors possess expertise in specific fields of knowledge," and so they have the "right to make decisions in and about their classrooms" (p. 352). However, they also acknowledge expertise in FYC is complicated because each educator's teaching expertise and areas of study can vary widely, so it becomes a challenge to honor "both the practical knowledge gleaned from teaching and the breadth of knowledge gained through formal education and research" (Del Principe & Brady, 2018, p. 354). Since some FYC or FYW programs are housed in English departments rather than writing and rhetoric departments, it means some educators can have decades of teaching experience in FYW—

however, they may have focused their courses on creative writing or literature to represent their disciplinary orientations; meaning they may not have specific knowledge about rhetoric, composition, and/or literacy like a WPA and other educators specializing in writing studies might. This is far from a certainty, but it is a consideration that can affect agency—both the agency given by WPAs who may distrust faculty with different disciplinary alignments, and the agency teachers may give themselves based on their self-described unfamiliarity with writing studies and FYW pedagogy.

Together, Heard (2014), Stewart et al. (2016), Brunk-Chavez (2010), Behizadeh et al. (2019), and Del Principe and Brady (2018) all write about agency over curriculum, noting the following factors impacting curricular agency:

- Opportunities to design curricula.
- Willingness to experiment, inquire, and learn.
- Administrators withholding or distributing power.
- Labor required for designing, implementing, revising, and maintaining shared and individual curriculum.
- Roles of WPAs in the community and willingness to collaborate and embrace the expertise of all teachers.
- Curricular resources.
- Pedagogical supports.
- Trust between teachers and administrators.
- Institutional context, such as student demographics.
- Practical teaching experience.
- Writing studies pedagogy experience.

In fewer words, agency is not easily distributed in teaching since there are many institutional and contextual factors that impact teachers' freedom. A role of a WPA in this context, then, could be to identify and communicate about agency constraints beyond the program while pursuing a program design that positions programs as educational spaces where learning is central as teachers consider and co-create curricula together in community. For this, there must be an administrative infrastructure in place to support teacher agency and learning. Rather than control what that learning looks like or how it happens, a writing program's community (including administrators) could commit itself to learning together and pursuing more agency in the interest of learning about teaching writing. The learning in a program, then, shifts from upholding and reproducing curricular structures to pursuing changes in the program, the discipline, and the world.

By suggesting that learning is centralized and agency is more freely afforded around curriculum design, I am not suggesting that teachers are encouraged to learn about and teach anything they want. After all, FYW is a program with institutional requirements and constraints that WPAs themselves do not have agency to affect. Additionally, I do not believe that FYW is a literature or creative writing course, and in advocating for agency I am not suggesting that teachers with those disciplinary leanings should teach that content. Instead, what I am suggesting here is a careful examination of what needs to be shared in a shared curriculum, knowing that teaching is already constrained in several ways both within and beyond a program.

Curriculum Design

Designing curriculum is a part of the practice of teaching. It is why WPAs—with their experience as teachers—are well-positioned to design shared curriculum in the first place. Shared curricula can offer material resources to onboard newcomers to the practices of a writing

program community, independent of their relational resources within the program. This positions shared curricula as useful resources when starting to teach in a program, though it also means there needs to be flexibility so it is not rendered as the only way to teach FYW. According to Smagorinsky et al. (2002), new teachers (regardless of if they resist the curriculum) will often try accommodating a curriculum into their teaching, eventually acquiescing to some of the elements they originally resisted. However, that is only because the material resources are limited through a standard curriculum—there are no curricular alternatives given the same authority. This is a possible advantage of shared curricula over standard curricula—there can be more flexibility and space to create and share alternatives. However, there needs to be an active effort to pursue these alternatives, as the lines between standard and shared curriculum can be uncertain, meaning a model created by administrators can be perceived as a standard even when that is not the intent of sharing the model (a concept I explore in my Discussion on Learning, Agency, and Shared Curriculum chapter).

In suggesting that more educators should be trained and trusted curriculum designers, Matthew Heard (2014) argues that established administrators, educators, and scholars limit opportunities for "experimentation or inquiry" when they withhold opportunities for graduate student and non-tenure-track educators to actively participate in inventing and designing curricula (p. 319). This creates "a cycle of dependency: simplifying design [by assigning curricula to teach] ensures reproduction of established values and traditions in our field" (Heard, 2014, p. 320), which then limits educators from expanding, contributing, or complicating the field. In this context, denying people from designing their own curricula in community not only prevents instructors from learning how to design curricula that they find meaningful, it also shields the field "from potentially innovative contributions that might disrupt and alter our

traditions of practice and theory" (Heard, 2014, p. 333). If first-year writing becomes formulaic, the attention of the program's community may go toward refining and perfecting the formula rather than researching other formulas—raising questions about who is able to design the formula to begin with and how others can affect it. In my research, this consideration led me to ask participants about their identities and experiences as curriculum designers.

Design Labor

Without clear encouragement or explicit policies identifying what can be changed, a writing educator's design agency over a shared curriculum can resemble the agency teachers have over designing a standard curriculum, following what Heard (2014) describes as "a nuts-and-bolts skill of application, imitation, and replication" (p. 316). With replication as a possible end, this calls back to Lea (2005), who asked how newcomers' practices "are integrated into those of the established community" (p. 188). Notably, if newcomers are invited to affect the established community's practices, then they will have to do more labor. This is one benefit to standardized and shared curricula: It theoretically requires less labor from newcomers because replication or imitation is less demanding than designing a curriculum from scratch—a process that involves "forging new connections between ideas and practices within environments of uncertainty and contingency" (Heard, 2014, p. 316). This difference in labor is one of the main reasons Mary K. Stewart, Jenae Cohn, and Carl Whithaus (2016) decided to make a course shell that "includes all of the activities, instructions, and learning materials" for a collaboratively designed online course in their program, arguing this shell mitigated the "increased workload" of teaching online courses (p. 3). Considering agency, they created an "adaptable course shell" rather than a standardized one, explaining that adaptable course shells give instructors

"permission to revise and adapt the material in ways that fit their own teaching personalities and their students' needs" (Stewart et al., 2016, p. 3).

While addressing major labor concerns, even adaptable course shells create other problems and require different labor. For example, Stewart et al. (2016) says instructors have to be allowed to "share their ideas and strategies for modifying course shell material [...to make the shells] truly adaptable" (p. 4). In their study, this meant instructors shared a communal Google Doc "teaching journal," where they reflected on teaching, discussed how they use the course shell, and shared approaches or strategies for adapting it (Stewart et al., 2016, p. 5). While it requires less labor than designing a curriculum, communal journaling became a necessary component to collaborate and encourage adaptations of the course shell. Despite their best efforts, Stewart et al. (2016) still acknowledge that "the reality is that even if the shell is adaptable, the 'official' strategy for delivering curriculum is published in the departmentally-sanctioned shell" (p. 14).

While it is easier to follow a shell than design it, the presence of a shell makes ownership over curriculum less uncertain. For example, Stewart et al. (2016) noted that the small group of designers who made their adaptable course shell "felt quite comfortable rearranging and rewriting online activity instructions [...since they] had both more experience with the technology and a stronger sense of ownership over the materials" compared to the instructors who were invited to only interpret and adapt the course shell (p. 16). This suggests the adaptability of shared curricular materials may be difficult for writing program administrators to recognize because they have a different relationship with curriculum through the process of designing it. While they might feel there is more agency than there is, for example, that sense of agency will not always be felt by different members of the teaching community. This leads

Stewart et al. (2016) to suggest that collaborations should happen at the "design and implementation phases of course delivery," supported by the belief that "expertise is shared" (p. 17). While this move may cause collaborating teachers to feel more agency because they participate in the design of the curriculum, it also requires significant ongoing labor since the curriculum needs to be changed regularly to ensure every teacher is involved in the design. So, while a shared curriculum with a course shell saves new instructors initial design labor, it results in more ongoing labor and barriers to program-level revision in order to collaboratively update the curriculum for all teachers.

Addressing labor from another angle, Beth Brunk-Chavez (2010) suggests integrating faculty development and instructional development. Differentiating these terms, Brunk-Chavez (2010) describes faculty development as being focused on the "faculty member as teacher, professional, and person," while instructional development "focuses on the course, the curriculum, and student learning" (p. 153). In connection with Wenger (2009), faculty development relates to identity while instructional development relates to practice. Brunk-Chavez (2010) recommends integrating and requiring faculty and instructional development and embracing the expertise of all teachers in a program community—"from the seasoned lecturers to the new teaching assistants" (p. 154). What this can look like is everyone being "invited to participate and present at workshops and provide feedback for revisions to every part of the program," resulting in opportunities where instructors "rethink the way they teach, the way they think about writing, the way they use—or don't use—technology, and so on" (Brunk-Chavez, 2010, p. 154). In other words, the administrative responsibilities of a program are distributed across the program, positioning teachers to teach and learn from each other.

Importantly, rather than designating teachers to do this work by themselves, "WPAs should work *with* the instructors in the program" (Brunk-Chavez, 2010, p. 154). In the same way teachers organize a class and invite students to write and learn from each other, WPAs can design a program that invites teachers to practice and learn from each other. By embracing the expertise of teachers in a program, WPAs can then decenter their authority and foster a space that invites teachers to teach each other *and* the WPAs—a concept that I return to in my Reflections and Applications chapter.

Shared Curricula

The point to emphasize in concluding this chapter is that shared curricula are not neutral. They can be helpful, generative, and transformational; they can also be discouraging, problematic, and harmful. Curriculum influences what is learned for both teachers and students—creating boundaries as well as possibilities (Young, 2014). In other words, the structure of curriculum and teachers' interactions with it shape and influence what is learned about teaching, which makes it important to research to better understand how it affects learning for teachers and how they experience agency and autonomy within it. This is why I pay attention to curriculum and its materials in particular—an approach I explain in the following chapter where I discuss how I set up my research with teachers to learn about their experiences with WRaC's shared curriculum.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

As suggested by the previous two chapters, a goal of this research was to listen and learn from teachers' experiences. This means that I did not want to use my research to verify a hypothesis, support a current theory, or build a theory from my participants' ideas. Considering this, I decided to work inductively and form conclusions from the ground-up, rather than testing a theory from the top-down. This should not suggest that I was uninfluenced by theories, or that I did not have beliefs and assumptions before starting my research. For example, I believed there was some connection between agency, learning, and curriculum—though I was not sure what the connection was or if there was a common connection between participants. This said, I did not intentionally design my research questions to support any assumptions I had, but I still acknowledge that it is impossible to say that my questions were not influenced by my preconceptions and position within the program. This is why I take an inductive approach to data collection and analysis to minimize the influence of my theoretical preconceptions and assumptions in collecting and reviewing data.

In this chapter, I discuss my research questions and process. This includes the reasons I chose to use a qualitative description (QD) methodology and how I collected and analyzed data thematically. Additionally, I explain the details of my research, such as how I invited participants and included them in my research process to ensure I represented their ideas accurately while preserving their anonymity to the extent possible.

Research Questions

My research questions are generally focused on the relationship between shared curriculum, learning, and agency:

- How do writing teachers experience a shared curriculum, specifically in relation to their learning and agency?
- Based on participant experiences, what should WPAs be aware of when designing support for writing teacher education?

Specifically, I wanted to know about teachers' experiences of a shared curriculum. To address these questions, my research focuses on what I learned from semi-structured interviews with a group of first-year writing teachers in one program. I also conducted surveys and collected some course materials, but these were used for context for the interviews and program rather than being what I analyzed and wrote about in this dissertation. As a result of my learning about the experiences of my participants, I locate areas of interest that some WPAs might consider when thinking about teacher learning and curricular design.

Methodology

My decisions to use an inductive approach to research and data analysis, stay close to the data about teachers' experiences, and prioritize findings that influence practice instead of theory led me to using qualitative description methodology. Broadly, Margarete Sandelowski (2010) describes this methodology as having "typical approaches to sampling (maximum variation), data collection (individual or focus group interviews), and data analysis (variants of qualitative content analysis)" (p. 77).

While QD methodology emerges from nursing scholarship, it is applicable to qualitative research in general. Since "the aim of QD is neither thick description (ethnography), theory development (grounded theory) nor interpretative meaning of an experience (phenomenology), but a rich, straight description of an experience or an event" (Neergaard et al., 2009, p. 2), it is specifically an alternative to more iterative or theory-based methodologies that are used more commonly in qualitative writing studies research. My decision to use this methodology, then, is not based on it being from nursing scholarship—though I believe the nature of nursing scholarship to focus closely on people and their experiences is why it is compatible with research in writing studies. I use it primarily because it captures how I wanted to collect and interact with my data (as I explain later in this chapter) more accurately than other methodologies more common in writing studies. Additionally, I find it is useful because it is used in studies when "data are neither generated nor interpreted on the basis of existing theories or knowledge of a given subject" and a goal is "to gain firsthand knowledge of [participants'] experiences with a particular topic" (Neergaard et al., 2009, pp. 3, 5). So, it is useful in research like mine where the aim is to learn from a participants' experiences in their own words without a theoretical influence overlaying the research.

This is not to say QD excludes theory. Instead, QD has an emphasis on naturalistic inquiry, where "there is no pre-selection of variables to study, no manipulation of variables, and no a priori commitment to any one theoretical view of a target phenomenon" (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 337). What this means is that I was not bound to particular theories or frameworks, though I am still influenced by theory (as I discussed in the previous chapter). As Sandelowski (2010) clarifies, "having no commitment to a theory does not mean not being influenced by theory at all. Every word is a theory; the very way researchers talk about their subject matter

reflects their leanings" (p. 79). However, QD allowed me to collect and analyze data more flexibly without frameworks or theories overdetermining my research, the questions I asked, or what the output of my research was. At the same time, it gave me space to still interpret and theorize on a small scale while acknowledging what theories underpin my research. So, while theories inform how and why I research, the language I use, and the questions I ask, they are not what I am directing my research at. That is, I am not trying to apply legitimate peripheral participation to the community teaching a shared curriculum to see what I learn about that application.

Research Design

Over the course of my research, I changed my research design. Initially, I wanted to theorize about shared curricula by connecting participant responses. For this, I considered grounded theory or phenomenology. By learning from my participants, however, my goal shifted from theorizing to representing the experiences of teachers around emerging themes. A goal to inductively interpret and find themes between my participants' experiences remained the same, then, but I recognized how my research questions urged me to stay close to the data to discuss teachers' experiences in their own words (Sandelowski, 2000). Additionally, since I looked at only one program instead of multiple, I knew any theories I developed would be limited—especially since shared curricula can differ widely. I reflected on how a goal for this research is to create considerations for administrators and writing teachers rather than to produce a theory about shared curriculum and learning, meaning I had to adapt my methodology to reflect this purpose.

