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TRANSNATIONAL WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION: MOBILITY,
ENTANGLEMENT, WORK

By

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B.A., Western Washington University, 2010
M.A., Miami University, 2015

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in English Rhetoric/Composition

Department of English
University of Louisville
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A Dissertation Approved on

13 April 2021

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my collaborators,
both official and unofficial.

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I would like to thank my participants, my committee, my colleagues, and my friends. Your support makes each of you a collaborator in this project. Special mention goes to the WPAs who invited me into their centers, introduced me to their colleagues, and taught me so much about this work. Many of those doing TWPA work are unseen and unheard; the knowledge they make is rich and this work is a step in growing and honoring its contribution.

ABSTRACT

TRANSNATIONAL WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION: MOBILITY, ENTANGLEMENT, WORK

Joseph Franklin

13 April 2021

This dissertation advances the global turn in writing studies by examining academic mobilities through an ethnographic study of transnational writing program administrative (TWPA) work outside of the United States. The literature review reads global writing studies scholarship through a critical-transnational lens to locate the gap for new knowledge in TWPA work. Influenced by Dorothy Smith's Institutional Ethnography, this dissertation grounds the findings of its interview-based study in the terms of everyday lived experiences by internationally mobile scholars currently doing WPA work in order to construct more nuanced narratives of navigation and sensemaking. Participants discussed the consequences and limitations of us/them or local/global binaries, traced commitments and policies across time and space, then accounted for and described the labor required to resist stable notions of difference. The study contributes terms and anecdotes for depicting TWPA sensemaking work as shifting, ever-changing, partial, layered, and complex. The core findings are theorizations of mobility and transnationality through discursive work, relative mobility, scaling practices, and co-constituted space.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: TWPA INSTITUTIONAL NAVIGATION.....	1
<i>Where am I coming from?</i>	13
<i>The end</i>	40
CHAPTER II: THE GLOBAL TURN FROM WPA TO TWPA.....	48
<i>Transnational framing</i>	49
(T)WPA as theorizing	58
<i>Global/Transnational Composition</i>	61
<i>International and Transnational Writing Studies</i>	65
International establishing	71
Transnational establishing	76
Transnational theoretical turn.....	83
Power in transnationality	86
<i>TWPA</i>	89
Critical/mobile TWPA.....	100
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGIES AND METHODS.....	104
<i>Methodologies</i>	107
Locations/space/place	109
Institutional Ethnography as Sociology/Methodology	115
Influential studies	120
Questions and considerations	127
Research questions.....	128
<i>Methods</i>	129
Participant selection	129
Study design.....	133
Interviews	133
Researcher/participant/collaborator roles.....	134
Data analysis	136
Privacy	136
The local vs. privacy.....	137
CHAPTER IV: THE INTERVIEW DATA	139
<i>Billie</i>	140
<i>Max</i>	148
Max returns to the U.S.	155
<i>Alison</i>	157
<i>Esther</i>	164
Esther writes student profiles.....	171
<i>Ellis</i>	177
<i>Conclusion</i>	195
CHAPTER V: MOBILIZING TRANSNATIONAL NUANCE	197

<i>The interviews: a language of entangling</i>	<i>199</i>
<i>Theorizing: TWPA entanglement, mobility, practice</i>	<i>206</i>
Entanglement	207
Practices are co-constitutive	212
Relative mobility, relative stability	216
Scaling practices, new questions	223
<i>Discursive Work and Transnational Practice</i>	<i>229</i>
<i>Mobilizing Transnational Nuance.....</i>	<i>234</i>
<i>Take-aways and future steps.....</i>	<i>241</i>
Power.....	244
American-style or local style.....	245
REFERENCES	247
CURRICULUM VITA	262

CHAPTER I

TWPA INSTITUTIONAL NAVIGATION

This is a dissertation about mobility in writing studies as seen through transnational writing program administration (TWPA) narratives. The work done by internationally mobile WPAs has thus far been under-theorized and under-represented, much to the detriment of composition and global writing studies. This under-theorization is a missed opportunity to examine transformative approaches to knowledge production through writing studies. By taking an ethnographic approach to understanding TPWA work as experienced and articulated by mobile WPAs, this study aims to connect marginalized voices from global writing studies through discourses on transnationality and theories of mobility. The larger stakes in this work are about finding better ways to articulate our work and enact our commitments to writing studies in a more globally oriented and complex way.

The first chapter will define and unpack these terms—“transnational,” “mobility,” and “writing program administration (WPA)” —with a brief overview of their salient history and a description of my own experiences in coming to understand them. The second chapter offers a review of international and transnational writing studies literature through a critical transnational lens, which arrives at the call for more nuanced narratives and theorizations of transnational WPA work. Chapter three outlines the methods and methodologies informing my study with internationally mobile WPAs, and chapter four

offers the interview study data to address the previous chapter's call for more nuanced depictions. Chapter five offers a discussion of the findings related to practice theory and mobilities as well as implications for future studies. The dissertation begins with setting up the terms of the discussion and seeing them in practice through my narrative, but our end goal is to learn from participants how to make sense of and articulate the entangled, emerging nature of TWPA work. Building from their insights, the goal is to develop more nuanced and human ways of expressing the aspects of TWPA work that might be eluding the grasp of our current terms like "mobility" and "work." In this way, we can account for the granular aspects of these experiences and build better ways to do the work while also producing new theoretical knowledge on entanglements and boundaries.

My project uses a mobility framework to theorize relationships and connections as a way to better understand transnational narratives I gather through ethnographic research by interviewing scholars who work as TWPAs. This dissertation project does not offer a new, more nuanced single theory to guide transnationalism, nor a single solution to the tensions that arise from it. Instead, this project looks at the terms that participants use to describe the aspects of their work that generate knowledge about dealing with *not* resolving concepts into stable containers. There is important work associated with resisting the short-cuts of assumption, work that is both externally visible and internally taxing. One key term that this dissertation uses is "navigation," which I find exemplifies the kind of consideration and action; a sense of avoiding pitfalls and finding a path. In some ways, TWPA work is very similar to the work done to navigate any institution, but in other ways it is very particular to a person and a place. Without these particulars, scholars cannot express the nuances needed to refine theories; a

transnational approach is all about articulating the work of parsing what's the same *and* what's different instead of taking one single view—that's the guiding principle of this project. Hence navigation.