A QD approach was fitting because it does "not require a conceptual or otherwise highly abstract rendering of data," and instead "entails a kind of interpretation that is low-inference"

(Sandelowski, 2000, p. 335). This does not mean that it is interpretation-free. Instead, "qualitative description is not highly interpretive in the sense that a researcher deliberately chooses to describe an event in terms of a conceptual, philosophical, or other highly abstract framework or system," and so avoiding the act of "re-present[ing] events in other terms" (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 336). This means findings are "data-near," and interpretations "are much less transformed than, for example, grounded theories or Foucault-inspired discourse studies," though they are "still detailed and nuanced interpretive products" (Sandelowski, 2010, p. 78). This approach then helped me to share and represent my participants' experiences in a way that stayed true to their words, but still gave me space to interpret and make sense of the data. For Sandelowski (2000), staying near to the data means that participants' "concerns [remain] concerns and perceptions [remain] perceptions" rather than being transformed into something more theoretical (p. 338). While I do some theorizing and interpreting based on synthesis from the Discussion on Learning, Agency, and Shared Curriculum chapter, this is minimal and comes only after I share what participants said in their own words.

While I am largely influenced by Sandelowski (2000; 2010) and Mette Asbjoern Neergaard, Frede Olesen, Rikke Sand Andersen, and Jens Sondergaard's (2009) recommendations and characterizations of QD, I depart from typical QD studies in some ways—primarily in data collection, sampling, and data analysis. This variation is a natural part of qualitative research. As Sandelowski (2010) explains, "methods are always accommodated to the real world of research practice and, by virtue of that very accommodation, they are reinvented" (p. 82). Thus, while my research was influenced strongly by QD, I depart based on needs resulting from my research process. To avoid confusion, I use this chapter to describe my methods and the considerations I made when departing from more typical QD studies.

Research Context

As I explained in greater depth in the first chapter, my study takes place at Michigan State University, an R1 Midwestern university with about 50,000 students. The first-year writing program I studied is a part of the WRaC Department, a writing studies department with teachers from a range of writing subdisciplines. These include cultural rhetorics or studies, composition, literature, and creative writing. At the time of my study, the program had over 70 teachers. The majority of the first-year writing program is taught by teaching-focused (TF) faculty—not all of whom have explicit training and education in composition and rhetoric prior to joining the program. The second largest group was graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), with 5–15 teaching in the program at any given time. Most of these students were from the WRaC and studying composition and rhetoric, though there was often at least one student from the English Department as well. Tenure-stream faculty sometimes taught FYW, but they were much more likely to teach courses in the department's majors, minor, or graduate program. Considering this population, I focus on the experiences of TF faculty and GTAs in my study.

The program's shared curriculum was created over 15 years ago and reiterated over time, with one notable revision being implemented in 2016. As mentioned in the first chapter, the shared curriculum was created to offer students taking FYW with a more consistent learning experience while also aligning with pedagogies in writing studies. This was needed at the time because the program was split between American studies and writing studies teachers who were approaching FYW from very different perspectives. While the program is still regularly staffed by teachers from different subdisciplines, generally teachers are better aligned in teaching writing from an inquiry-based (rather than content-based) approach. This alignment is likely the result of intentional hiring practices, increased professional development, and the shared

curriculum itself, which (as I later discuss) continues to be a useful resource for teachers who come into the program without yet having explicit writing studies expertise or familiarity with the program's approach to FYW.

To support teachers, the program offers regular professional development workshops or sessions and end-of-semester gatherings for all teachers, and hosts multi-week orientations and provides learning groups for new teachers. During my study, the program was also piloting with optional "teaching circles" for returning teachers as well in an attempt to expand peer-to-peer support. As mentioned in the first chapter, the program was also supported by the First-Year Writing Advisory Committee, which had several subcommittees or working groups supporting and researching the work of FYW. Teachers across the program could choose to be involved in these committees, but their participation was not required.

Methods

Data Collection

I collected my data in Fall 2023. Prior to my research, then, teachers experienced the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (either as students, teachers, or both). Additionally, my data collection took place after a traumatic event happened on the campus where my research was situated. Both of these factored into participants' experiences, though I did not ask questions specifically about them because I did not want my participants to revisit potentially traumatic memories. While some participants mentioned either or both events voluntarily, inquiring into the impact that traumatic events had on teaching was not a part of my research design and it is not, as a result, something I discuss at length in this research.

Sampling Considerations

As with most qualitative research studies, my research "focuses in depth on relatively small samples [...] selected *purposefully*," meaning I chose to select "*information-rich cases* for study in depth," or cases where I could "learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry" (Patton, 2015, p. 1). QD research typically uses purposeful sampling such as convenience, maximum variation, or a combination of purposeful sampling strategies (Kim et al., 2017, p. 6). Maximum variation sampling involves finding "shared patterns that cut across cases and derived their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 535). In particular, it is "useful to get a broad insight into a subject" (Neergaard et al., 2009, p. 2). This is because it "allows researchers to explore the common and unique manifestations of a target phenomenon across a broad range of phenomenally and/or demographically varied cases" (Sandelowski, 1995, as cited in Sandelowski, 2000, pp. 337–338). In their systematic review of research articles in the PubMed database, Hyejin Kim, Justine S. Sefcik, and Christine Bradway's (2017) research shows that QD studies using maximum variation or a combination of maximum variation and other purposeful sampling strategies ranged from 10–100 participants, with most having fewer than 35 participants. So, while I only have 9 interview participants, this sort of sampling can apply to smaller studies.

I, however, would not characterize my sampling as maximum variation. This is because variation in these studies normally refers to "diversity in participants' demographics," such as "age, gender, and education level" (Kim et al., 2017, p. 6). However, I chose interview participants with similar time teaching in the program and similar positions, collecting little demographic information about them that was unrelated to their teaching experience and employment position. If I were solely influenced by maximum variation sampling, I would have

also, for example, tried harder to involve tenure-track faculty and at least one GTA from the English Department who teaches in the FYW program. So, while I prioritized variation between participants when possible, I did not feel the need to follow a maximum variation sampling approach—especially since my study is small. Additionally, I did not ask for demographic information about race, gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, class, etc. in an effort to keep the identities of participants more anonymous to people at MSU. The decision to not include much demographic information was a mistake, as collecting more would have at least helped me make decisions about who to invite to interviews to ensure more demographic variation.

Even though participants overlapped with each other, I prioritized variation in years teaching in the program, initial feelings about the curriculum documented on a recruitment survey, and position as a TF faculty member or GTA.

Sampling Process

My sampling happened in two stages, both with a different approach. The first stage was an open invitation to participate in my research through two surveys sent to the program's listserv, which had 73 teachers. In these surveys, I wanted to learn about how teachers across the program experienced the shared curriculum and identify who was interested in further participating in my research. Since I am a member of the program's community, I wanted to keep this as an open call to everyone in WRaC rather than trying to invite teachers I already knew. One of the surveys was anonymous to gather data from as many teachers as possible. This yielded 31 responses from:

- teaching-focused faculty (21),
- graduate teaching assistants (6),
- academic specialists (2),

- a teaching-focused faculty member with prior administrative experience in the program (1),
- and a tenure-stream faculty member (1).

The second was a recruitment survey, which asked if teachers were interested in participating in three semi-structured interviews. This yielded 15 responses from:

- teaching-focused faculty (9),
- graduate teaching assistants (5),
- and a teaching-focused faculty member with prior administrative experience in the program (1).

The second sampling stage was supposed to be more purposeful and selective (I initially planned to invite 3–4 people to interviews), but I realized I wanted more participants who could represent a wider range of positions and perspectives. In this stage, I invited participants who indicated interest in the recruitment survey to semi-structured interviews. Primarily, I wanted an equal number of GTA and TF faculty participants who:

- represented a range of time teaching in the program,
- represented a range of perspectives about the shared curriculum,
- taught recently and were (ideally) still teaching.

Due to my time constraints, once I had 10 people sign up for interviews, I invited 8 of them (4 GTAs and 4 TF faculty) to schedule interviews with me. I kept the recruitment survey open in case anyone who I invited to interviews canceled; however, all 8 participants confirmed. Of the original 10 who signed up, I left out 1 TF faculty member (who had the same number of years teaching in the program as another teacher I invited) because the teacher I selected indicated they appreciated the curriculum from both a learner standpoint and teaching perspective, which

seemed more relevant to my research. I left out 1 GTA because they had not taught FYW in a year. While the survey remained open after I invited my 8 participants and waited for their confirmation, 5 more people signed up. Of these, I invited only 1 additional participant because of her past administrative experience within the program that differentiated her from all of the other participants. I did not choose participants based on if they were people I knew. Even when I knew the teachers through my position on the FYW admin team, I did not have a clear sense of what the teachers did with the shared curriculum or how they experienced it.

I successfully recruited a near-even number of GTAs (4) and TF faculty (5) representing a range of time teaching in the program, with 1–3 years (4 participants), 4–6 years (3 participants), and 7+ years (2 participants). Since I wanted about half of my participants to be graduate students, the 1–3 years of experience group was the largest because most GTAs have only 3–4 years of experience before they graduate. No one who responded to the recruitment survey had an explicitly negative relationship with the shared curriculum, meaning I was only able to interview teachers who had positive or neutral experiences.

Instruments

I collected data through an anonymous survey and semi-structured interviews. The majority of my data, however, came from semi-structured interviews. As part of the interviews, I also collected the past and current assignment descriptions and syllabi from my participants. However, for this current study, course materials were collected primarily for context and to encourage participants to review their materials.

Anonymous Survey

To learn about general experiences and attitudes across the program, I sent an anonymous survey (see Appendix A) to the program's 73 educators using the program's email list. This

survey was open for a month in August 2023. 31 teachers responded, most of whom responded in early- or mid-August. In the survey, I asked questions around the topics of:

- employment position and FYW experience,
- disciplinary orientations,
- experiences with the program's shared curriculum,
- and innovations or changes made to the curriculum.

I asked a combination of open-ended and closed questions, mostly about agency, curriculum, and learning. For example, I asked the open-ended question "What did you expect to learn about teaching writing when you started teaching in your program?" and the closed question "What are 2–3 resources or experiences that best supported you in learning to teach the shared curriculum?" and provided options ranging from official professional development events to trial and error or reflections on teaching. This survey provided a breadth of qualitative and quantitative data. This was helpful in understanding the broader perspectives of the program's teachers before I started interviewing. For the purposes of this dissertation, the survey only provided context. In future research, I expect to analyze and integrate the survey responses with data collected in interviews.

Semi-Structured Interviews

After collecting responses to the anonymous survey and a recruitment survey, I invited 9 teachers to a set of three interviews (see Appendix B) conducted over Zoom:

- The first interview focused on early experiences teaching in the program (first year in the program, with emphasis on the first semester).
- The second interview focused on current thinking and practices (current semester).
- The third interview focused on future learning and curricular change.

All 9 invited participants scheduled interviews with me, which I conducted in Fall 2023 between August and October. The majority of interviews took place in September. Interviews ranged from 27–90 minutes, with the average time being about 63 minutes. In total, this resulted in about 230,000 transcribed words. For the first two interviews with each participant, I asked them to bring their syllabus and assignment descriptions from their first or current semester respectively. I asked questions about these materials, such as how the program's learning goals show up in their syllabus and assignments. With permission, I collected these materials for reference and future research.

All of the interviews asked questions around four topics: curriculum, teacher learning, agency, and goals. The questions asked in each topic often overlapped. For example, in the first two interviews, I asked: "How did the [past or current] syllabus and assignments you brought in come to be? Did you make them from scratch, work from a model, or do something else?" While this was a question in the "learning" topic because I primarily wanted to get a sense of what sources of learning participants identified, it also had to do with curriculum—both designing curriculum and learning from the shared curriculum.

Based on what I learned from the responses to the anonymous survey, I edited some of the wording for my semi-structured interview guide, especially for the second and third interviews. This revision clarified questions and focused more on curriculum and goal-setting. After conducting the first several interviews, I further revised the emphasis of the third interview to more directly inquire into if participants felt they could change the shared curriculum. Initially, I planned to ask only about what changes they would want to make to the curriculum at the program-level. This change was made to connect agency and curriculum more explicitly, but

also because most of the participants discussed changes they would want to make in the first two interviews.

My interview process was not ideal. While interview guides in QD research are "slightly more structured than in other qualitative methods," one advantage is that they are flexible enough to be "modified and transformed as themes emerge during the analysis" (Neergaard et al., 2009, p. 2). Because of time constraints, however, I needed to quickly conduct all 27 interviews (3 interviews with each of my 9 participants) in the span of about 2 months. This meant I conducted interviews in a staggered way based on the availability of my participants and me, meaning I started doing second interviews before completing all of the first interviews. This allowed for little in-process revision, which should have been an advantage of doing multiple qualitative interviews. More ideally, then, I would have created "sets" of interviews, where I conducted all of the first interviews with participants before moving to the second interviews and so forth. This would have let me review responses and revise interview scripts based on emergent themes relevant to my in-process analysis.

Since I used Zoom to conduct interviews, I used the built-in transcription feature. This provided a base for transcripts, but the auto-generated transcripts had too many errors to analyze the data. To correct the transcripts and review the interviews in-depth, I listened back to the interviews and edited them by hand, doing light reflection and analysis throughout. While time consuming, this was a meaningful process to begin data analysis. Transcribing gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in the data, following the recommendation of Mojtaba Vaismoradi, Hannele Turunen, and Terese Bondas (2013) that researchers "transcribe the interview, and obtain the sense of the whole through reading the transcripts several times" to familiarize themselves with the data and begin generating codes (p. 401).

Data Analysis and Coding

Within nursing scholarship, there appears to be some uncertainty about the boundaries of analyzing QD data. Neergaard et al. (2009) suggests an approach of "describing" rather than "synthesizing, theorizing and recontextualizing," adding that "only a descriptive summary can rightly be given" because few existing theories are used within the research (pp. 2–3). However, in addition to noting that QD researchers will always have theoretical preconceptions, Sandelowski's (2010) description of analyzing QD data offers more space for interpretation and synthesis, arguing "data never speak for themselves," and analysis "always requires moving somewhere: that researchers make something of their data." (p. 79). In my approach to data analysis, I am more aligned with Sandelowski's (2010) characterization. That is, I do not avoid my role in data analysis, which I see as an inherently interpretive process. I do, however, minimize recontextualizing and theorizing. So, my coding process was based on synthesis because it sought to identify connections and themes between responses. This synthesis is the basis of my discussion in later chapters.

Data analysis in QD research commonly uses "descriptive phenomenology, content analysis, and thematic analysis," which are "suitable for researchers who wish to employ a relatively low level of interpretation" (Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 399). While these are similar and sometimes overlapping analytical approaches, I decided to use thematic analysis in my research for a few reasons.

- First, thematic analysis is in line with my research goals and QD research because it is "essentially independent of theory and epistemology," making it "a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Similarly, since I take an "essentialist or realist"

approach to thematic analysis, I report "experiences, meanings and the reality of participants" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). This fits the descriptive aspects of QD that I value and addresses my experience-focused research questions.

- Second, thematic analysis is used to reveal themes, which capture "something important about the data in relation to the research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Since I wanted to balance description with some synthesis and interpretation, it made sense to use thematic analysis to derive themes. This is because finding such themes is a process of synthesis and interpretation that makes connections between data easier for me to describe while foregrounding description.
- Third and most importantly for my research, thematic analysis remains qualitative, where a theme's importance "is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures" in the same way as content analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 403). Specifically, in content analysis, "it is possible to reach a theme based on the frequency of its occurrence in the text" (Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 403). In content analysis, then, the frequency of a theme across a data set "may [cautiously] stand as a proxy for significance" (Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 404); however, in thematic analysis, "more instances do not *necessarily* mean the theme itself is more crucial," even though a theme should be prevalent across the data set being analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Further, a theme's significance can be based on "whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question" rather than its "quantifiable measures" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Since some experiences represented by themes were less common than others, it was important for me to represent less frequent experiences that still addressed my research questions.

While thematic analysis can be top-down or theoretical, I used an inductive or data-driven approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). Specifically, I did open coding, meaning I created "codes based upon the data" rather than using predefined codes that "are determined before the analysis begins" (Hayhoe & Brewer, 2020, p. 106). This coding happened in two passes. First, I did in vivo coding, where the codes were "taken from the words in the transcript itself" (Hayhoe & Brewer, 2020, p. 106). While it is common to code short phrases and words during in vivo coding, I exclusively coded longer phrases and sentences instead in an effort to preserve context around key concepts. This took longer to review codes, but it was ultimately worthwhile since it made it easier for me to recognize or remember context throughout the coding process.

After writing in vivo codes, I looked back on what I coded to develop theme-based codes. While in vivo coding was "an analysis of the directly observed data," identifying themes was a process of categorization since it was "an analysis of the codes themselves" (Hayhoe & Brewer, 2020, p. 107). This resulted in the following themes (which are further detailed in Appendix C):

Agency

- Agency boundary
- Agency provider
- Agency and ownership over course
- Agency over writing program
- Agency uncertainty

Curriculum

- Curriculum adherence
- Curriculum deviance

- Curriculum alignment
- Curriculum misalignment
- Curriculum rationale or feature

Learning

- Learning source, resource, or influence
- Learning limitation
- Learning identity and positionality

Program Design and Goals

- Program change or suggestion
- Student learning goals
- Teacher learning goals

Beyond the Program

- Universal first-year writing element
- Teacher value

Each of these thematic codes were created and defined inductively through my coding process, though the basic umbrella categories of agency, curriculum, and learning were predefined to ensure the codes were connected to my original research questions. To develop these thematic codes, I reviewed the in vivo sentences I coded during my first pass, considered what mattered about the sentence(s) in relation to my research questions, and then invented a code and instructions for when to apply the code in the future. This resulted in a recursive coding process for the first quarter of my coding pass to identify themes, where I would define new thematic codes or redefine codes I applied earlier, and then go back over the data to check if the codes were applied consistently. After coding for the first quarter or third of the data for themes, the

thematic codes became more stable, with small edits that increased the applicability of particular codes rather than revising their focus. This resulted in some codes that were broader than they should have been, which would have been addressed if I had time for another coding pass.

Once thematic codes were established, they were applied to the data based on the instructions I wrote for when to apply them (see Appendix C). In an effort to make this process more concrete, I will offer a brief example that also highlights how multiple thematic codes could overlap. One participant talked about the shared curriculum materials that influenced her course, specifically a course shell that offered materials and contextual information for teachers about how to teach the shared curriculum. Her original response was over 2,100 words, and my in vivo coding highlighted more than 900 words. This involved highlighting specific sentences, such as the following:

> [...] when talking about previous university's attendance policy, I had to have this really specific language. And here, I had the opportunity to write—even though I think it is directly from the shell—I had the opportunity to write: "attendance is not graded."

This was a complicated passage to code. In the first part, she talks about a past learning experience that influenced how she previously approached writing her attendance policy. She also talks about a sense of agency and ownership over her materials in contrast to her past context, and suggests she is aligned with the program's philosophy because her stance on attendance is also what the program believes (explaining how she suspects the phrase on her syllabus "attendance is not graded" is from the course shell given to her). Given these considerations, I coded the passage as "learning source, resource, or influence" for the past experiences that influenced how she previously approached writing her attendance policy, "curriculum alignment" because she felt her feelings about attendance were already represented

by the program, and “agency and ownership over course” because she talks about being able to write her own attendance policy in this program.

It is important to admit this approach to coding was not perfect. One change I would have made with more time and another coding pass through the data would be to parse out the “learning source, resource, or influence” code from a new “past learning or influences” code, which would have been more accurately applied to the passage above. This would be meaningfully different from the “learning source, resource, or influence” code that was more often applied to sources of learning within the program. In other words, my data analysis would have been refined further with one more coding pass through the data, but I had enough data coded well enough to write about initial observations involving the themes I coded—making the labor required for another pass ultimately not worthwhile at this point in my research. In the future, however, I would like to analyze the data further and create more specific codes to search for patterns across this interview data as well as the anonymous survey.

IRB and Member Checking

Research Approval

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants who took the anonymous survey, recruitment survey, and signed up for interviews were required to read and provide informed consent. Participants were allowed to leave the study at any point and skip any questions I asked without consequence or question. Beyond mild embarrassment or emotional discomfort, there were no foreseeable risks to participate in the research. All participants were asked to provide pseudonyms. If no pseudonyms were provided, one would be

assigned. To protect anonymity and privacy, I was the only person with access to raw data from the participants.

Member Checking

As no study can be completely anonymous and participants sometimes say things they do not mean when put on the spot, I invited interview participants to member checking so they could both redact or revise responses. Member checking involves asking about "the participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations" (Hayhoe & Brewer, 2020, p. 100). Inviting participants to member checking increases the accuracy of my research by giving participants a chance to review and clarify what they said. To respect everyone's time, I only asked for member checking in two moments: The first after I transcribed data, and the second once my discussion chapters were written. Since it requires extra labor, member checking was completely optional for participants. Most participants reviewed their transcripts, though only a couple suggested multiple meaningful edits to either protect their anonymity or clarify what they intended to say.

Writing from Patterns

My data collection and analysis process allowed me to find related themes across participants' experiences, leading me to recognize some patterns. These patterns are what I discuss in the next chapter, highlighted in the different sections I write about. I chose to focus on patterns that related directly to my research questions and were experienced or discussed by all (or most) participants. This resulted in a strong focus on early experiences in the program, which is where the shared curriculum and its materials were used most faithfully and consistently. The patterns discussed in the next chapter are the ones that were the most important to addressing my

research questions—I do not (and cannot) discuss every pattern that was interesting in my research. For example, many participants talked about how the institution posed more barriers to agency than the program, with several teachers talking about class size and the resulting grading load. This is an interesting consideration that merits discussion and has implications for my research, but participants did not inherently or consistently relate it to learning and the shared curriculum. I take note of this both to say my data analysis process was helpful in identifying preliminary patterns to write about that related back to my research questions, but the scope of my dissertation along with my QD approach meant that I was more interested in depth rather than breadth. I chose key patterns I could explain in depth through my participants' words rather than trying to list every pattern that could have emerged (which also would have required more data analysis to conceptualize). Subsequent projects with this data, then, might take it in different directions around research questions that emerged during the research process to consider patterns I did not have the time and space to write about here.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION ON LEARNING, AGENCY, AND SHARED CURRICULUM

In this chapter, I aim to address my research questions by discussing how writing teachers experience WRaC's shared curriculum in relation to their learning and agency. This leads me to briefly consider what WPAs might be aware of when designing support for writing teachers in a program with a shared curriculum, which I continue discussing in my final chapter. Throughout this chapter, I attend closely to my participants' words, making light interpretations and connections based on their experiences and perspectives.

While the full assignment descriptions and information about the program are included in the first chapter, as a reminder for this chapter, the assignments and their sequence in the shared curriculum are:

1. **The Learning Narrative Project** invites students to engage inquiry as a means to discover and communicate new knowledge about something they already know pretty well: their own histories as learners. In telling their stories of learning, this project ask students to consider their experiences with learning in and out of school to encourage them to reflect on the relationship between their learning histories and their present lives.
2. **The Cultural Artifact Project** invites students to engage inquiry as a means to discover and communicate new knowledge about their influences. The moves of this project ask students to inquire into cultural values in which they are implicated as learners by choosing an everyday object as the focus of guided exploration.
3. **The Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project** invites students to engage inquiry as a means to discover and communicate new knowledge about their ambitions and

professional futures. This project enables students to learn about the literacy practices of a profession or discipline of their choice by looking at textual products as cultural artifacts to understand the textual products of disciplines as cultural and rhetorical.

4. **The Remix Project** invites students to engage inquiry as a means to discover and communicate new knowledge about their audiences by way of working in a new mode, genre, or collaborative capacity. This project builds on the learning of the preceding projects by making rhetorical moves implicit in these projects the explicit focus of attention.
5. **The Reflective Learning Narrative Project** invites students to engage inquiry as a means to discover and communicate new knowledge about themselves as writers. This project, the culminating experience toward which the previous projects have been directed, takes students' own situated and in-process learning as its object of inquiry. (WRaC, n.d.)

Sometimes, these projects would be rearranged. For example, the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project was taught as the fourth project and the Remix Project was taught as the third. Additionally, most of the projects were taught in a writing process where students would propose, draft, peer review, revise, finalize, and reflect on each project. There is variation in this process, as some teachers would have multiple rounds of peer review for every project, others would ask students to create revision plans before revising, and some would support the steps through classroom activities that resembled peer review (e.g. brainstorming and sharing topics to develop proposals). Overall, the program is inquiry- and story-based, seeing reflection as what drives the curriculum and centers students' learning. To support this framing, the program's administrators teach and recommend an assessment approach that is non-punitive.

This chapter focuses on the relationship between learning and agency for teachers, both in their first semester and current practice. Since the shared curriculum is an assemblage of texts (e.g. written learning goals, assignments), I focus mostly on how teachers use the materials provided by administrators and how that affects learning and agency for this group of teachers. For this, I describe some of the early and current learning sources and resources that teachers use to understand how learning shifts over time for participants in relation to the shared curriculum. As I discuss, the shared curriculum's influence reverberates through some of the teachers' decisions, manifesting in how they teach five projects or make choices in relation to how they interpret the goals of the shared curriculum. However, this was not always true, as several teachers decided to deviate from the curriculum—even early in their teaching.

Participants

The interview participants were either graduate students or teaching-focused faculty members, differing in their experience teaching both within and outside of the WRaC's FYW program. Table 1 summarizes participants' basic information. Aside from Angela, who began teaching as a graduate student in the Department and is now a teaching-focused faculty member, all participants had experience teaching writing prior to WRaC's FYW program. Not all of this past teaching experience was in FYW explicitly, with some participants teaching creative writing, literature, or language. Additionally, some participants had breaks from teaching between when they taught in WRaC and when they taught previously.

Specific details about participants' experience is excluded in an effort to preserve anonymity. In particular, the "7+ years" experience is the most variable, with decades of teaching experience reported by some participants. I chose not to explicitly detail past

experiences and disciplinary foci, as this could identify participants (especially within the program). In general, though, almost all participants had different disciplinary learnings.

Table 1: Participant names, positions, and teaching experience.

Pseudonym	***Pronouns***	***Position***	***Exp. in Dept.***	***Exp. Overall***
Genevieve	She/Her	TFF	1–2 years	7+ years
Paula	She/Her	TFF	3–6 years	7+ years
Angela	She/Her	TFF	3–6 years	3–6 years
Calvin	He/Him	TFF	7+ years	7+ years
Rose	She/Her	TFF/WPA	7+ years	7+ years
Sam	He/Him	GTA	1–2 years	3–6 years
Douglas	They/Them	GTA	1–2 years	1–2 years
Ellen	She/Her	GTA	3–6 years	3–6 years
Soo	She/Her	GTA	3–6 years	7+ years

TFF: Teaching-Focused Faculty
WPA: Former Writing Program Administration experience within the program
GTA: Graduate Student Assistant
Exp.: teaching experience.

Early Experiences with Program Materials

All participants named the materials shared during their program's orientation as an early and important source of learning. This included some sample syllabi or assignment descriptions from different faculty as well as an adaptable course shell with assignment descriptions, assessment criteria, contextual framing for instructors, and peer review prompts. Usually, these materials were presented by the program's administrators (mainly the directors, though also graduate students working with the administrative team) as a way to exemplify the shared curriculum and onboard newly hired teachers. Such materials were important since teachers only

had 2–3 weeks to prepare their courses before they began teaching. The course shell, for example, was developed as a way to simplify the labor required of new teachers who began teaching during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, “admin materials” refer to a range of materials created and assembled by program administrators over time.

Early Adherence to Materials

All participants stayed close to the admin materials for at least their first semester, though their reasons for adhering differed. Genevieve (a TFF with 1–2 years of experience in the program), for example, “stayed very true to the materials offered,” taking inspiration from resources by current and former program administrators, and using “mostly [the FYW Director’s materials].” She found the admin materials were “really solid” and “a natural fit” for her pedagogy, acknowledging that a benefit of teaching them is that the program’s learning goals were “woven through them, because otherwise they wouldn't have been offered as samples in orientation.” She identified a need to teach through the projects to understand them, saying “it’s one thing to read through these assignment sheets, it is another to figure out how to teach these concepts [related to the learning goals].” Similar to Genevieve’s respect for the admin materials, Ellen (a GTA with 3–6 years of experience in the program) said “I liked the learning goals and I liked the course descriptions.” However, she felt she did not have a “full understanding of the prompts and how I would want to teach them,” adding “I wasn't familiar enough with [the curriculum] to know what are the goals, and values, and things that are embedded within this prompt.” In addition to this unfamiliarity, she also said “I did not feel like I had time to rewrite anything” because the “turnaround from orientation and being familiarized with the curriculum for the first time” was too short. Also wanting to learn through teaching, Sam (a GTA with 1–2 years of experience in the program) said he was interested in learning the program’s “outcomes”

and “what the Department wants to do with first-year writing.” By teaching the shared curriculum, he hoped to learn about “the way they [administrators] want me to and see what I can learn from it,” noting an interest in teaching it “correctly,” especially since the curriculum emphasized “different things than what I'm familiar to.” For this reason, he also used the admin materials “pretty much unaltered.” Genevieve, Ellen, and Sam all wanted to learn about the program’s approach to FYW through teaching it, especially to understand the concepts (like the learning goals and outcomes) embedded in the admin materials. Here, then, personal agency over curriculum design is de-emphasized in an attempt to learn through practice. However, as Sam suggests, even making this decision to use the admin materials involves taking agency since he “ultimately chose to use everything that was given,” having the impression from other teachers that “you can change these [materials] and nobody is going to raise any eyebrows at you.”