Transnationality can describe physically crossing national borders, but it is also a paradigm evoked when the unit of analysis shifts from the national to challenge conventional notions of racial, gender, ideological, and linguistic identifications (e.g., “the German race”). Transnationality also thereby works to highlight the presence of diverse and marginalized voices within geopolitical boundaries. There is an important distinction to be made between terms like “internationalization” or “globalization,” which might assume stable boundaries/identities and frictionless movement between them. Transnationality specifically destabilizes fixed notions of and interactions between/within nations, which it sees as too restrictive and falsely contained. The global or transnational turn in composition has been driven by scholars questioning the assumptions about the borders of the field's purview, both geographically and theoretically (Donahue, 2016; Hesford, 2006). The transnational, in a sense, not only crosses borders, it re-draws the maps, and points us to the very constructedness of those nations we take for granted. It shows us a more mobile, manifold, and contingent world.

In one sense, mobility is a somewhat emergent scholarly term that captures recent attention to concepts like globalization, identity, and technology. In another sense, there is little that is new, because even within composition (which has been recently exploring the term), so much of the field has been driven by the concepts of mobility before there was a term under which to collect them. Mobility intersects strongly with the fields of geography, linguistics, and sociology, but also falls well within the broad purview of

composition.¹ The core methodological and philosophical commitment that mobility foregrounds is change as a constant; transnationality acts as an entry point into mobility by looking to constructions of place and its complex relationship to identity or meaning. Cresswell (2002) explains mobility as a necessary shift in the social sciences from the sedentarist model, which ties identity with nation/ethnicity/language, to a more mobile model where categorical flux is the norm across different scales (Adey, 2006, 2010; Fenwick & Farrell, 2012; Lemke, 2000). The main areas the term circulates in composition are within literacy and language studies, but it is certainly relevant, and should be more present, in transnational discussions as well. The most relevant extant literature within mobility studies that this project speaks to is in the concept of academic mobility.

The term “academic mobility” has more commonly been explored as student mobility and peripherally as knowledge or scholar/staff mobility. In defining internationalization, Teichler (2017) describes the primacy of student mobility as the focus of the European ERASMUS program and the Bologna reform process through the 1980s and 90s. Blommaert and Horner (2017) broaden conventional models of student mobility from students who are geographically mobile, such as exchange students, to also include students’ socio-economic (im)mobility in relation to their academic literacy as well as student identities as constantly emerging. Brice Nordquist (2017) describes mobility also in terms of social mobility up through a class system as well as tracing knowledge production across geographic spaces by conducting interviews, for example, on buses with students transitioning from high school to college.

1. For example, the 2016 Watson Conference theme was “Mobility Work in Composition: Translation, Migration, Transformation.” See also Fraiberg et al., 2017.

While academic mobility, as a response to sedentarist approaches, has been primarily taken up in terms of students, in recent decades the term has expanded into other modes and activities, such as department level partnerships, the mobility and migration of scholars, branch campus partnerships and policy implications, online courseware enrolling across nations, or domestic focuses on international diversity (Teichler, 2017, p. 183; Fenwick and Farrell, 2012). Terri Kim is a prominent scholar on transnational academic mobility looking primarily at mobile scholars in the UK context, which will be important to return to in the later narrative of this chapter.² She highlights the importance of a transnational designation to move beyond a conventional understanding of the term *international* taken to mean, “a part of official inter-action between nations” (2010, p. 395). Transnational mobility takes place, for Kim, when academics move *between* or *above* territorial boundaries as part of broader internationalization policies in higher education. She argues that there has been no full-scale investigation on transnationally mobile scholars’ impact on internationalization in higher education in the UK—and even when researchers do study academic mobility, they differentiate domestic and mobile students, but do not “distinguish international academic staff experience” (p. 398). This is a crucial gap in understanding internationalization and the impact of scholar mobility on higher education that has been taken up more and more. The work of Chen and Zhu (2020) begins to address that gap as they interview international scholars working in China and detail feelings of what they call “misfit” as expectations about the work do not align with actual experiences.

² Treichler’s usage of the term academic mobility sometimes refers to the more encompassing notion that includes students, but most often refers to scholars, i.e. academic mobility (of academics/scholars/staff) versus student mobility.

Blommaert and Horner (2017) show us how a mobility framework opens up a path beyond sedentarist notions of identity and place, first beginning with a focus on students' physical movement, then shifting to other domains like knowledge transfer. Within a mobilities framework, research can be focused on "what, if anything, happens to knowledge in the process of its relocation from person to person, site to site, genre to genre, technology to technology, discipline to discipline, moment to moment" (p. 4). Treichler (2017) shows us how mobility moved beyond students in ways "partly viewed as independent from and partly as complementary to or substitutions of the traditional activities" in internationalization, such as different curricula, partnerships, and stakeholders (p. 183). Kim's attention to the gap foregrounded by collapsing different scholar/staff experiences of transnational academic mobility into a monolithic understanding is where I can similarly locate my own work.

I, too, am interested in exploring the impact of scholar mobility in transnational higher education sites. Coming from a composition background, though, I will focus on internationally mobile scholars who do work as writing program administrators (WPAs) and how they themselves make sense of their roles/institutions. Writing Program Administration—especially if we follow Donna Strickland's (2011) view of what she calls the managerial unconscious—is a central component inseparable from discussions about composition. There will be much more to say about WPA work in Chapter 2, but for now, it's important to note a few things about this term. Writing specialists often design, develop, and administer writing programs in the academy, in industry, or in the community. In addition to first-year composition (which is common mostly in the United States), such programs may include: digital writing collaboratives, writing majors and

minors, writing centers, WAC/WID programs, National Writing Project sites for K-12 educators, community literacy projects, and employee training programs. The central professional organization for primarily academic institutions, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), and its journal *WPA: Writing Program Administration* were founded in the 1970s in the United States.

According to McLeod (2007), this professionalizing done in the 1970s “dignified” a job, which was usually seen as a service task of managing teaching assistants, by giving it a title that aligned it with other institutional administrative positions (p. 3). Since that time, WPA has come to represent a range of different bureaucratic and intellectual facets of these various roles listed above. Early WPAs were appointed in the wake of the Johnny Can’t Write literacy crisis and felt directed to do something specific with their programs and to represent and legitimate their work as a scholarly enterprise (Ede, 2004, p. 56). This unifying push can be seen manifested through the pages of the WPA journal and CWPA reports.³ These statements lay out a role that is both professional, but also critical and scholarly for WPAs who often teach, train teachers, and oversee programs on an administrative level simultaneously. What is often unstated, but is certainly true, is that WPA is a title that was developed in the U.S. academic context—though the term and the work are increasingly internationally mobile. The role, however, would very logically have several antecedents and local versions across numerous global contexts, just as compositionists weren’t the first teachers to focus on the writing process.

3. “The Portland Resolution: Guidelines for Writing Program Administrator Positions” (Hult, 1992), “Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Program Administration” (Council, 1998), and “The WPA Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition” (Harrington, 2001).

In line with composition and rhetoric's social (Trimbur, 1994) and global (Hesford, 2006) turns, Jeanne Gunner (2012) described an overarching trend in WPA literature from mostly instrumental practice as the field was establishing itself to a more self-aware, self-critical scholarly approach driven by early articles like Maxine Hairston's (1982) "Winds of Change" piece. If in the 1970s WPAs were claiming more professional legitimacy, in the 1980s they were claiming their agency through the newfound economic and institutional power to change institutions and, through writing, to make knowledge production more equitable and accessible. Gunner (2012) offers a heuristic for WPA scholarship through three categories: *efficiency*, which relates to program-stabilizing, management-focused aims (Myers-Breslin, 1999; Ward and Carpenter, 2002); *hybrid*, which claims a research and theory identity for WPAs through a professionalized research agenda with program-focused applications that are site specific (Enos and Borrowman, 2008; Rose and Weiser, 1999; Rose and Weiser, 2002); and *resistant*, which is influenced by the social turn, shifting the scholarly gaze away from the program as a perfectible object (George, 1999; McGee and Handa, 2005). This framework offers a glimpse at a tension in WPA scholarship between management stability on one end and critically destabilizing certain university agendas on the other. Gunner places that latest resistant shift through the 1990s to the 2000s and describes it as the field growing more critical of itself. She argues that "those in WPA work are best served by open-minded, boundary-pushing, and actively resistant forms of scholarly inquiry," and one of those boundaries being pushed that she lists is a transnational orientation (2012, p. 120).

I locate this dissertation's TWPA focus as part of this resistant trend in WPA scholarship that develops more critical and diverse voices in representing the complex

theoretical nature of WPA work. I can also place TWPA work as an under-explored but crucial aspect of the field of Composition's global turn—a global turn that has, for the most part, connected WPA theorizing as part of this shift. Gunner's (2012) heuristic timeline allows us to connect these two threads and see TWPA study as bringing global voices into a theoretical, scholarly discussion of WPA work that exemplifies the global turn. This disciplinary expansion would allow me to layer in notions of academic mobility through inter-disciplinary theoretical and methodological developments in literacy studies, linguistics, geography, comparative/cultural rhetoric, and others working to understand the interactions and entanglements of different aspects of sensemaking and consideration inherent to transnational writing program work. Chapter two will help historicize and locate TWPA work and Chapter three will connect different WPA perspectives with interdisciplinary mobility studies via institutional ethnography.

I want to understand (T)WPA work as globally situated scholarly work connected through internationally mobile scholars' experiences with institutional navigation. As Terri Kim demonstrates, there's a crucial gap in our understanding of mobile scholars' role in our transnational picture of higher education, and WPAs offer a valuable site for studying that mobility as a better way to understand institutions and transnational reconfigurations. The simple fact is: writing stays as a defining feature of higher education around the world, but writing programs rise and fall all the time. If we want to continue developing and offering better writing programming, we need to know much more about how and why these programs succeed or fail by simply knowing more about them. A transnational approach should allow us to understand these programs as situated in local contexts *and* connected in various ways to other contexts, too—both of these

scales are also constantly emerging. My project aims to expand the boundaries of composition and mobilities research by including distant voices through an ethnographic look at TWPA work done by internationally mobile scholars. Otherwise, the knowledge they are making goes wasted and our ability to understand what they are doing is diminished.

Locating TWPA work as part of composition, though, also presents challenges. Amy Zenger (2018) highlights a central tension in composition scholarship between an “insistence on valuing the local” as a fixed aspect to honor/maintain and a global/local binary that transnationalism “aims to dismantle” (p. 62). This tension is central to my research. Zenger’s piece (which will be explored more thoroughly in chapter 2) offers narratives of policy mobility, a term she locates in geography discussions of urban planning as policies are borrowed, debated, and disseminated to solve various problems. She sees policy mobility as a potential lens to make administrative work in American branch campuses more visible in the liminal space between local and global forces by describing how the assumptions of frictionless global flows through stable, authentic local interests are at odds with the experiential narratives of writing programs at the American University of Beirut. She argues that transnationality, as it is currently construed, has limitations that still leave administrators and teachers “with the need for more nuanced theories to develop better understandings of the forces at work in our programs and for processes and tools to help drive conversations and decision making” (p. 76). The limitations of transnationality, for Zenger and other transnational scholars, are rooted in assumptions of binary identities (driven by some limited depictions the “local”) and approaches linked to geopolitical place. This *conceptual* limitation in

accounting for the complex forces at work in transnational writing programs inhibits the development of *practical* tools (how to run contentious meetings, how to write across power asymmetries, how to train tutors/teachers from different educational backgrounds) with which to act in support of these programs.

It is in the sense of addressing limitations where I can offer an important frame to orient this project, borrowing from Nedra Reynolds' (2004) work placing cultural geography in conversation with composition—to bring more attention to the *where* of writing. Describing a fixed separation between writers and readers and the proliferation of restrictive container metaphors used to conceptualize space, Reynolds (2004) writes that “binaries and boxes limit what we can see” (p. 8). By this, she means that fitting a spectrum of experiences or ideas into the confines of a fixed category cuts off a surplus of meaning and variety in that containment. In my study, those containers can be import/export or us/them or domestic/international, but they can also be the layers/lenses through which people categorize and mark difference (e.g. gender, language, age, race, etc.). We need terminology, and language itself is necessarily restricting a world of meaning down to more narrow interpretations, but as Reynolds points out, it is important to understand how they might limit what ways we *see* the world. I offer some careful description that is cautious of binarized, sedentarist notions of place/identity and their potential for over-determining how we see what is happening day-to-day, but at the same time to try and observe and trace the ways these containers might be deployed as part of the sensemaking processes of participants. Such representations are a foundation for developing better understandings and more informed discussions about transnational institutional contexts of delivering academic writing support. If we keep certain details of

the process of developing that support contained (i.e. boxed up), then it will be impossible to see, unpack, and make them legible.