Other teachers also wanted to learn about the curriculum through teaching, but were less focused on understanding the learning goals and outcomes. Soo (a GTA with 3–6 years of experience in the program) taught “pretty much the same” as what was prescribed in the admin materials for the “first 2 years.” While reading through her syllabus, for example, she noticed her course description “is straight up just from [the then FYW Director].” This is unsurprising, as she characterizes her early teaching in the program by saying “I was busy thinking from [the then FYW Director’s] head than my own.” She decided to use admin materials because she was trying her “best to understand each assignment,” saying the “first semester was tough teaching the shared curriculum, ‘cause I [was] trying to understand it as I was going.” While Soo wanted to learn about the assignments broadly, Calvin (a TFF with 7+ years of experience in the program) remembers “not understanding what the [Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project] was” in particular, characterizing his first year as an attempt to “very closely follow that shared

curriculum" because he felt like "this is what I gotta teach. This is the stuff that I'm working with." Similar to Ellen feeling constrained by time, Calvin admits his assignment description for the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project was inaccurate because he reached a point where he thought "I have to get a syllabus done. I don't have a handle on this project." He made this comment after reading over his old assignment description, where he noticed "this is [the then FYW Director's] language, or someone else's language," adding "it's so clear to me that I'm like, 'no, I have no clue what this project is.'" For both Soo and Calvin, the choice to use the admin materials—including exact language—resulted from needing to understand the assignments better and teach the course without yet fully understanding it. Here, both teachers felt they could not take agency with their materials because they had not yet learned enough about them to understand what to change or how to change them.

Like everyone else, Rose (a TFF with past administrative experience and 7+ years of experience in the program) explained how she "took the assignments pretty much directly" from the admin materials and tried "to follow as closely as I could, the impulse of [...] what this was, how [the Program Director] had structured the course." However, this was a different time for the program, so she recounts being "told to teach from" those admin materials. At the time, the curriculum also had required textbooks to teach from, meaning there were more required materials accompanying the course. Differing from other participants, Rose's early teaching also involved teaching a university-designated "developmental course," which was intended to prepare students for FYW. At the time, this course was taught as the regular FYW sequence with one fewer project. It was up to individual instructors to decide which of the five projects to remove. Because of this additional layer of course planning, Rose said "I don't think I made any changes my first year because I was trying to wrap my brain around the five projects minus one."

The difference in the program and the conditions of her employment, then, make Rose's decisions for teaching the admin materials unique compared to the other participants.

Other teachers still wanted to teach through the admin materials, but had more individual reasons. For Douglas (a GTA with 1–2 years of experience in the program), they wanted to stay "pretty true to the curriculum" early on, suggesting a reason for this decision was support: "if I ran into issues, it wasn't issues from me piloting stuff, it was other stuff. So I could go ask, institutionally, for help." Angela (a TFF with 3–6 years of experience in the program) also "definitely borrowed from the materials that were given to us," but explained she used them because she "was really new" at teaching and "didn't know how to do a class like this" because she did not have a class like it as an undergraduate student. Paula (a TFF with 3–6 years of experience in the program) said the shared curriculum "played a big role in my very first semester," and that her "early, early drafts were, you know, 95% of whatever [the then FYW Director] gave me." Unlike any of the other participants, Paula also taught part of another teacher's syllabus because she covered several of their class sessions, adhering to their syllabus "because it already existed" and was what the students expected. Similar to Calvin believing the admin materials were something that he had to teach, Paula remembers she "deviated less from the shared curriculum initially, because I didn't know I could." While Douglas, Angela, and Paula all had different reasons for using admin materials based on support, experience, and agency, they all found the materials "overwhelming": Paula said the shell was "kind of overwhelming," Angela found admin materials "really overwhelming," and Douglas was "really overwhelmed" by the program's learning goals. These acted as barriers following the materials straightforwardly, creating a need for revision.

Early Agency: Revising Materials

Rewriting Materials

While all teachers stayed close to the admin materials in their first semester of teaching, almost everyone also made some immediate revisions. Douglas, for example, made decisions about the learning goals they used. For context, the learning goals in the program are displayed in two ways: the first in a concise yet undetailed way, and the other in a grid spanning a few pages that explains what students should know and be able to do after completing FYW. This latter display is what Douglas felt "overwhelmed" by, saying that there were "too many goals to present to one group of students in 15 weeks." This caused them to pick "some of the ones that were vague enough, that could be applied to a lot of the different projects, but also kind of gave an overview." So, rather than addressing all of the learning goals, they selected the ones that were most applicable to what they were trying to teach. Angela similarly "borrowed course goals" and "tried to sort of reword" some of them, but did more revision to the admin materials overall. For example, she remembered how she "semi-adapted [admin materials] with a couple of other grad students" to address how "overwhelming" they were, which led her to "pare down my materials a lot, too, from what we were given." For both Angela and Douglas, they needed to reduce the admin materials to make them less overwhelming.

While Paula also felt the materials were overwhelming, she did not focus on revising or adapting the materials. Instead, she comments, "I didn't make really big changes, because I was afraid—I mean, probably." This fear was a result of her not knowing if she had agency to make changes. Instead, in her first year of teaching in the program, she said she worked to "develop the things underneath the projects," such as the "scaffolding to the projects" and "most of the supporting activities." Her decision to not revise the language of assignments is potentially a side

effect of her needing to teach a part of someone else's syllabus in addition to her not knowing she had agency. Like Paula, Rose also did not talk about revising the language of the materials much, but said there was "a little bit of play within" the materials provided, adding that she did not feel her agency was "present in the [early] materials, necessarily." Too, because she was new to rhetoric and composition, she said she was "partly wrapping my head around the vocabulary myself *and* how to make it explicit and transparent to the students," doing "an awful lot of translating work" rather than changing the materials. She still acknowledges her agency was "sort of implicit" in the course through how she designed the "working in the community" aspect of the course. Notably, official course themes (including one focused on community engagement) were a part of the FYW program at the time, but the program shifted away from them. Rose was the only participant who taught while FYW had themes. Both Paula and Rose, then, had unique early teaching experiences compared to the other participants, did not revise much of the language of the admin materials, and felt their agency did not factor significantly into their early course designs. However, both still found agency in designing around the admin materials, especially in the day-to-day work students did.

With exception to Paula and Rose, when participants changed the admin materials, the reason almost always involved the language of the materials rather than deeper structure of the course. Douglas, for example, said they "never found a way to combine [admin materials] with my teaching." Specifically, they felt "the shared curriculum voice [...] is just not a voice that I embody," meaning they needed to reword materials that were "not written in a way that I talk to my students." This rewriting also gave them the opportunity to make the materials "more straightforward," better representing what they believed was "important for students." Like Douglas, when Angela revised admin materials, she said "I tried to emphasize the things that I

felt were most important out of all that ton of material" and "make it mine." Rather than just rewriting learning goals, Angela also brought in a few of her own that represented "the parts that I knew I could bring to the table." For both, the overwhelming nature of the admin materials caused an initial need for change, though the changes they made also brought the course more in line with what they valued as teachers.

For almost the same reason as Douglas, Genevieve needed to rewrite the admin materials because "they're not my materials, they don't have my voice." To avoid the materials feeling "discordant or off" for students, Genevieve said "I would look [at a material], and I would deduce what the primary point was, and then I would rewrite that section the way that I write, think, teach." This was also Soo's approach, who revised assignments to "try to put [them] into my own language," adding that over time "each assignment description kinda evolved a little bit to make more sense to myself." Ellen, too, was "rewriting [assignment descriptions] into a different language style" as she taught the course, addressing the "struggle" of them not being written "in the way that I talk." As suggested earlier when he recognized a passage written by someone else, Calvin said he "can see the places where it's me and where it's not me" across his materials, indicating that his materials were partially rewritten. However, Calvin did not say these revisions were to make the materials feel like his own. Compared with the other participants, Sam talked about making fewer changes to the language, only changing "a little bit here and there" in places where he thought it "doesn't make sense," such as editing "a couple lines" for the Cultural Artifact Project. So, while all of these participants revised the language of the materials, the extent and focus of their revision differed.

So far, all teachers have talked about adhering closely to the admin materials, making changes mostly to language or surrounding materials to make teaching the course more

manageable, understandable, consistent, and representative for themselves and students. For some teachers, there was a motivation or need to learn the materials and curriculum, namely the learning goals, outcomes, and assignments. This resulted in them using the admin materials without significant changes so they could focus more on learning the moves of the curriculum, designing classroom activities, or translating the curriculum to students. For others, they did not feel as though they had the agency to make significant changes. As highlighted in the previous section, everyone still saw themselves adhering to the admin materials and the shared curriculum broadly, even when making these changes. In the next section, I will discuss some of the more drastic changes that a few teachers made to the projects in their first semester teaching.

Remaking Materials

When changes were made that moved beyond rewriting or changing language, they resulted from inspiration from peers, misalignment with the curriculum, or (in one case) collaboration. Such changes highlight moments where a teacher takes agency based on values or past experiences. While the source of learning so far has been the program materials, in this section I discuss other sources of learning that influenced teachers' early experiences in the program and led to them making choices that moved further away from the shared curriculum. While not the focus of this section, some teachers incorporated unique practices that were not an official part of the admin materials, exercising agency in another way. For example, Soo used "individual conferencing" as a practice throughout her course, saying "I don't think it was in the shared curriculum—but I kind of plant that into the schedule" to create a better "sense of connection" with students. This was a practice she appreciated as a student who was "not really loud in a group setting," and something she learned to do in her teaching at a previous university, where she worked with first-generation and multilingual students who would "feel at ease talking

through with me" their writing in a conference setting. This was a practice requiring some agency to incorporate past experiences, but it is not a shift in the materials themselves because conferencing was not a part of the curriculum to begin with. So, while those moments of integrating practices to support students and supplement the admin materials are important, I will focus this section towards teachers shifting projects—that is, removing, adding, or altering components of projects. Such shifts represent teachers taking more agency within their first year, as they remake the projects.

The Reflective Learning Narrative is the final assignment in the course, and is where students will narrate their learning throughout the course with evidence mainly from their former projects and activities (including peer review). Angela and Genevieve both made changes to the Reflective Learning Narrative. For Angela, a change was necessary to reflect a structure in her course. Specifically, she said she puts her students "in groups, and they stay with those groups all semester," which is one way she builds community and is thus "very devoted to it" as a practice. Reflecting its prominence in her course, then, she changed the Reflective Learning Narrative to have two parts: "group presentations and a final reflective paper." These presentations served another purpose, too, as it took "some of the pressure off" of the written paper, making it feel less like a "final paper" that "everything rests on." Genevieve, on the other hand, converted the Reflective Learning Narrative into "a letter to the professor," saying she got the idea to assign a letter from a colleague at orientation, but decided to make the audience herself. The benefit of this was it gave students space to reflect as "a user of information," writing about not only their reflection and processes of learning, but also things like "technology in the course," giving insight into how the materials she made were involved in students' learning. After teaching it, her value for the letter format became solidified, as she offered an example of a student who

"learned that writing was a tool for working through his emotions and finding what mattered to him"—an outcome she imagined the student may not have "arrived at" without the "let me write to the professor" framing. Both of these changes, then, had positive effects based on different needs. For Angela, it was her own values; and for Genevieve, it was inspiration from a colleague coupled with her inventiveness.

Teachers also changed the Cultural Artifact Project, which is the second project in the course. It is usually framed as a narrative where students write about a culture or community that is connected to an object. For Genevieve, this was the project she "took a lot of liberty with," as she made the idea of culture "really small and had students look at things that they might not otherwise think of as culture, but are culture." She says she got the idea to revise this project out of her extensive experience "in the writing classroom [...and] everything that was offered to us" during orientation, especially a story from a former FYW Director who talked about one of his former students approaching that assignment by writing about a group of friends with a shared practice as a culture. She then merged that with her knowledge that students would need to "get their hands around it" by making culture smaller and more "tangible" and "relatable." She says this is "still true to the principles" of the project, but it is a much different framing and approach that uses her expertise.

Douglas also made changes to the Cultural Artifact Project, saying they could not "find a way into [the Cultural Artifact Project] that felt meaningful rhetorically, and also useful to my students." Since it is positioned as the second project in the sequence, Douglas said they struggled to "find an ethical and relevant way to get students to think about culture through writing" that early in the semester—especially since they felt they were working against the idea felt by some students that "the only people who have culture are non-white people." So, because

of their interest in multimodality, they taught the Cultural Artifact Project as a genre-based multimodal composition assignment that they "took from a rhetorical theory grad class" they were in previously. They said this new "framing sort of made more sense" and let them "bring [multimodality] in more" while still inviting students to identify the cultural functions of their compositions through analyzing "the choices they made." This different "lens into culture" seemed useful, but they admitted that "understanding how cultural objects function was not something that I executed pedagogically," and that making the project useful was "definitely a bit of a struggle." While the reasons to revise the Cultural Artifact Project differed, both Genevieve and Douglas found ways to incorporate their own interests and expertise into the assignment's design. While Genevieve was aligned with the project and its principles, Douglas was not. This example shows that agency over project design can either come from alignment or misalignment with what is understood about the project. Notably, for both teachers, their changes worked well enough that they continued to teach versions of their redesigned projects in subsequent semesters, with Douglas making changes over time to refine the multimodal composition toward a "culture of access" by focusing it on "what it means to communicate across modes and build access points."

While the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project was one that many teachers changed over time, several changed it within their first or second semester. This project is the most robust and research-heavy one in the curriculum, asking students to synthesize a rhetorical analysis of published texts and a student-led interview with a professional. On top of her revision to the Reflective Learning Narrative, Angela changed the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project after she "decided from the beginning I wasn't gonna do the interview." The reason, she said, was "I don't feel that the interview is as beneficial as other people do. And I don't know if

that's because of the nature of our work, or teaching philosophies, or the ways that we view storying," drawing attention to how "the practice itself [of interviewing] feels like it's benefiting students for whom that would be a skill." Angela's concerns about the interview's benefit to student learning, then, overrode adherence to the shared curriculum. Also due to the interview component of the project, Sam "pretty much completely changed" the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project in his second semester, commenting "it felt like I only had three weeks for [each project]," while also hearing from experienced teachers at orientation that they took up to "seven weeks" to teach the project with the interview component—something that wouldn't work in his course schedule. Still, he kept the interview as an option and asked students "if they thought that [the interview] would be helpful," which led to a conversation where he learned students "didn't really know what an annotated bibliography was necessarily." This caused a pivot to teaching an annotated bibliography for the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project, which Sam believed was "gonna be productive for them" and more applicable to their future writing compared to a rushed interview.

Despite having different reasons for not wanting to teach the interview in the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project, both Angela and Sam felt the interview was not going to be useful to students. Angela, like Sam, also decided to teach an annotated bibliography instead because she "always wished, as a student, that I had somebody to be like, 'no, this is literally exactly the rules to do for this. These are the standards,'" referring to library research and MLA formatting. With a similar focus on citations, Sam summarized that the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project was about "learning how to find and cite accurate information" and "learn about the field you want to go into and investigate writing practices in that field"—two outcomes he identified as "the same" as the annotated bibliography, though still

recognizing his "approach to it [...] is very different." Surprisingly, Douglas also made their Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project "into just an annotated bibliography," but their reasons for doing so were based on "the semester we were having and the level of engagement I expected," referring to an tragic event on campus that disrupted the semester. While they changed the project for this reason initially, they learned "that was really successful," saying they still taught the annotated bibliography after and focused on "the differences between citation, summary, and analysis." I bring these examples up to highlight how multiple teachers re-interpreted an assignment in the same way despite having different motivations.