I have found this notion of container metaphors and boxing/un-boxing to be fruitful in many ways. There are, generously speaking, two groups of terms that I think will be useful to capture arrays of difference. The first is scale, as in *across different scales*, which is something I have found myself needing in this project to describe the sort of matryoshka-like nested layers of department, discipline, institution, neighborhood, city, region, state, nation, continent, time, etc. This term will become useful again in Chapter five for understanding how participants are describing their work. The other array is in identity or demographic markers: age, gender, race, language background, height, personality, cultural background, etc. Ironically, I found myself reaching for a way to *contain* these un-containable layers as a way to describe them without unpacking and listing them all exhaustively, and I also knew that I could not neatly separate one list from the other. I haven't found a perfect term that can hold these concepts. One's department can be a kind of materially scaled place as well as an identity signifier. All of these various facets are contingent, but they are also material and salient in varying proportions across contexts and events. We are, in a sense, constantly tacking between temporarily stable and temporarily fluid containers of context and identity resonating relative to the terms in play. These rhetorical and material ecologies can extend across an array of scales of context, especially when considering knowledge mobilization through digital media or mapping disciplinary communities (see, that's why I need those containers).

Global higher education institutions produce confluences of power filled with potential for confusion but also powerful knowledge-making. In terms of locating and understanding TWPAs work, this project aligns with Starke-Meyyering's (2014) depiction of TWPAs as uniquely positioned at broad intersections of language, power, and identity. That is why I wanted to see and hear these different contexts and the institutional navigations performed by those who inhabit them, in order to make visible what she calls the "cross-boundary knowledge-making," which is knowledge specifically connected to mobility (p. 318). This project is about moving past binaries by looking to knowledge-making work that is already being done by mobile WPAs. Let me first begin with my story, and how I came to see things this way.

Where am I coming from?

I came to teaching writing as a compositionist, trained in a process-based approach, through a global, circuitous route—this is not that uncommon in the field. Not only was I trained in particular pedagogical methods, but I also agree with the positions on knowledge creation, student-centered focus, and forms of expertise that are somewhat implicit in the field. These preferences and perceptions shaped how I did my work in the narrative I share in this chapter.

My first degree was in creative writing, but I found a love for the classroom through teaching English as a foreign language in South Korea and Brazil. My MA studies worked to connect language difference with the vibrance of composition pedagogies through culture and second language writing. Another fascination found its way to me during my MA studies in the form of administrative work on an international exchange program funded by the State Department. Working as an administrative

director and living with both local students and exchange students from North Africa and the Middle East on a program meant to study civic engagement in the wake of the Arab Spring offered me a lot of lessons in the tangled character of administrative work.

Upon receiving my degree, I accepted an offer to run a pilot writing center project at a university in England. This was, in many ways, a rich crossing for all my various academic interests. My experiences in this unique role formed the basis of the research questions that motivate this dissertation. Ultimately, this writing center, while very successful, did not become a sustainable part of the university (programs rising and falling, remember?). Grappling with the frustration of a thriving program left to wither and disappear raised numerous questions about this work and institutions. If the work with students and instructors was successful and necessary by every metric, why did the university not support the project? If these institutional barriers are hurting writers and their instructors, then how does one go about effectively making institutional changes as an outsider?

These questions motivated my return to graduate studies in the U.S. for a PhD. New (to me) models and theories like mobility, translingualism, and transnationalism gave me rich new terms and concepts to grow my understanding and begin articulating my experiences. Reading texts about transnational composition, especially administrative narratives, kept giving me the feeling that there were so many crucial absent pieces to these stories. While some details resonated, many gaps remained in the material labor required to do this work. What I most wanted to understand was how decisions really get made, how conflict and friction are managed, who actually does what on the staff, and how all these tangled concepts and conditions come together or break apart. The answers

to these questions, which I saw as the real grinding of the gears of this work, was missing. This project thus aims to bring a more critical and practical attention to the work being done and begin addressing such gaps.

While my research can be located within a broadening trend toward new global contexts of administrative work, it is really that and more. From multiple disciplinary areas (linguistics, gender and sexuality, comparative rhetoric, literacy studies, composition, and others) there have been category-destabilizing, transformative theoretical shifts (superdiversity, mobility, intra-action, recontextualization, transliteracy, translingualism, and others discussed more fully in later chapters). These theoretical shifts work to capture a contemporary depiction of the reconfiguration of identities and meanings across space and time and question the very nature of boundaries—e.g. between languages, genders, nations, disciplines—by seeing them as constantly in flux. This shift requires various observable phenomena to study and understand. TWPA work, as I see it, is a rich research site for observing the ways in which these theoretical questions of boundary/identity destabilization can be materially represented, navigated, and better understood. These theoretical lenses all describe a reconceptualization of stable boundaries as something fixed through time and space to something always emergent and requiring labor to sustain. Shifting to a perspective that sees boundaries as co-constructions between individuals and social structures, and to see writing studies work as shot through with local and global concerns, brings a more rich and mobile sense to the field. It is this more tangled, but holistic, sense of the work that resonates more with my experiences.

During my MA, on the heels of teaching English abroad in South Korea and Brazil, I pursued questions of culture, language difference, and pedagogy for my thesis. Having the freedom to design my own syllabi and the space to interact with a moderately diverse group of students brought me to many ideas about best practices for teachers and ways to think through linguistic diversity in a constellation with other identity markers. Working in a small writing center housed in the Farmer School of Business afforded me a chance to observe scheduling, training, and consulting specifics on a digestible scale. I also worked in the summer in a program called Study of the United States Institutes (SUSI), funded by the State Department. SUSI had many different institutes throughout the country; ours brought students from North Africa and the Middle East to study democracy and civic engagement with university faculty and students. I was an administrative assistant in the summer of my first year and administrative director in the summer of my second year of my MA.

Before the students arrived, I and my co-worker and our boss planned the whole schedule, prepared logistics for daily activities as well as interstate travel, housing, food, policies, etc. All of these plans were negotiated between the terms of the grant, the purview of the State Department, and the policies of the University. I and my co-worker lived in the dorm with the thirty students 24/7 with no days off for the six-week institute and managed an untold number of interactions across these student demographics. We were both composition graduate students who taught courses in the department, but in this role we were seeing well beyond the normal bounds of the classroom space in interacting with these students (mobilities!). International students were all university enrolled and across two different cohorts came from Palestine, Jordan, Libya, Tunisia,

Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. They lived and studied with the locally enrolled students who came from white and African American U.S. communities as well as from Zimbabwe, Palestine, and China. In the second year, I hired a staff of five folks from across the U.S., Kenya, and Cameroon when I became the administrative director of the whole institute. This first taste of administrative negotiation became my front row seat to culture and education programming in practice as messy and rich.

For me, SUSI raised the stakes of the puzzle of international education I'd been pursuing and lent me a perspective on the process in ways I never imagined. Put simply, it was so messy and real that I forever saw exchange as full of friction and labor and fraught with possibility. In concert with my close look at classroom pedagogy and multilingual writers, this expanded my awareness of interaction with difference into all new contexts. For example, some students observed Ramadan closely, while others did not, nor were all students Muslim. Different countries, dialects, religions, personalities all came swirling together in much more detail than one accesses in the role of instructor. It felt so creative and interesting, as well as very human and exhausting, and it called on all my resources (and then some) to accomplish. Being in charge of getting a group that diverse to arrive for anything on time was in itself an exercise in cultural and rhetorical flexibility. Tracing the ways in which one's concept of time materialized across different demographics admitted few clear demarcations. I saw my position as a front row seat to a new part of the world, but later came to realize I was more than a spectator. In line with the many professionally enriching experiences came a real chance to personally position myself in the world. In such a rich and swirling set of practices and ideas and among students eager to share and debate, I found the locations of my knowledge and beliefs in a

larger, global way. Simple notions like Arab-ness or American-ness became so complicated and entwined as certain details resonated or conflicted across all of us. Seeing the constellation of these identity facets shift and change was eye opening in how I considered culture and my professional role and also inextricable from how I saw myself crossing many boundaries every day.

Near the end of my MA studies, I also learned that I was a U.K. citizen, through my father, from birth. So, I applied for a passport and was granted one in a matter of weeks. Just like that. This made me think about how citizenship and nationhood is a strange and constructed thing—very young and bureaucratic compared to other identity markers. Upon graduating, with my newfound experience in multilingual pedagogies and cross-cultural administration, and a new passport, I set off for a tour of the Middle East (to visit my SUSI alums in their home environments) and to look for work abroad. On an obscure job list, I found a perfectly fitting position, in England, starting a writing center.

I accepted a position at a Russell Group university in southern England to start a pilot writing center program with two years of modest funding. The position of starting a writing center to potentially serve the whole university was listed as a part-time role—two and a half days a week. I argued it up to four days a week and an assurance they could find the money to make it five in due time. Such are, sometimes, the tentative promises of pursuing international WPA work. The hiring process had been delayed, so I would begin as soon as I could arrive, which was on December 1. I flew into England and checked into a hotel in Heathrow. The hotel clerk asked how long I would be in the U.K., and I replied, “I think I live here now, I just moved from America.” She stared at me with a furrowed brow and dryly asked, “Why?”

In mentally preparing myself for this new role, I reflected on my graduate work with non-native English speakers in arguing for non-deficit-constructions of their identities and my interest in comparative rhetorical methodologies as ways of understanding the “other” on its own terms. More or less, I primed myself to remain open and learn what might be happening in this new context, but I am not sure how effective this form of reflection really is, in comparison to actually butting up against difference in practice. Because I came to England quickly, there really wasn’t time to prepare much for the local conditions—something in hindsight I feel more acutely. Specifically, I felt well trained to work with students and see their differences not as deficits, but I was lacking in my ability to work with colleagues with the same aplomb. Finding a place to live, preparing for how to get around the country/city, learning more about the institutional structures/culture, and acquainting myself with the role were not accomplished before arriving. Nor was there an outpouring of guidance from the institution. In truth, it’s also fair to say that I didn’t really know the right questions to ask anyways. But so I arrived pretty naïve to what I would be doing.

Day one in post, I was placed in an office, given a stack of forms, and met with two folks from the hiring committee who told me they would help to arrange initial meetings with various stakeholders. There was no schedule to adhere to, no space in which to meet with students, no immediate deliverables, nor many specifics of any kind to orient me to the role. I was not part of any team, and this did not feel like a particularly bad thing. My colleagues who hired me made it clear they trusted me to navigate the project in whatever way I thought best. Such confidence and freedom felt great, but it was also inefficient. I did not know then what it meant, really, to not have the support of

official structures—the good and the bad. What is also crucial to know is that there simply was no guide of any kind. Fitted in between the administrative cracks, I began, in my own way, to map the place.

Though I wanted to see the context on its own terms, it is also true that anything familiar was the most legible. There existed no single, central way for me to make sense of the new context on its own terms. There was no history of writing instruction at this institution I could read, no real trail of any kind (other than limited official web pages) to help me know what courses were being taught, what their curricula were like, what traditions might exist locally. Looking up writing at the university provided only a document of style requirements for any public facing texts from the institution—rules regarding punctuation, terminology, the use of passive voice, etc. Fragments of guidance, pieces of explanation connected through diligence and observation were my process. Piece by slow piece, I found ways to meet with faculty⁴ in my administrative home discipline of Humanities, and then branched out to Business, Health Sciences, and the main library staff and others tasked with student support.

My immediate colleagues working in writing support were published novelists employed by the Royal Literary Fund as writing fellows. After chasing down numerous leads, I found that there were also a few scattered faculty managing PhD student led writing/discussion groups for undergraduates and one Health Sciences faculty member offering writing workshops as part of a range of academic skill support, as well as staff in the library and a job placement office offering general academic skills and job document

⁴ A quick note on terminology here, a faculty in the U.K. is the term commonly called a department in a North American context. I will choose to use the North American terms as a default for this project as my direct audience is North American.

one-to-one workshops. Also, in Humanities, instructors who worked on a program for international students offered workshops, some of which explicitly mentioned writing, but they were only for certain international students. While one should certainly be cautious before claiming that something is absent, there is one important note to point out: there was not a single academic writing course at the entire university. Nor was there even one full-time role tasked with supporting writing in any sense. It was all distributed and disconnected across campuses and departments—notes on a syllabus, informal meetings in the margins.

In the weeks/months it took to find my putative colleagues in writing support throughout the university, I was also meeting with students in the office for my Royal Literary Fund colleagues on the Humanities campus when they weren't using it (Humanities was separate from the main campus but connected through about a 15-minute walk). While learning more and more about the University space, administrative structure, and various provisions for writing support, I was also working with students on their writing almost immediately. I found a simple, free appointment-booking site and shared the link with a few instructors/staff to distribute and made a few class visits. All the potential tutorial appointments booked immediately with no advertisement beyond that.

I learned more about the institutional context through student writers. A first degree took three years (as opposed to four in North America) and students arrived and stayed, for the most part, in their disciplinary home department (as opposed to the culture of core, cross-disciplinary requirements). What I saw in the writing by the students, especially first year's, seemed to be very similar to the writing I'd seen from freshmen in

my MA institution. What differed greatly from my past experience was the feedback of their instructors. The most common comment, written in the margins was this: “Not academic.” Um...? I worked with these initial student writers as I had been trained—I asked for more information about instructor expectations and assignment sheets. Students were at a loss; many of them reported having no idea about their instructor expectations, or even who did the grading as a way to follow up. Writing prompts were limited in their scope if they existed, which is a perspective shaped by the standard assignment prompts I was used to seeing in composition programs in the United States. I was left wondering whether in certain disciplines that I didn’t encounter before this was the norm. In the absence of such orienting information as clear assignment prompts, there was an overriding sense of panic and confusion from the students who found their way to me.