Only one teacher, Calvin, made changes to the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project in consultation with another teacher within the first year. He explained how the program's Associate Director "helped me with this idea" to make his Remix Project "a part of the flow of the narrative rather than it being an afterthought" by connecting it more directly to the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project. For this, he also flipped the two projects, where he taught the Remix Project before the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project. Usually, the Remix Project asks students to reimagine one of the first three projects of the course, but for Calvin it was a "design project" that addressed a social problem and acted as a "proof of concept" for "a grant proposal in their discipline," which is how he framed his Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project. This is perhaps the biggest shift to the curriculum mentioned by any participant within their first year of teaching, and it was also one of the only ones that was made through active collaboration around solving a problem that Calvin had with the scaffolding between projects. Broadly, though, Angela, Sam, Douglas, and Calvin all saw research as a significant part of the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project, and each of them opted for a genre-based project rather than what was described in the shared curriculum.

Throughout this section, teachers made choices about the projects to change their form and focus. The reasons behind the changes were as various as the changes themselves, including values, inspiration from colleagues, alignment, misalignment, concerns about student learning, time, student feedback, scaffolding, and collaboration. While some of these projects are further away from the shared curriculum than others, they each prioritized very different work. Using the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project as one example, an interview will probably teach students more about primary research and working with direct quotes than an annotated bibliography, and an annotated bibliography will probably teach students more about summary and analysis than a grant proposal. In other words, the kinds of writing, research, and learning each teacher is asking students to do is different despite having some similarities. This highlights some of the inconsistency in a shared curriculum resulting from teachers representing their values, bringing their past experiences into the design of their class, and solving problems unique to their classroom. What strikes me, though, is that for everyone other than Calvin, there was little sense of collaboration to drive change—instead, changes were made by what the teachers learned to do in the past, what they believed students needed (e.g. from trial and error and classroom surveys), or what worked well for them when they were students. As I discuss in the next section, this is a problem that becomes worse with time as support in the program is geared toward new teachers learning the shared curriculum and structure of the program, leading continuing teachers to be increasingly isolated since there is an "endpoint" for learning about teaching within the program.

Continued Learning and Program Revision

Learning Endpoint and Uncertain Agency

All participants learned through the admin materials early on and made changes to their own materials as they taught, highlighting the capacity of the shared curriculum as a model for teachers to adapt and make their own. At the same time, since early learning in the program is supported by teaching the shared curriculum through admin materials, teachers who continue in the program should encounter new sources of learning after they learn how the shared curriculum works through this process. However, I found that instead the shared curriculum created a kind of "endpoint" for learning within the program. For example, Angela said:

> Everybody in the Department is very generous and willing to help, but sometimes [...] the information feels a little recycled [in larger professional development meetings], maybe? And the stuff that we're doing on the ground with a couple of the teachers is more helpful—it feels more innovative.

For some context, the professional development events in the Department (typically workshops) were organized by administrators and were mostly about teaching in relation to the shared curriculum—such as how to teach particular projects, assessment approaches, peer review practices, etc. While there are exceptions, these events were often led or facilitated by program administrators, and some of them reiterated information across academic years to onboard new teachers after the orientation. Even when workshops were designed for new teachers primarily, they were open to the full department.

Over time, there have been attempts to change this model and involve more teachers in professional development. For example, in the academic year before I conducted interviews, the

program piloted new “teaching circles” that gave continuing teachers a chance to meet with each other and new teachers in small groups. Angela commented these groups were “a great idea, but I don't know if it ends up being the kinda same core number of people who are doing these things.” This was a broader concern Angela noticed in the program, which she framed as a “community siloing” problem wherein there was a group of teachers regularly involved in program meetings and events while the majority of teachers did not know each other. Given this, she suggested that the administrators might incentivize teachers “to observe other people's classrooms” to build community. However, she also thought “a lot of us will be like, ‘I wanna do it, but I can't. I don't have time to do it,’” which is why she suggested “incentivizing” rather than “requiring,” addressing how teachers are already overburdened. Generally, when asked about how the first-year writing program could support them and their future learning, teachers spoke about how the administrators could support forming connections with other teachers.

While Genevieve appreciated and supported the current approach to professional development—characterizing it as “really fantastic”—she also made a suggestion that would address Angela’s feeling that the workshops became a bit recycled. Specifically, for the workshops that were based around the five projects of the curriculum, she suggested asking “someone from the faculty to come as [...] the person who's gonna talk to you about [one of the projects]” rather than having the workshops be led by administrators alone. She framed this as the invited teachers could be “the ones that kind of give feedback. Like, ‘oh, well, you know, these are some of the pitfalls I've experienced, or these…’” saying “you learn from their experience.” While Genevieve suggests making the project-based workshops for “people who are new” rather than leaving them open to the entire program, the suggestion for a more

collaborative teacher-led workshop would minimize some of the material in workshops feeling recycled—meaning it could become more relevant to continuing teachers as well.

Similar to Genevieve's suggestion that would spotlight teachers' experiences during workshops, Soo wanted more public "celebration of how people do things differently" that "validates and recognizes the good work" being done by the program's teachers, adding that recognition "should happen to lots and lots of people, with lots of different interests—not just one person with this, 'cause it will give the idea that 'oh, this department is focused on that topic only.'" If done intentionally, this strategy could counter some of the community siloing described by Angela, as it could feature a wider range of teachers. Complicating this, though, Soo said that "sharing classroom activities" was a good idea in theory, but added: "to do that, we need a good teacher community to share that safely, without feeling judged." This concern had to do with agency. In describing her current approach to the shared curriculum where she has made innovations based on a sense of "freedom," Soo said "I feel like I do my own thing." However, she wondered about her agency and "if the sense of freedom is even a real thing"—a concept I will return to in the next section about uncertain agency. So, while both Genevieve and Soo value teachers sharing expertise with other teachers, this kind of sharing feels risky for Soo because what she does in her classroom is based on a presumed sense of freedom that may not be "a real thing"—which is tied to a concern that she will get in trouble if administrators found out about what she does in her classroom.

Other teachers talked about wanting more opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and share resources. Douglas, for example, said they "don't know if there could be a space for people to talk about new scholarship, and new approaches, and what it would mean to apply that willingly—but that would be cool." They also mentioned how they've been trying to integrate

accessibility into their classroom and find more multimodal resources, admitting "that's work that I've really struggled to do on my own," and that they would like other teachers to work with. Similarly, Paula said "more collaboration among colleagues about what they're doing" and a place where resources are shared would be helpful, which connects both to Douglas's interest in collaboration and Soo's interest in learning about what other teachers are doing through encouraging teachers to share materials for recognition. However, Paula said the current approach to professional development was "the perfect amount of 'there if you need it,'" commenting on how she was ultimately able to make connections with other teachers "on my own pretty well" and did not "want more requirements"—resonating with Angela's point about incentivizing some new professional development initiatives rather than requiring them outright.

Self-described individualistic teachers still valued and wanted opportunities to connect with other teachers. Ellen, for example, said she appreciated the spaces where she was with other teachers, saying:

> it's just nice to remember (even as such an individual teacher that I am), that I am not alone in my experiences, not truly. And getting sort of grace and permission from other instructors, who are in similar boats to me, to basically be like "yes, you do what you need to do." [...] that is support, in my opinion.

Calvin, who also described himself as "self-driven," shared that he mostly learns "organically rather than someone saying, 'implement *this* this way.'" Considering moments of learning or change in his teaching, he recounts that those moments occur "where I happen to be talking to somebody in the hallway; [...] or I happen to be reading something that I'm like, 'oh, this would be interesting'; or someone put something across my [social media] feed"—all of which, based

on experiences he shared earlier in the interviews, occurred between him and other teachers in the program.

Summarizing these comments, teachers—despite valuing community and collaboration—feel there are few official opportunities for building connections with other teachers. At the same time, teachers feel they are at capacity for professional development, signaling a need for support that is more organic and perhaps informal. Importantly, it seems opportunities to connect with teachers more than administrators were especially valued for continuing teachers, which makes more sense given how teachers talked about their agency in relation to the shared curriculum—something I discuss in the next section.

Uncertain Agency

One complication for teacher-driven professional development is that teachers often felt uncertain about the extent of their agency, reporting that when they have made changes to the shared curriculum, they feel unsure about if those changes are acceptable. For most teachers, the approach to gaining agency involved trying things in private and seeing if they got in trouble. Often, teachers felt they had agency over how their course was delivered (e.g. day-to-day classroom work and course schedule) and assessment. However, when I asked about deeper structures of the course, there was more hesitancy.

Returning to Soo, she said the administrators in the program are "not really surveil-y," saying that while she has heard people can "propose officially a first-year writing with a theme," she has never heard of anyone doing that and feels "that unofficially everyone's doing it" anyway. An official proposal for a deviation from the shared curriculum is not something any of the other participants brought up, though Calvin's collaboration with the Associate Director to change his projects suggests that such revisions are not discouraged. As mentioned earlier,

though, Soo still wondered if the freedom she assumed and the changes she made were truly acceptable. This uncertainty made her wonder if she would be "rejected" and not "get to teach" if she brought her course changes up to the FYW Director, leading her to wonder "does that mean [...] as long as I do it without her knowing, that it's fine?" This is something Douglas brought up as well, saying they make subversions to the curriculum regularly, but they do not "tell [the FYW Director] and hope I don't get in trouble." However, they conclude "I'm not gonna get in trouble," explaining they have seen teachers who have not gotten in trouble for taking more liberties with the shared curriculum than they have.

Also seeing the lack of supervision in the program as a source of agency, Sam commented on how "nobody's telling me like, 'here's a specific way to teach the [Cultural Artifact Project]. You have to teach it this way.'" However, like Soo and Douglas, Sam also questioned if the changes he made would be accepted, saying "maybe people would be saying [to teach the Cultural Artifact Project a specific way] if they found that I was doing it like a rhetorical analysis—I don't know." Almost exactly like Douglas, Sam mentioned how he has learned he could make changes by observing what other teachers have done, saying:

> when I talked to other grad students who have taught here, or are currently teaching in first-year writing, they're like, "yeah, we don't even do that." And I was like, "well, if they're not getting in trouble for it, I'm not going to get in trouble for it." Which makes you feel a little bit bad, but, you know.

Observing what other teachers do is also how Ellen found a sense of agency over adapting materials in the shared curriculum, commenting on how she saw "Everyone is doing this differently, and it doesn't seem like that's a bad thing? It seems like that's kinda encouraged? Or at least not looked down upon." She adds that she has a "mindset"—despite "never [having] been

told this directly"—that "a really common, accepted way of interacting with the shared curriculum, is that we are all able to make it our own." So, while Ellen (like Soo, Douglas, and Sam) assumed this sense of agency, it comes with some uncertainty: is revision "kinda encouraged" or "not looked down upon"? What does that distinction mean when teachers are trying to make the curriculum of their class? This seems to be a limitation caused by a lack of policies surrounding revision or adaptation to the shared curriculum, resulting in agency with unknown boundaries being learned through observation rather than being openly invited.

Not everyone learned about their sense of agency just through observation. Angela, for example, understood her agency more through trial and error, recalling how "it did feel kind of like a risk not to do the interview [in the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project] at the time, but nobody said anything to me—and I don't know if that fueled the fire of knowing that I could experiment with stuff." While this approach led to innovative ideas in her classroom, she also spoke about being unsure of why she would not want to share those with the program's teachers in a public way, explaining, "I don't know if it's imposter syndrome" or a feeling that "I'm afraid somebody's gonna tell me 'you can't do that anymore.'" This results in Angela characterizing how being a teacher in this program's context is "really complex, 'cause we get a lot of freedom—but then I think that I'm scared of showing how I have taken that freedom." Sharing Angela's concern with sharing her practices, Calvin admitted he worries that people will respond to his end-of-year reviews by saying "that's not what we do here. Stop doing that. Why are you doing that?" He, like other teachers, admits he "never really asked permission" to make the changes he made to things like the assignments and his approach to assessment, following a "'better to beg forgiveness than ask permission' kind of model." Across all of these experiences so far, agency is not expressly provided, then, but rather assumed based on what other teachers

have observed in the program or tried in their teaching without facing repercussions. While this clearly creates a sense of agency, the boundaries of that agency are unclear. This makes sharing unique approaches or revisions feel riskier than they probably are in reality.

For other teachers, agency was provided more externally. In considering her agency, for example, Paula said "I'm guessing [there would be constraints or obstacles] for other people, but not for me," explaining how she has "socioeconomic agency, which is to say if they fire me, I'll go get another job." While she believed the program generally provides teachers with agency and support, she also recognized that "not everyone in our Department has socioeconomic agency," explaining that she knows someone who is "very rigid in sticking to the [shared curriculum...] if [they] lost this job, [they] would be screwed. So that's interesting, all the different things that take away our agency." Similar to Paula, Rose did not feel there were barriers impeding her agency, saying there was "capacity within [the shared curriculum] to do certain kinds of things that are important to me." She imagined, too, that this agency was felt throughout the program, saying "within the five projects, there is quite a bit of flexibility. People teach very different things." However, she also recognized "that other people feel obstacles differently" and imagined how "some of my non-tenure-track colleagues who come from very different fields" might, when they first encounter the shared curriculum, "feel constrained by it." Based on these two experiences, external factors like socioeconomic status or disciplinary alignment can inequitably affect agency.

Paula also said she found her sense of agency "like everyone does. You kind of tiptoe in, and you try a little"—similar to the gradual trial and error approach that Angela, in particular, described. Like other participants, Paula did not know "whether people who kind of know about my class turn their head and pretend it's not happening, or embrace it, or what," speaking to

some of the ambiguity felt by other participants on how individual revisions to the shared curriculum were perceived. In line with Soo and Sam's belief about administrators not surveilling or supervising what teachers do, Genevieve commented on how "the administration does not micromanage us." The most prominent surveilling practice I heard of from these interviews was that the administrators collect syllabi from teachers every semester. However, Genevieve acknowledged this practice, saying "they do ask to see our syllabus" every semester, but she did not feel this was for any kind of surveillance or micromanagement, adding "there's a huge bunch of us. There's no way they read through all of those." In thinking about her agency, she described herself as "a bit of a rule follower," but not feeling "like I could just do three projects." As Douglas and Soo wondered about getting in trouble as a result of their changes, Genevieve expressed "I don't know that there would ever be any repercussions if I only did three projects." While this is not something she said she wanted to do, it did identify a boundary she felt might exist.

Through what all participants felt, it seems that agency is assumed rather than communicated, resulting in the boundaries and administrators' perception of how agency is taken ambiguous. In part, this can be seen as a good thing, as the administrators seem to trust teachers enough not to surveil or micromanage what they do in their courses. However, without a public policy and enthusiastic encouragement for classroom revision, the benefit of administrator's trust may inadvertently push teachers to keep what they do in their courses private and inequitably disperse agency to those more comfortable with taking risks or who have disciplinary expertise. The next section picks up from Genevieve's perceived boundary about teaching the projects. Specifically, I discuss the presence of the five projects in relation to agency, as that was one structure of the shared curriculum where agency is more fraught.