I visited my colleagues in Humanities and Business (as that was from where the first wave of students came) with these impressions and soon learned a number of things. It was not common practice to offer students what I would consider to be particular guidance on specifics for their essays; what was shared were very limited frames or questions to which students would respond. Instructors often lectured to the large group from slides, and also often invited a revolving door of guest lecturers to relieve the workload or offer different approaches. This large, and what seemed to me to be teacher-centered lecture was complemented by discussion groups with PhD students each week with a pre-set sheet of questions to cover, though they were there to respond to whatever questions students brought. Rubrics for grading were available here and there, but the usefulness was, again in comparison to my experience and training in composition,

limited (e.g. what's the difference between an average, good, or great argument? I didn't know and the rubrics didn't say.).

A lot of writing feedback was given anonymously. Students submitted their work to an office, the office redacted their names and distributed them to a team of people who graded them (according to their rubric one hopes). Then, the scores were moderated to fit within a prescribed bell curve and any large disputes in scoring were adjusted in various ways by the third-party moderator. These graded papers were then returned to the office and the office would return them to students. No student could really ask the person who had given them feedback for elaboration, nor could they really predict the grade they would receive. Students who had written very similarly structured and argued papers, for example, would come to me and point out the 20-30 point disparities in their grades, even though the feedback looked very similar. While this degree of disparity was not the norm, it was indicative of the system and not as rare as one would hope. Other disciplines used software for their grading, but it followed the same anonymizing pattern, except now the potential feedback was limited somewhat to pre-loaded common comments. Teachers complained, rightly, of carpal-tunnel and eye-strain.

I saw, in these first introductions to the experiences surrounding all stakeholders in institutional writing structures, a breakdown in communicating expectations in all parts of the process. It felt to me like an astonishingly bad set of conditions under which to try and become a more competent writer. This will, no doubt, be taken as a deficit orientation to this difference, but at the same time, these practices had mostly been debunked or eradicated in composition writing programs through composition research and administrative argumentation *and* were widely condemned by many local teachers and

staff who lacked the resources to change them. I struggled to find ways to articulate my perspective without sounding like a critical outsider, or more importantly without being dismissed because I was seen as an outsider and by association ignorant of the local conditions and their limitations. At the same time, many faculty and administrators agreed with what I was noting, nodded and embraced the terms used in composition to frame these ideas and diagnose the frustrations they were feeling and not always articulating. There I sat with my approach and experience facing a great swell of need expressed across this institution and in many ways a lot of support and welcoming of my ideas, but it was in the mobilizing of change to address that need where I found the real work—and saw things fall apart. It's when I found myself in with colleagues who were hitting the same walls and had been for years.

Though I did not read it at the time, Lea and Street (1998) demonstrated more or less this exact finding of a breakdown in the feedback loop in some U.K. institutions. Their ethnographic study, based on an academic literacies model, used interviews with students and staff to assess perspectives of writing expectations and requirements. By taking an ethnographic approach, they were working to find connections and disconnections in perception, and also to shed light on institutional practices and understandings across various stakeholders (something we'll explore much more with institutional ethnography in Ch. 3). Their study found that student struggles with writing could be explained by “conflicting and contrasting requirements for writing on different courses and from the fact that these requirements were frequently left implicit” (p. 163). They further discussed a gap between writing feedback on the essays and implicit, disciplinary epistemological knowledge that instructors assumed students had. Without

having read this article, though, I could tell there was a gap in feedback, but I only groped at the *local* terminology and understanding that Lea and Street offer from their study.

And, as such, I was more easily dismissed as an outsider.

Within about a month of arriving, I had a developing sense of the local institutional approaches by faculty/staff who were tasked with supporting student writers. It did not appear to be working for anyone, really, nor did it sound like it had moved in a positive direction from any previous systems. If anything, instructors missed the old ways before computers and large class sizes. Without being able to articulate it, though, I was also having trouble settling in on what the “local” take on writing support even was. This was my first glimpse at a campus-wide view on writing support, and it was sort of staggering to see how so many departments were articulating and performing something as universal as writing assessment so differently. For example, many departments had devised their own versions of common citation styles, which they disseminated as the requirement, but made it nearly impossible to tutor on this aspect. The very task I had been hired to achieve—better student writing support—seemed to be up against a colossal set of barriers: practical, theoretical, and epistemological. I struggled to both see and act in a way that would bring about change through the approaches I felt were best while also trying to understand and honor the local context. That struggle partly tells us that new terms, even if they are better terms supported by research, were not the tool to unlocking whatever kept larger administrative and structural changes from happening.

On the one hand there seemed to be specific aspects of the role that on one level were so different from my previous experience, but on other levels, it seemed to be just the same core challenges and victories that previous WPAs had faced and continue to

face. What I am trying to get at here is that I felt and experienced, on a daily level, a kind of dissonance between the global/local binary that just wouldn't resolve. As I was working to understand my role, I was unsure whether what I had learned in my experience in the U.S. was really applicable or not; I was confused about where to look for scholarship and which groups would be audiences for my questions. Were these U.K. questions or composition questions or writing center questions or all of those? I felt very lost—partly connected to my previous experiences but more so adrift in a place I couldn't navigate at the same time.

A case in point here can be found in two pieces of scholarship; first, McLeod's (1995) piece on the idea of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) directors as *foreigners* and *agents of change*. The article does a wonderful job of articulating possible ways to identify and understand the work of WAC directors as they interact across disciplines and advocate for students and particular views of the writing process. This is a domestic (U.S.-based) discourse, though, whereas I was both a metaphorical and a literal foreigner (despite my citizenship), and I saw resonances and dissonances with my experience.⁵ Secondly, Thaiss et al. (2012) offer a large range of WAC-focused institutional profiles from around the world. This work demonstrates the creativity and day-to-day exchanges present in doing transnational work yet does not connect these contexts to describe a way to reconcile, in a meaningful way, the tension inherent in the global/local bind. Two anecdotes may be instructive about how these tensions manifested.

First anecdote: early in my work, I was able to find time to meet with PhD students for extended conversations—beyond the thirty-minute tutorial—about their

⁵ See also Thaiss & Zawacki (2006) for a similar domestic discussion of disciplinary borders.

work. At the end of such a meeting with a student in the Health Sciences faculty, she was very pleased and curious with the approach I had taken to our chat and inquired a bit further.

“This way of explaining and discussing writing is different from anything I’ve ever experienced, it’s so clear and helpful. Where did you learn it? What is it, exactly?” she asked.