The Five Projects

Starting this research, I believed the projects themselves would be a limit to agency for teachers, leading them to teach in particular, conventional ways. However, this was not usually the case, as many teachers developed and redesigned the projects and related materials immediately or over time, creating a range of project types that fit the goals they identified as important in each project. Unexpectedly, then, was the conversation that came up across participants not about the projects themselves, but the presence of the five projects in the shared curriculum. No matter what agency teachers felt or the amount of time they had been in the program, they included an approach to five projects—moving between personal, cultural, professional, remix, and reflection (sometimes this sequence was altered, but that was usually switching the place of two projects). This, I suggest, is a hidden constraint because it is so deeply embedded into what teaching in the program means.

Returning to Genevieve's feeling that she could not just teach three projects, she thought "maybe somebody does, maybe someone really mixes up this curriculum—but [...] I feel like I gotta get through these five." When considering changes to the program, Genevieve talked more about this by suggesting "I actually think four projects might be better than five." She clarifies that this should be an option rather than a requirement: "if someone wants to do five, I think flexibility with that [...] I think you could either do four or five projects." As an example of what this might look like, she talked about how the Cultural Artifact Project could be one to remove, saying "you take the principles of [the Cultural Artifact Project...] and you weave that all the way through the other projects," admitting "I already do it to a great extent, but I think if I had one fewer project, I could even do it more in each of the other projects." This move, then, would not

remove or devalue a project—but rather identify the values and goals of the project to embed those more fully across other projects.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there were some projects that teachers either did not understand the purpose of or could not find a way into teaching them. While some teachers revised the projects to make them work better for their class, this still did not always address the problems they had with the assignments or their fit in the course. Despite changing the Cultural Artifact Project into a genre-based multimodal project around the culture of access, for example, Douglas still had reservations about the project. This was coupled with a critique of the assignment sequence, where they said "I do hate the five-project structure. It's so hard to get through." Given this, I asked why they taught five projects if they hated that structure, which they responded to by saying "I didn't know I was allowed to *not* teach five. I feel like I'm gonna get in trouble if I don't—even though I know that's not real." This conversation started in the second of three interviews, and is something Douglas considered more by the third interview, returning to the topic by saying "if I hate [the Cultural Artifact Project], what if I just didn't teach [it]?" Having expertise in curriculum design, they (like Genevieve) clarified this would not just mean dropping the project completely, but rather a reconceptualization of the other projects. In particular, they wondered: "what affordances does [the Cultural Artifact Project] have that I would be losing, and how can I bring those in in different spaces?" Based on the thinking of Genevieve and Douglas, thinking through a change in the regular structure and sequence of projects seems to naturally raise questions about what each of the projects are doing, how they are related, and how the work of some projects can be dispersed throughout the curriculum. In other words, they both are thinking through important questions of curriculum design and basing their decisions around that deliberation.

Since the question of "why teach five projects" was not an official question during interviews, it was only asked when the topic came up naturally in the conversation. This happened two more times, with Calvin and Paula. For Calvin, he said the Cultural Artifact Project was "one that I hate teaching, just in a nutshell, and I shouldn't," explaining that he feels "frustrated by it" because he cannot get students to rethink their approach to research for a component of the project. Given this, I asked him why he teaches it, which he responded to by saying "Because I have to? [...] 'cause it's one of the five projects," and "because that's part of our curriculum." He then talked about its value to him beyond being a part of the curriculum, mentioning how "object-based inquiry is valuable," but that "as a project it frustrates me." Paula had a similar problem with the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project, saying "I can't fall in love with it no matter how I do it." In response to me asking why she teaches it if she cannot fall in love with it, she had a similar response to Douglas, saying "that's a good question because… do I have to?" She then talked about how she has heard that "some people don't teach everything," but added "I've never been quite sure about whether I could really just drop it altogether." Like Calvin, she also thought about the value of the project, saying "maybe I do think there's a value for the students in thinking about [...] what they wanna be, what they wanna do," but continued to rethink the project, saying "I thought about dropping the whole scholarly article part. That'll be the first to go." Like Douglas, the question about the purpose for teaching projects that are not working in each teacher's course led to useful inquiry into the value of the projects; for Paula, it also led to considerations for what to change about the project. More broadly, though, knowing the value of a project does not necessarily justify its inclusion in a teacher's curriculum, as (like Douglas began considering) there are ways to disperse the affordances of one project into other work within the course.

Rather than dispersing a project across the course, both Sam and Rose talked about blending two projects together. For Sam, this was something he implemented, saying "there's five projects that we do in total, but the way I teach it now is closer to four." This required some reframing for the fourth project in the course, which is the Remix Project. Sam said he changed the Remix Project to be "kind of emblematic of [the students'] semester in my class," then assigned a project reflection after—a change that he wishes he "made my first semester." For context, most teachers have evidence-based, multi-page reflections after each of the projects, with the Reflective Learning Narrative being a larger version of these that stands on its own at the end of the semester. Notably, some teachers in the program do not teach a project reflection about the Remix Project and move directly into the Reflective Learning Narrative instead—so, Sam's approach is an inversion of that. Since Sam integrated reflection into his Remix Project, the reflection following the project worked as a reflection on the course as well. This change resulted from Sam realizing that "trying to shift gears so quickly into another final project was a bit much for the students," and that approaching it this way would result in "more breathing room" for his teaching. Still, the Remix Project's reflection in Sam's course is likely not as robust as a full Reflective Learning Narrative, as he notes students do not "do peer reviews for the reflection," for example (something they did when the Reflective Learning Narrative was a part of Sam's course). This, then, is the closest any of the participants talked about teaching four projects instead of five.

While not a change Rose made in her class, she also talked about the affordance of blending projects. This resulted from her considering changes to the shared curriculum, where she thought "In terms of the five projects, if it were me I would probably extend [the Learning Narrative Project] more because I love [that project]," explaining how the project relates to her

interest in creative nonfiction. To make space for extending the Learning Narrative Project, she thought "what I would probably do is find a way to maybe trim [the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project] a little and make it multimodal in output. And maybe that would be the [Remix Project], you know, blur [the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies and Remix Projects] maybe?" She admits this was not an idea she has given "tremendous thought," but it does show thinking about different ways to blend or "blur" projects together.

The opportunity to disperse or merge projects could provide a useful opportunity for teachers who have carefully designed their course to emphasize values that are not present in particular projects. For Ellen, for example, she talked about the "transition from [the Cultural Artifact Project to the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project] feels like two different classes," explaining how the sequence is "jarring for students" since "there's just too many things that we're trying to accomplish, in the sense of like, we're talking about culture and personal narrative… also careers." This was not an issue of discomfort or inexperience teaching the project's concepts or style, as Ellen understood the project well and felt comfortable teaching projects like it outside of the shared curriculum, saying "I have all kinds of stuff to talk about them with [the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project], but that feels like a completely different class with completely different goals." Expanding on this idea, she talked about how the goals of the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project seem "contradictory" to "challenging students' perceptions of what writing is and can be in the world"—something she focuses on in the first two projects, but is disrupted by the third project "going back to more of that practical aspect." Without feeling agency to drop the project, then, it would take reconfiguring the projects around the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project, or a reconceiving of the

Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project to somehow connect to Ellen's goal around "challenging students' perceptions of what writing is."

Based on these suggestions and experiences, I wonder if there needs to be five projects in the shared curriculum—especially when people are inflecting the projects in different ways (meaning the sequencing and scaffolding is already varied, which would be one of the main benefits to the structure of five projects). The presence of five projects, then, seems like a feature of the shared curriculum rather than something that is pedagogically necessary for everyone, especially since teachers have thought of (or are interested in thinking through) ways to incorporate the principles and goals of some projects into the work throughout the course. However, thinking back to how the projects were revised, it may be useful to identify, in community, what the goals of the different project types are and how they relate to larger goals of the course to invite more collaborative design approaches. With this in mind, I will talk about how teachers apply their expertise and consider their agency beyond their classrooms

Affecting Program Design

All nine teachers I interviewed said designing curriculum was a part of teaching. However, as I discuss in this section, the expertise they possess and have developed in curriculum design was limited to their classrooms rather than the program itself. While I do not suggest that all teachers be involved in writing program administration, I do believe it is up to writing program administrators to learn from the teachers in the program in the same way teachers learn from their students. That is, listening to what teachers experience and revising the program to make changes that will emphasize learning and community building. The teachers within a program bring incredible experience from teaching their course. This is a feeling Ellen described: "I'm in the curriculum. [...] I feel like I'm allowed to be nitpicky, because this is what

we do as teachers. We're in it. We're trying to figure out all these different ways how to teach it." This practitioner status does give teachers unique insight and experience—perhaps more than any WPA would have due to their dual position as administrator and teacher rather than just teacher. This is not to critique WPAs, but rather to recognize the expertise of teachers that can sometimes be unnoticed within a program. In this section, then, I talk about this issue by highlighting the ways teachers talk about influencing or changing the program overall—thinking beyond curriculum design in their individual classrooms.

First, two teachers—Ellen and Angela—both spoke about not feeling ready to change the curriculum. For Ellen, she said:

> I guess I still never really saw my curriculum development, my curriculum design choices, as an argument for anyone else to also do that. But I do think, now that you're talking about it, I think I might be [...] selling my ideas a little short, maybe?

To her, teaching is both a "very collective and individual practice," and so the idea of curriculum revision at the program-level was appealing, though something she said she "never really thought about" because she felt "The shared curriculum exists. It is a thing that has been thought through by people smarter than I am. And then I just make it work for me." This feeling that the curriculum was designed by extensive research or experts that have smarter ideas than the participants was felt by multiple participants. While I do not dispute the design of the shared curriculum, these perceptions from teachers never give enough credit to the teachers as curriculum designers with their own well-conceived ideas and the unique perspectives they bring. The mere question about affecting curriculum design at the program-level seemed somewhat inspiring to Ellen, as she said "I would be interested in thinking about how I teach this curriculum could be relevant to how the curriculum is taught overall, to how the program overall

is discussed and [...] the program itself is almost being open to revision." This is an idea that captures the spirit of this section overall—that the program itself should be revisable, and the teachers who are "in the curriculum" should be able to apply their expertise to contribute to this revision.

Angela, similarly, said she is "not yet," ready to affect the shared curriculum, but wonders "if that's the Department or me. I mean, this maybe goes back to that idea of: do I have anything innovative to offer the Department? Maybe. Do I feel comfortable sharing it? I don't know yet." For both Angela and Ellen, there is uncertainty about if their ideas are applicable or useful to other teachers. Angela further noted she still did not "always feel like a colleague yet" (due to her transition from graduate student to teaching-focused faculty) and that she "wouldn't wanna professionally insult" the administrators who made the curriculum despite disagreeing with some of its design. This is important, as the design of the curriculum is attributed to the administrators who crafted it rather than teachers who enact and remake it in their classrooms, meaning any argument against the curriculum could be interpreted as a disagreement with the administrators who made the curriculum rather than with the curriculum itself.

In addition to not feeling ready to affect the program's design and not wanting to insult anyone, labor was another barrier that emerged for program revision. For Douglas, they said they didn't feel they could change the curriculum because it would require too much labor for them and the teachers in the program, explaining:

> it's labor that I'm unwilling to do right now, with the positionality that I have. [...] I don't wanna ask people to do the labor of rethinking how they frame things in their class, 'cause that's a lot of work. And if you're already doing a lot of teaching work, I'm not gonna be like "no, do more."

This concern about having teachers "already doing a lot of teaching work" and being at capacity connects back to the concern made by other teachers who felt overburdened and did not want more requirements for professional development. Additionally, their concern about asking teachers to rethink "how they frame things" relates back to how teachers learned the shared curriculum through adopting and adapting the admin materials specifically, rendering that process as the way to learn teaching that would need to be repeated if a change to the projects were made. This was another limitation for Douglas in considering potential contributions they could make to the program, as they said "I do not think we should uniformly do the 'Douglas Pedagogy,' I'm very aware that mine is very individual," and that "other people do different things better." They added that they "do not know" if there are "moves that we could make that would universally help students succeed, and have transferable skills, and communicate better that would also work for teachers with different positionalities, and security of employment, and labor abilities." These comments indicate the impossible task of teaching from one central model, suggesting that a plural approach to curricula might be useful. That is, while I agree the "Douglas Pedagogy" is not going to work for everyone, parts of it could work better for some people than the admin materials.

Rose—despite her past administrative experience—admitted she could only "make gentle nudges," to invite change to the curriculum, adding that she does not believe there is a strong reason to change the curriculum because there is enough flexibility as-is and "it's gonna change anyway" when the program gets a new director. Even though she felt she cannot personally change the curriculum because it requires "building a kind of consensus about what would need to be changed and why," she clarified "I'm not saying it can't be [changed]—and I know it will be—but that is a huge task. It's just a huge task." In thinking about reaching a consensus, she

notes, it “takes a lot of time” to “get people's heads wrapped around what [change] should and could look like.” Here, again, the labor required for a program-wide change seems to impede motivation to initiate. However, theoretical or philosophical values underpinning the program seem to be in need of more consistent revision, as Rose also talked about how she sees “disjuncture” or “disconnect” in some of the program’s learning goals with how teachers and administrators have reconceived the class over time. She points to the absence of reflection in the learning goals, for example, which is a practice in the program that has become strongly emphasized. However, Rose highlights the disjuncture between this programmatic value and the learning goals by saying “over 50% of the grade that I'm giving them is based on how they reflect [...but] that is not in our learning goals in the ways that we're teaching,” adding that she thinks the word “reflect” is mentioned “only in [the learning goals] once and it’s buried.” So, with central admin materials and a standard project sequence, any official project shift in the program would require extensive deliberation and consensus before new materials could even start to be developed

Like Douglas and Rose, Soo also commented on a barrier to program change is labor. Specifically, she said she didn’t have the motivation to pursue program revision, explaining how she imagines “there's a whole pitch you have to do, whole document you have to make”—which is the sort of consensus building Rose discussed. Soo also wondered “has it ever changed since it was shared? Because I'm pretty sure no?” From what Rose discussed, the five projects “have always been there [...] just differently inflected,” with shifts to learning goals and an emphasis on reflection being the most notable changes to the shared curriculum that happened about a decade before my study. Additionally, Soo ultimately did not feel she had “a say in changing the shared curriculum,” explaining how the faculty who made the shared curriculum are professors while

she is “a grad student.” For Douglas, Rose, and Soo—even though they had ideas for changes—they describe how the labor required for a meaningful change creates a barrier. While change is theoretically possible, then, the change would need to be significant and pressing to make the labor worthwhile. This appears to be a limitation to the shared curriculum model more than it is a constraint of labor. That is, a shift in the materials to reinforce the current model of the shared curriculum would take significant labor for the reasons Douglas, Rose, and Soo described: administrators or teachers would need to create a proposal for change, build consensus, and then implement change across everyone’s courses when teacher’s already feel overburdened.