I responded with what became a refrain: my discipline is called Composition and Rhetoric, its approach was developed in response to various conditions in U.S. institutions, and it is very student-centered. Writing Centers are a part of that development that works to offer further attention to the writing process for students so there’s time to meet one-on-one. I told her that the experiences she described in her own frustrated literacy narrative earlier in our chat were of teaching methods that Composition had critiqued and worked to improve upon for decades. While other countries have developed their own ways to work with writers, a lot of the developments I was trained in were from the U.S.

“Wow,” she said with sincerity, “you really wouldn’t expect Americans to be better at *that*.” Instead of responding with a question why, I was a bit stunned at her reaction. This experience stayed with me as a kind of persistent puzzle. To see myself through that description unsettled the way I went about my work. I took it as an honest reaction that there was an expectation about Americans by some that put me at a kind of disadvantage in terms of sharing any possible expertise. But at the same time, it seemed like such a casual insult to be comfortable with delivering, for some reason, especially after sitting with her for over an hour to talk through her work. I wondered how the WPA

narratives I read would relate to this experience—was there a cognate in the Composition WPA/WAC/WID literature for this feeling? Was it any different from the ways in which my “local” colleagues were stymied in their claims for change?

Second anecdote: around this same time, I sat in on a meeting in the Business department in which faculty discussed their desire to get students more involved in peer-feedback. They asked me how it worked in America with writing courses and writing centers—how did they get peers to actually be helpful with students? I told them that it often takes a fair amount of time and training, carefully scaffolded and developed. Their goal, it seemed to me then, was primarily to use peer feedback as a way to relieve pressure on the instructor, but my response didn’t fit in well as it would have required significant redesign of the course. So, they said: “Well, not every university is blessed with the money that these American behemoths have to play with. There’s no way we could devote that kind of time to just talk about *writing* here.” I joined that meeting on request because the person leading the group wanted my input. So, in a sense they saw value in part of my outsider identity, but then used that same point to disregard my ideas. These ideas were tied to commitments to student-centered, scaffolded pedagogy, which they told me at first they were interested in learning, but when they resisted these ideas, I had to assume their motives were more interested in other aspects. But, they didn’t admit they weren’t up to it, they made it about *place*.

Making sense of both of these encounters weighed on me heavily, though they might seem relatively small. I turned them over in my mind long after they happened, thinking I could interrogate them for some answers on how to better understand my role in this institution and the values that I carried with me when I came. I believe that

moments like these are explicitly left out of depictions of doing WPA work—and that is especially true of work done internationally. There’s a good reason not to depict such disruptions, because they can be messy and resist easy answers. They can make programs look bad or air dirty laundry. It seemed like in some rooms, and at certain times, the expectations of my identity or my ideas could shift on a whim. I did not want to be a stand-in for “America,” and a proxy for whatever impressions suited my audience, but I didn’t have effective ways of responding to, or shifting, the terms of such retorts. Certain moments forced me to recognize and make sense of how my national background played a role in the success of my project. It is true that my upbringing and nature fit into some narratives of American-ness, and probably the discourses of composition (student-centered, collaborative, process-driven, valuing revision and formative feedback) only enhanced this perception in how it strengthened my resolve to support students in a particular way. But in other ways, this worked as a liability for the project and the arguments I wanted to make for changes. Students and certain instructors would seem to be astonished at the value of my approach in developing the writing center, while others, sometimes in the same breath, could also dismiss my ideas as irrelevant. I struggled to find solid ground in which to base my rhetorical approach for mobilizing my knowledge, or to know where I stood in the larger context of the university.

Part of my professional uncertainty came perhaps from my academic inexperience—though I’d done brief but complex administrative work, tutored in a writing center, and taught courses, departmental meetings were novel. Even though I had been to conferences and had some colleagues in other institutions, it was just a small taste of even the diversity within the United States in terms of institutional context and

approach, let alone grasping the degree of variability that might come into play looking transnationally. Even finding a local history of writing instruction at this institution was a fractured informal ethnography scattered across the various campuses, in offices, or over coffee. As I will discuss more thoroughly later, I believe that part of the labor lining the gap between written job descriptions and the actual work we need to represent is the version of institutional ethnography we all must often do to survive in our roles.

Institutional ethnography describes the way we navigate in response to feeling lost. In this sense, I was struggling in the aspects of the work that were never written down in the literature or the job description. Making the knowledge I needed to navigate came in the form of an informal, casual form of institutional ethnography. With a better set of tools, I could have suffered much less confusion, I believe, and that belief informs this project.

Back to the narrative.

So, while getting working with students, I also had to learn how to operate: to figure out the budget; figure out how to hire folks; figure out a way to get a space in which to offer writing support; figure out how to create a digital presence with information about the center. None of these things were accomplished in fewer than a dozen emails, numerous trainings or certificates, finely worded stipulations, and multiple criticisms for doing something wrong. For example, once I took the internal course (two 3-hour sessions) on how to use the local content management system and post an official webpage for the writing center at the university site. Upon completion of this course, all content needed to be approved before it could be published. In my first post announcing the opening of the writing center, I included an exclamation mark. I was told this was off-brand and not allowed, because exclamations did not fit the professional style guidelines

(remember those? Clearly, I didn't take them seriously enough.) and so the whole post could not be published until it was removed. I called and argued about the mobility of such concepts and their inherent contingency as well as the value of showing a bit of humanity in the prose for the center...and lost. So, I created a Wordpress site and used whatever punctuation I wanted, then linked to it from my official University webpage and built no further content on their system. This is one form of institutional navigation, and it is labor intensive, especially transnationally and *extra*-especially when the local institution has no clear cross-disciplinary structures by which to transfer an outside approach. It's where commitments and policies intersect through real people in particular places/times that I want to locate this work.

I also hired folks. My first hire was a student who came in for a writing center session and showed me her perfectly fine draft and its vague, demeaning feedback along with a failing grade on her work. This stern approach to giving feedback did not agree with my own approach, nor the training as a compositionist. I assured her that the work had many strengths and in no way deserved the insults to her intelligence found in the feedback. She cried and told me how often she was made to feel stupid and how much time she spent struggling to figure out what her professors wanted—clearly to no avail. At the end of the session, I asked her to come back again to chat the following week, and in that second chat I offered her a job as a tutor.