While Rose and Calvin both talked about being on committees where discussions about the shared curriculum and its design were collaboratively discussed between teachers and administrators, this was not a common practice and it was clear to the teachers that they did not really have power to change or revise a part of the program. Soo saying she did not have “a say in changing the shared curriculum” or Rose saying she could only make “gentle nudges” suggests this. Additionally, Genevieve felt “I absolutely feel like I could pitch [a change to the curriculum] to [any of the program administrators…] if I felt strongly” about the change, adding that her delivery would matter: “I do think approach matters because the curriculum is so good and everyone knows it's so good, that coming at it from that angle of ‘this is not right’ [...] I don't think [...] you would get as much traction.” She clarified “that doesn't mean [the administrators] wouldn't make the change,” but someone’s approach might “justifiably” cause someone to “hit a bit more of a wall” in the process “because this is not a curriculum that deserves that kind of nastiness.” Calvin said “I've been in positions where I can make suggestions about [the shared curriculum], but I don't know where I can say, for example, like, ‘hey, what if we did this?’” He admits “I don't think it's a thing that's up for debate right now,” saying “I don't see it as

something that either directors—you know, either of the directors of the program that have been there since I've been here—are really soliciting requests for how to change it." Similar to Genevieve but unlike Calvin, Paula said "I feel like the administration is open to ideas," and felt that if she "had something important to contribute," she "would be heard." However, she said she does not currently have an important contribution to make and no "desire to do that at the moment."

So, teachers feel they can nudge, pitch, suggest, and be heard—but no one said they could outright affect or lead change in the shared curriculum. Importantly, too, is that each of these teachers believed the process for change starts with sharing an idea or following the lead of the program administrators. This is likely true, but leaves little room for teacher-led changes that might be proposed to the teaching community more broadly. This suggests administrators ultimately hold the power to change program curriculum—not teachers.

While none of the teachers who theorized they could propose a change tried to make a change, Sam was the only participant who suggested a curricular change to administrators. Specifically, he made suggestions about providing more resources and materials to the shared curriculum to increase its standardization, explaining:

> I have gone to people [on the administrative team] with suggestions and they've kind of given me the answer of: "that sounds like too much work," or "I don't think people would like that." [...] So I would say no [I cannot make program-level changes], and I would maybe chalk it up to bureaucracy rather than, say, rigid learning goals.

These recommendations were intended to address the needs of new teachers who want or need more resources and materials when starting out. Importantly, though, no parts of his suggestion were pursued or brought to the larger community of teachers because the administrators,

according to Sam, “dismissed” his idea. As a result of this, Sam says he has gotten “the message” that “unless I am somehow more involved in admin team stuff, and unless I'm saying the right thing at the right time, it's gonna be dismissed”—something he did not “have a problem with” because he (like Soo) recognized his position as “a grad student [who is] just trying to keep my head down and get through this thing.” This experience suggests that, while other teachers felt their suggestions would be considered if they proposed a change to the curriculum, this may not be true as the only example of one of the participants trying that approach independently resulted in no change.

This is all to say that when and what changes are considered in the shared curriculum are ultimately decided by administrators who are responsible for and thus hold power over the curriculum. Teachers in the program did not have the power, motivation, or labor to make changes, though most of them felt they could propose changes to the administrators. So, while every participant said curriculum design was a part of teaching, applying their expertise to lead a change in the shared curriculum at the program level seemed, to them, unlikely. At this point, it should be clear that all of the teachers I interviewed bring a wealth of expertise, compassion, and consideration into their teaching, pedagogy, and curriculum design. However, the model of the shared curriculum does not inherently make use of this expertise. This is not to suggest it is an impossibility, but it is something that may require more attention.

Takeaways

Across these examples, there are a few key takeaways. First, everyone started with the admin materials with the belief that teaching those would help them learn about how to teach or understand the shared curriculum and its assignments. By design, the admin materials and their position in orientation encourage this. That is, rather than sharing instructions for how to design

and scaffold projects around the curriculum's learning goals, or suggesting characteristics and considerations for projects that invite teachers to build within some defined parameters, teachers are encouraged to learn through practice with a set of materials they can adapt. This is, in part, because of time constraints where teachers only have a week or two in orientation to learn about the program, its shared curriculum, *and* design their course before having to teach it.

This circles back to Sam's idea for more structure and materials to begin with, which is something that multiple participants valued. For example, Soo appreciated the structure of the shared curriculum, saying "if there was no shared curriculum at the beginning, especially, I would feel pretty lost. It's good to have structure." Ellen similarly valued having a foundation, saying "I would have been very overwhelmed with, 'Hey Ellen, it's first-year writing, go teach whatever you want.' [...] I don't know what the goals are, I am not experienced enough, I don't know what students need to know." Douglas also talked about feeling inexperienced, but framed it around disciplinary expertise by saying "I do appreciate having a shared curriculum when it comes to agency, because I am not a composition studies person, and if you told me like 'build a first-year writing curriculum from scratch,' that feels really overwhelming." For Calvin, the shared curriculum "informs broadly everything" for his course, adding "whenever I've made moves towards being more inclusive, being more generous towards students, being more humanizing towards students [...] all of those are informed by the kinds of things we're being asked to do in our shared curriculum." Like Calvin, Angela felt the shared curriculum was "instrumental because without that base, we can't build anything, so to speak," appreciating how it provides a "skeleton" that teachers "get to build the muscles" around. Rose, similarly found the shared curriculum to be "central," running "all through" her current iteration of FYW. And Paula said "I've always thought it's a good idea to have this shared curriculum for people who have

never taught it before," though suggests it must be coupled with agency as she noticed: "the further away [my course] gets from the shared curriculum, the more I like it. Not because I didn't like the shared curriculum, but just—it continues to be mine." With these perspectives in mind, a completely open curriculum does not seem like the best way forward, as teachers clearly appreciate having something to base the course on.

When I began this research, I predicted that I would have more conclusions based on the shared curriculum and teacher learning—but instead, through my learning, what is more interesting to me are the structures and preconceptions around the shared curriculum and how it may affect what a WPA can learn from teachers. That is, the shared curriculum in the program was seen by this group of teachers as a useful resource for teachers who are new to the program without posing a meaningful constraint to their agency. In the following chapter, I reflect on this and the research questions in relation to what I learned through this research process.

CHAPTER 5: REFLECTIONS AND APPLICATIONS

Throughout my dissertation, I have discussed teachers' learning and agency within WRaC's program and in relation to the shared curriculum. In this, I learned to see shared curriculum—like any curriculum—as offering both constraints and possibilities to teachers and their learning. While experiences differed with the shared curriculum and teachers interpreted it multiple ways, everyone felt the shared curriculum itself was a useful foundation to learn about the course and how the department approaches FYW. In this chapter, I will summarize and explain what I learned in relation to my original research questions, and why I believe it matters to writing program administration and design. For this, I will first revisit my two research questions:

- How do writing teachers experience a shared curriculum, specifically in relation to their learning and agency?
- Based on participant experiences, what should WPAs be aware of when designing support for writing teacher education?

In light of these questions, I want to return to Gunner's (2002) advice that "No structure can 'automatically' transform program administration into a completely sane and equitable process" (p. 260). Considering this, I am not going to use the space of this chapter to recommend a model or program redesign—with my research focus on teacher learning rather than institutional needs and student perspectives, suggesting any model from this research would only capture a small part of the program's overall story and position within the university. Instead, I am going to summarize some of my learning throughout the research process to talk about implications, and

suggest structures that *may* lead to ongoing learning based on the learning that I experienced in this research process. This is not an approach for every WPA, nor is it viable for every program.

In addressing these questions, I am going to suggest a reconceptualization of some WPA's connection with curriculum—rather than applying their expertise as teachers toward designing and sharing a model of curriculum, they instead apply it toward community building and designing opportunities to learn in the program. This means they will build the program as a teaching-learning community, emphasizing professional development rather than curriculum. More broadly, then, I am suggesting that writing program administrators emphasize and bolster their roles as writing teacher educators. This is not to say that writing programs should be devoid of administrative considerations—that remains the brunt of a WPA's labor, just as grading, course planning, curriculum designing, and other activities outside of the classroom account for the brunt of teacher labor—but rather the thing that is shared in a shared curriculum is more about the activities and learning experiences experienced instead of something like the structure of assignments. In the same way that teachers use student learning goals and outcomes to plan their teaching, I suggest the way to start this shift might be to co-create teaching learning goals to guide the support offered by the program and orient professional development around.

Experience of a Shared Curriculum

Generally, participants had positive experiences with the shared curriculum and saw it as a source of learning and a foundation for designing their course. The shared curriculum and its materials created by the program's WPAs were especially useful to new teachers, as they used them to learn about the expectations and approaches to FYW sponsored by the program and its administrators. For many, they explicitly recommended that the program continue to provide materials for new teachers, seeing the shared curriculum and its materials as a valuable early

resource that supported their learning rather than infringing upon their agency. The presence of shared materials and recommendations from directors to use the materials for at least a semester generally resulted in early adherence to the shared curriculum, though most teachers changed the materials in some way. Usually, this was around surface-level features like the choice of language; however, for most participants (Angela, Genevieve, Douglas, Sam, and Calvin), deeper features of the curriculum like the assignments or components of assignments were remade within the first year of teaching. This involved shifts like swapping out the interview component of the Professional/Disciplinary Literacies Project for an annotated bibliography. In these cases, teachers still saw themselves adhering to the spirit or principles of the shared curriculum and its assignments, viewing their changes as a variation or an expression of the materials rather than as separate, anomalous designs.

Teachers needed to feel a sense of agency to make the changes they did. In fact, every teacher at the time of the interviews expressed how they felt they had almost complete agency over their courses, with most of the barriers around their teaching being related to institutional constraints (e.g. class size, classroom space, or course modality and available technologies) rather than program-specific constraints. However, some teachers also acknowledged that not everyone felt the same agency that they did, suggesting factors like socioeconomic status, disciplinary expertise, or positionality were possible constraints for other teachers in the program. This was connected to how teachers assumed agency by noticing what other teachers do, acknowledging how they felt trusted in the program, and making changes while knowing there may be consequences. Such changes are, then, riskier for some people based on how dependent they are on teaching FYW for employment or teaching experience.

This suggests that agency is not equitably dispersed in the program by the administrators introducing the curriculum, and that the boundaries of agency toward adapting the shared curriculum and its materials could be more strongly communicated so that such adaptations do not feel like a risk for teachers—especially for those with more precarious employment. I want to stress that inequitably distributed agency does not seem to be an intention of the program and its administrators; rather, it seems to be a problem resulting from broader systemic inequities and unclear policies in conjunction with a shared curriculum being uncertainly located between a standard and open curriculum. As a result, how standard or open the curriculum *appears* depends on how it is interpreted by individual teachers. Genevieve describing how she is a "rule follower" who would hesitate to move away from the five projects is one salient example of this uncertainty impacting agency. In this case, despite her learning that "four projects might be better than five," the shared curriculum is perceived more as a standard curriculum where she needs to "get through these five [projects]" rather than applying her learning to teach four projects instead. As the other teachers felt similar to Genevieve about teaching five projects, her assumption about this need seems aligned with others'—however, as far as I can tell, nothing explicitly renders the shared curriculum so rigidly to disallow teachers from teaching a four-project sequence. This suggests Genevieve conceived of rules to follow based on her interpretation of the shared curriculum rather than an explicit policy being in place.

This leads to my next point: the perceived agency felt by teachers still had program-specific limitations in relation to the shared curriculum, which is perhaps best captured by teachers feeling they needed to teach five projects and stay close to the spirit of each assignment—a decision that was based on adherence to program expectations and a sense of value imbued in particular projects. However, as I learned from teachers who considered

program design, there were also savvy design choices to disperse or blur projects in the curriculum, which could integrate the values and goals of projects across the work of the semester or merge them directly into another project. This makes me wonder if adherence to the structure of five projects and their sequence could be communicated as being more flexible, centered around the learning goals of the program with encouragement for teachers to apply their gained or burgeoning expertise as curriculum designers to the projects, their sequence, and the scaffolding around them.

What I learned, then, was that agency in the shared curriculum was not a pressing constraint for this group of teachers' learning and action in their individual classrooms. Still, though, there are points where teachers' learning could not be applied to their pedagogy because they had assumptions about their agency being limited by some structures of the shared curriculum. This, it seems, is a result of uncertain boundaries and learning to teach the shared curriculum primarily through admin materials—rather than, for example, learning by viewing a variety of curricular models imbued with equal authority and then being invited to use their agency to design courses around defined and collaboratively developed boundaries (e.g. student learning goals and outcomes). That said, teachers appreciated having the opportunity to teach through admin materials when they began in the program, as it provided a foundation for the course and helped them understand the program's approach to FYW. Considering possibilities of future research, I do wonder if it is the existence of *any* disciplinary model of FYW that was useful to teachers, or specifically the admin materials that were provided. A future project, then, could see how teachers interact with multiple curricular models, with the intention to learn about what qualities make models useful for teachers' learning when they enter into a program.

Unexpectedly, though, the more apparent constraint on learning and its application by agented teachers was around program revision, or influencing the design of the shared curriculum at the program level. In this case, teachers felt they could make proposals, but changes were ultimately initiated and filtered by administrators rather than the broader teacher community. Additionally, with some feeling their curriculum designs were risky because they were uncertain about if the agency they have assumed is real, the more important effect of shared curriculum to consider is its possible impact on WPAs' learning from teachers.

Designing Support as WPAs

What teachers learned from the shared curriculum gave them the agency to make adaptations to it, but not to move beyond it and create entirely new course designs, or to affect how the shared curriculum is conceptualized in the program overall. While this may not be a goal for teachers, it could be a goal for administrators to more actively learn from teachers and their experiences—designing spaces where listening and sharing curricular resources amongst teachers happens regularly to build community and drive program revision. That is, WPAs could clarify the agency that teachers have, create spaces where members of the program's community (including administrators) can learn how people are using their agency, and use that learning to collaborate on program resources or begin revising program-wide structures.

Above all else, then, what WPAs should be aware of the structures of a program may inadvertently render teachers' contributions to the program or curriculum as risky, limiting opportunities for WPAs to learn from their teachers about how the curriculum is being interpreted or what is actually happening in classrooms. This means these teachers can provide support to other teachers, have valuable insights about the program and pedagogy, and can support administrators as much as administrators support them. While not necessarily the focus

of my research, I learned *a lot* about pedagogy and heard numerous useful program suggestions from my participants. Regardless of their experience teaching, disciplinary foci, positionality, etc., all of my participants had stunning insights and made careful curricular considerations that could positively affect aspects of the overall design of the program. However, few had the time, energy, or confidence to share these insights with administrators and the broader teacher community—which is one reason I believe WPAs must develop more practices around knowing, learning from, and connecting teachers. Reiterating Soo's idea, I agree WPAs should find ways to recognize and validate the exceptional work that FYW teachers across interests and ranks do. This can include awards, opportunities to influence the program's design through research or committee work, workshops and events that are created and facilitated by teachers, learning groups, etc. Some of this work, like serving on committees or attending workshops, depends on teachers being compensated to participate in professional development (which is true for the program I researched) and is therefore not viable for every program.

In reflecting on my research process and learning—where I inquired into teachers' learning, experiences with curriculum, agency, and goals—I feel this process in and of itself can be a useful tool to learn from teachers in considering a program's design and approach to professional development. In considering applying this approach administratively, for example, I imagined how I could derive teacher learning goals from the goals for continued development and learning that teachers described. For example, several teachers wanted to bring in more inclusive, antiracist, and/or accessible practices into their teaching (or into the practices of the program overall). However, many of these teachers were doing this work alone (even when teachers, like Douglas, described how it would be useful to work with others). So, one general teacher learning goal could be:

By the end of this academic year, teachers will know how to:

- Collaboratively design inclusive, antiracist, and/or accessible practices.
- Share inclusive, antiracist, and/or accessible practices with an audience of FYW teachers in the program.
- Integrate inclusive, antiracist, and/or accessible practices into their pedagogy.

This is not necessarily an intimidating set of goals so long as a WPA creates professional development opportunities for this work to happen (such as inviting a group of teachers interested in accessibility to meet, share practices, and identify accessibility issues or concerns in the classrooms that they want to address). This might make use of some of the existing structures within WRaC—like informal teaching circles or mentor groups—adding more structure and purpose to these spaces by organizing groups intentionally around teachers' shared goals for learning. Then, at the end of the year, there can be a moment to check in by conferencing with or surveying teachers to debrief about progress toward their goals while learning about interests for the following year.

This sort of practice could, theoretically, counter the "learning endpoint" I mentioned in the previous chapter by making new learning a constant goal and continually setting new learning goals for all teachers. That is, it gives teachers the opportunity to shape the topics of professional development, hopefully revitalizing interest and encouraging participation from continuing faculty who might feel as though professional development becomes less relevant as they gain expertise. By giving teachers goals in common, this would also hopefully address the "community siloing" issue that Angela described, where some members of the teaching community do not know each other well enough to collaborate or share resources freely with each other.

However, this process also takes a tremendous amount of time and effort. As I mentioned in my Methodology and Methods chapter, I wanted to do more data analysis and find more patterns across responses. However, doing this research and writing this dissertation within a single academic year proved constraining since my inductive approach required constant reflection and ample time to sit with the data and learn from it. This meant that I did not have time to continue analyzing the data. This is both a limitation to my approach in this research and a consideration in the recommendation that I am making here about using this approach administratively to learn from teachers. That is, for researchers, this kind of research is better applied to projects where there are multiple years to collect and analyze data. For administrators, the process would have to be minimized significantly for it to be an annual practice or blended with long-term strategic planning. Additionally, there are many points where I believe it would have helped to have a collaborator in this process, especially during data collection, analysis, and writing. Trying to make sense of data alone within a single academic year proved challenging, and resulted in me not spending as much time with the data as my inductive research methods invited me to do.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEYS

Anonymous Survey

Position and FYW Experience

What best describes your position in the department?

- Graduate Student / Graduate Teaching Assistant
- Teaching-Focused Faculty
- Tenure-Stream Faculty
- Academic Specialist
- Other… [Specify]

How long have you taught first-year writing at [this university]?

- 1–2 years
- 3–5 years
- 5–9 years
- 10+ years

How long have you taught first-year writing in general?

- 1–5 years
- 6–10 years
- 11+ years

Disciplinary Orientations

What is your primary disciplinary area of expertise?

- Rhetoric
- Composition
- Cultural Rhetorics or Studies
- Technical Communication
- Literacies
- Theory
- History
- Digital Humanities or Rhetorics
- Creative Writing
- Literature
- Linguistics
- Other… [Specify]

What are your additional disciplinary areas of expertise? (Choose 1–3)

- Rhetoric
- Composition
- Cultural Rhetorics or Studies
- Technical Communication
- Literacies

- Theory
- History
- Digital Humanities or Rhetorics
- Creative Writing
- Literature
- Linguistics
- N/A
- Other… [Specify]

Experiences with Shared Curricula

Please use the scale below to indicate the extent to which the shared curriculum has been a resource for you to learn about teaching writing.

- Not a resource at all (1); A very helpful resource (5).

What are 2–3 resources or experiences that best supported you in learning to teach the shared curriculum?

- New teacher orientation
- FYW workshops
- Learning groups or conversations with peers
- Borrowing and adapting materials from other teachers
- Support from the FYW administrative team
- Local or national conferences
- Feedback from students
- Trial and error
- Reflections on teaching
- Other… [Specify]

What did you expect to learn about teaching writing when you started teaching in [this FYW program]?

- [Open ended]

What are 1–3 important things you have learned about teaching writing from your experiences with the shared curriculum?

- [Open ended]

What are 1–3 constraints or limitations you have experienced from teaching the shared curriculum?

- [Open ended]

Innovations and Changes

What are 1–3 examples of meaningful changes or innovations you made to the shared curriculum? (If you have not made any significant changes, please write "No significant changes").

- [Open ended]

If you have made changes, adaptations, or innovations to the shared curriculum, what are your reasons or motivations for doing so?

- [Open ended]

If you have not made significant changes, adaptations, or innovations to the shared curriculum, what are your reasons or motivations for not doing so?

- [Open ended]

Recruitment Survey

What is your name?

- [Open ended]

What best describes your position in the department?

- Graduate Student / Graduate Teaching Assistant
- Teaching-Focused Faculty
- Tenure-Stream Faculty
- Academic Specialist
- Other… [Specify]

How long have you taught FYW [in this program]?

- [Open ended]

Are you interested in participating in interviews about your teaching and experiences within the [FYW program]?

- Yes
- No
- Other…

Briefly, how would you describe your relationship with the shared [curriculum in this program]?

- [Open ended]

Do you have experience teaching FYW before [this program]?

- Yes
- No
- Other…

Is there anything else I should know about you, or are there questions you have for me?

- [Open ended]

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General Information Questions

[Asked during the first interview].

- What is your position in the department?
- Since I will be referencing you in my writing, I will need to know your pronouns. What are your pronouns?
- If you taught writing before [this Department], how long have you been teaching writing in general?
- In connection with the teaching of writing, what did you do before coming to [this Department]?
    - Considering those prior experiences, how similar or different are they to the teaching you're now doing in our first-year writing program?

First Interviews: Past Experiences

[Asked participants to share the syllabi and assignment descriptions from their first year or semester of teaching the Department].

Curriculum

- [This program has] a shared curriculum and learning goals. How do these appear in the materials you brought in today?
- How did the syllabus and assignments you brought in come to be? Did you make them from scratch, work from a model, or do something else?

Learning

- Looking back at your materials, what do you wish you had done differently in your first year of teaching here?
- How did you learn to teach this version of first-year writing when you got to [this university]? For this, you might think about conversations with peers, professional development opportunities, experiences teaching the shared curriculum, past experiences, and so forth.

Agency

- How would you define agency in teaching?
- Where do you feel you have agency in your teaching?
    - Is this agency present in the materials you brought in today?
        - If yes, where?
        - If not, why not?
- What changes or innovations did you make to the shared first-year writing curriculum within your first year of teaching?
    - Why did you make these changes?

Goals

- When you started teaching first-year writing [in this program], what did you hope to learn about teaching writing?
    - Did you learn what you wanted to learn about? Why or why not?

Other

- Is there anything else you want to talk about or mention today, specifically in relation to your past experiences teaching?

Second Interviews: Current Thinking

[Asked participants to share the syllabi and assignment descriptions from their current semester].

Curriculum

- How do [the program's] learning goals and shared curriculum appear in the materials you brought in today?
- How did the syllabus and assignments you brought in come to be? Did you make them from scratch, work from a model, or do something else?

Learning

- How would you describe your current approach to teaching writing?
    - How have you developed this approach?
- What did you need to learn to create the current version of your first-year writing course?
    - What role did the shared curriculum have in how you designed the current version of your first-year writing course?

Agency

- What do you see as constraints or obstacles to your teaching practice?
- Where do you feel you have the most freedom in your teaching? For example: do you have the most freedom in course design, activities, assignment descriptions, assessment approaches, course policies, learning goals, and so on.
- Looking at the materials you brought in today, what changes or innovations have you made to the shared first-year writing curriculum?
    - Why did you make these changes?

Goals

- What are your goals as an instructor of first-year writing?
    - How have your goals influenced your teaching?
- What do you hope students will learn after taking your first-year writing course?
    - How do these goals for what students will learn connect to or differ from the shared learning goals of the first-year writing program?

Other

- Is there anything else you want to talk about or mention today, specifically in relation to your current experiences teaching?

Third Interviews: Future Learning

[Before the other questions, I asked GTAs: "After graduating, do you want to teach first-year writing regularly?"]

Curriculum

- To you, is designing curriculum a part of teaching?
- Would you consider yourself a curriculum designer in this program?
    - If yes: In what ways?
    - If no: Why not?
        - If "yes" to curriculum design as a part of teaching: How could the program support you in learning about designing curriculum?

Learning

- Throughout your time teaching here, what have you learned about teaching writing?
- What do you still want to learn about teaching writing?
    - How do you plan to learn about what you listed?

Agency

- What do you believe are the biggest challenges or obstacles in learning more about teaching writing within this program?
- If you had the choice, what would you change about the shared curriculum?
    - Why would you want these changes to be made?
- Do you feel like you can affect or change the shared curriculum—not just in your classroom, but at the program level?

Goals

- How would you describe your ideal first-year writing class?
    - What goals do you have for yourself to create that ideal class?
- What are your goals for developing your first-year writing curriculum over the next few years?
- How could the first-year writing program support your goals as a writing educator?

Other

- Is there anything else you want to talk about today—specifically in relation to your future learning and teaching?

APPENDIX C: CODING THEMES

Agency

Agency boundary

- **Description**: A limit to agency is discussed.
- **When to use**: A teacher explains what prevents their agency, such as time (both to prep and for assignments), inexperience, students' engagement or expectations, assumptions, or being told they cannot do something. This usually results in a decision being made, like using a project without any modification because there isn't enough time to change it.

Agency provider

- **Description**: A source of agency is identified.
- **When to use**: Whether agency is given or not, this code is applied when a teacher explains what gives or takes their agency (e.g. themselves, the institution, the curriculum, administrators, their experience, or a lack of structure or surveillance).

Agency and ownership over course

- **Description**: Agency as a concept is discussed in relation to a teacher's individual course.
- **When to use**: A teacher discusses agency in their classroom and over their individual materials. They talk about their ownership or flexibility over what they teach, their voice, and originality. This can either be they feel agency, or their agency is constrained.

Agency over writing program

- **Description**: Agency as a concept is discussed in relation to a teacher's influence on the first-year writing program.
- **When to use**: A teacher discusses agency over the writing program overall, especially as it relates to changing or influencing the program. This can either be they feel agency, or their agency is constrained.

Agency uncertainty

- **Description**: That extent of agency a teacher has is discussed ambiguously, or the perceived agency of others is discussed.
- **When to use**: A teacher is uncertain about their agency or its limits, they express how they have taken agency without being sure if they're allowed to, or comment about the uncertain agency of other people in the program.

Curriculum

Curriculum adherence

- **Description**: There are intentional decisions to move toward teaching the shared curriculum.
- **When to use**: A teacher intentionally adheres to the shared curriculum, makes the shared curriculum more central, uses language connected to the learning goals to explain

decisions or regular classroom practices, or identifies what they use from the curriculum. This differs from alignment in that they are choosing to follow the curriculum, not that they feel inherently represented by the curriculum.

Curriculum deviance

- **Description**: There are intentional decisions to move away from teaching the shared curriculum.
- **When to use**: A teacher explains a unique practice or choice, usually one that departs from the shared curriculum or what most teachers do in the program. They make a choice to do something that is different from what the shared curriculum provides or emphasizes, including minor changes like renaming an assignment. They highlight how what they do is not what everyone should do because it is less common. They share a strategy for revising the curriculum.

Curriculum alignment

- **Description**: Aspects of the shared curriculum are fundamentally consistent with what a teacher believes or wants to teach.
- **When to use**: A teacher's belief is represented in the curriculum, they praise the curriculum and its materials, or they are excited for a particular project. Elements of the curriculum include inquiring, reflecting, communicating rhetorically, taking creative risks, and learning from mistakes. They say they teach something in the shared curriculum because it is what they would teach anyway.

Curriculum misalignment

- **Description**: Aspects of the shared curriculum are fundamentally different from what a teacher believes or wants to teach.
- **When to use**: A teacher's belief is not represented in the curriculum, they critique a process or practice of the curriculum, or they disagree with the curriculum design and its materials. They question the purpose of something, or find that it is at odds with what they want to do.

Curriculum rationale or feature

- **Description**: A reason for changing or emphasizing a specific part of the shared curriculum is described.
- **When to use**: A teacher describes a rationale for a change, explains a feature of the curriculum, uniquely interprets some element of the curriculum, or highlights a specific main element of the curriculum. For example, how the shared curriculum is supposed to be used, or how they make use of a certain part of the curriculum (like a learning goal) over others.

Learning

Learning source, resource, or influence

- **Description**: A source or resource of learning is identified.

- **When to use**: A teacher identifies how they learned or what they used to design their pedagogy and materials, name professional development structures they support, identify something they learned that has been important, or describe contributing to the learning of other teachers. For example, they reference a practice, a text, shared curriculum materials, past experiences, teachers, students, or administrators being connected to their learning or assembling of teaching materials.

Learning limitation

- **Description**: A limitation, boundary, or constraint to learning is discussed.
- **When to use**: A teacher struggles with or does not understand how to teach something; they are confused by a part of the program; they identify constraints or the irrelevance of professional development or program resources; they describe limited, strained, or no connections with (some) members of the teaching community; they express why they do not contribute to professional development; or they feel they have learned all they can from the program, or that some professional development opportunities are not useful.

Learning identity and positionality

- **Description**: Identity or positionality is discussed and related to some aspect of learning.
- **When to use**: A teacher talks about their identity as a teacher; or how they bring their identities as a researcher, writer, etc. into teaching. A teacher draws attention to their positionality as a graduate student or teaching-focused faculty member, especially to explain why they participate or avoid certain opportunities for learning.

Program Design and Goals

Program change or suggestion

- **Description**: A change in the program is recounted or suggested.
- **When to use**: A teacher offers a suggestion for what to change, identifies some aspect of the curriculum or program that could be improved, notes how the program has or has not changed over time, or suggests how the shared curriculum might be a resource (especially for new teachers).

Student learning goals

- **Description**: A student learning goal is identified.
- **When to use**: A teacher describes a learning goal for students in their classroom.

Teacher learning goals

- **Description**: A teacher learning goal is identified.
- **When to use**: A teacher describes something they want or wanted to learn or do as a teacher—within or beyond the program. A teacher describes an absence of goals for themselves.

Beyond the program

Universal first-year writing element

- Description: An inherent feature of first-year writing that is perceived as existing across universities is described.
- When to use: A teacher identifies something that they believe is a core part of first-year writing beyond the program.

Teacher value

- Description: A value, purpose, or belief a teacher holds related to their teaching is described.
- When to use: A teacher identifies a personal value, purpose, or belief within their teaching or underpinning their course—especially one that is not directly connected to the program's values.