“You seem to care deeply about your writing, and I think that will make you a great tutor,” I said. I asked her to schedule some meetings in her department with instructors to begin gathering information for a writing guide, and the first meeting we scheduled was with the teacher who'd given her such poor feedback. I told her to go and

chat with her as a representative of the writing center and get as many concrete expectations about writing as you can. She came back empowered, with a better understanding of the grey areas of her teacher's expectations, but also with the feeling of being heard and taken seriously. Many instructors both privately and publicly seemed to believe a first-year student could not help anyone with their writing, and I set about changing that idea through demonstration, not confrontation nor argumentation. I also hired staff from non-English speaking backgrounds, again, much to the surprise of many. These newly hired students would come back after meetings with their departmental faculty, often with little to show, because many different departments couldn't offer concrete expectations of their writers, or they didn't take seriously the people I sent to meet with them. Such a concept resonates strongly with sagas of WAC/WID work in communicating across disciplines. One could see the power structures shifting in the writing center staff members' eyes as they started to glimpse the Emperor's wardrobe.

Another institutional navigation I found to be essential, based on my training during my graduate program, was assessment. As soon as I began meeting with students, I wanted some official mechanism by which to ask for feedback from them. In the United States, we have the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and at my U.K. institution they have their Ethics and Research Governance Online (ERGO) approval system. Contacting the office responsible for handling ERGO applications, then navigating the requirements, finding a suitable definition of my role in the institution to satisfy requirements, and then drafting the survey for sharing with students were not listed in my job description, nor were they a requirement. I took it on as part of my role, though, because I wanted that data to understand what students thought, but also as evidence for any future arguments I

might want to make. From the very beginning, this data was illuminating, and overwhelmingly positive. Did it help validate the center to those who could provide institutional support? Who knows, I never got to meet with them.

Many university members who work with student writers were curious, supportive, and relieved that I was offering student support in writing. In particular they appreciated the process-based approach I had learned from composition. They reveled in the idea that something they'd been seeing for years had a term or a title in composition scholarship. It was clear, though, that pieces of process-theory were woven through many teachers' ideals for giving feedback, yet limited by institutional policies. Instructors shared with me their frustration at the rubrics from the department and the software they were required to use as well as the increasing number of students in their courses and the layers of bureaucratic oversight in the process of giving feedback. As I learned more about the conditions under which expectations were articulated and feedback generated, the claims from student writers about ambiguity and inconsistency were echoed by all members of the institution. One could point to software, workload, discourse, training, leadership, and also factors like the language ideologies and epistemologies informing these choices as well as corporate management discourses shaping the work. None of this seems unique to England, but surely in some ways it is particular to that context.

So, starting from my experiences with students in one-to-one sessions as my foundation, and the central assumption of process-theory that students are not deficient (they more often lack practice), I wanted to understand why students seemed to feel so frustrated and why the feedback seemed so unhelpful. The initial layer to help make sense of this pointed towards the instructors who seemed to be unclear in expressing their

expectations and offering actionable feedback that wasn't demeaning. Very few of the instructors I spoke with had any experience as students or teachers with a process-based approach, or any other formal approach aimed at improving writing feedback. But some instructors gave wonderful feedback and welcomed any new approaches. My office-neighbor, when I first arrived, upon hearing about my background, hustled back to his office, crossed out the names on some student texts he'd marked, and handed them to me.

"Would you be willing to let me know how I am doing with my feedback?" he asked. Others had come to many of the same principles I had been taught simply through their own deductions and desire to be useful and supportive to their students. In a sense they had the theories I had been trained in coming through in their intentions, though the terminology was where I could offer new ideas. But these kinds of experiences were few, especially because writing studies in this sense is not an area of study in the same way—there are very few opportunities to even institutionally study academic writing in the U.K. regardless of approach.

Instructors could be charted along a spectrum from indifferently stubborn, on one side, to curious and flexible with academic writing approaches on the other. This spectrum, in my experience, followed no affiliation across age, gender, discipline, nationality, or role. The institutional container for the approach to writing was huge and tangled. I came to see the institutional constraints that these instructors worked against in delivering their feedback were often due to policies made via committees and upper administration members. This policy layer helped me understand the lack of weight that "good" writing instructional practices had on any career success in the eyes of the institution as well as the lack of feedback or consultation taken when making these

policies. It appeared to me then that bureaucracy had diminished dialog, and the lack of feedback persisted throughout each facet of the institution. In this way, I began to see the gravity of what my role represented. What first seemed like a kind of affront/critique of those who were responsible for the status quo became more about structural issues, which spoke to ideologies about “academic literacy” and learning. I felt as though I had no real power to change any of this, and that felt to me most acutely in the sense that I couldn’t mobilize my knowledge, there wasn’t even a way for me to find a room to ask to be let in to speak on behalf of my program. I was structurally irrelevant to decision making with no path forward.

There were serious grumblings about the change that the writing center brought. These grumblings made their way to me indirectly—rarely in any confrontations. Students would tell me that some advisors or teachers told them not to come to the writing center for a number of reasons. Staff would pass on gossip that folks argued against giving the writing center any space to operate. In terms of building allies, I will admit that my approach was not well rhetorically attuned to valuing all differences. Often, I could be unflinchingly direct at addressing what seemed like bad-faith arguments to avoid change even in the best interest of my colleagues. But, I was always looking for local ways to do better, always asking from where these approaches stemmed, and rarely got answers. So, I was not well informed about the processes that had produced the current policies or practices (Reynolds would say they were boxed up). Gaining access to the actors involved in those processes, let alone teasing out the reasons or acknowledging potential missteps, proved elusive. Not knowing the local histories and conditions under which the system functioned meant that I was often reacting out of context. Also, not

realizing just how I was inscribed by larger forces made it difficult to make sense of things.

In hindsight, this time was really one of intensely compressed knowledge-making, because I was meeting with university stakeholders across all kinds of institutional power levels, disciplinary homes, ideological views, and cultural/linguistic backgrounds. I was doing this work as a part-timer without a permanent contract, by the way, telling us more about how seriously writing support was taken by the institution while all of their own metrics pointed to it as maybe *the* central concern in terms of the quality of the education they provided and student success. What I want to point to here is this: week after week I was taking more meetings in undiscovered areas of campus to collaborate on new materials or programs, working with student writers on their texts, negotiating with various staff in different university offices for ways to put ideas into practice or spend budget funding, as well as numerous informal meetings to continue to measure the vicissitudes of upper administration and learn local institutional histories. These meetings involved reading and composing texts, tailored to an ever-growing list of audiences. They involved a performed oral argumentation across all kinds of venues. These rhetorical situations involved a constant push and pull between my sense of self, my growing and changing knowledge of my institutional context, and adaptations to exigencies that I had often never encountered. There was a persistent, yet dynamic, set of rhetorical puzzles that called for knowledge that seemed ever-changing, and an ability to interpret and act on an always-limited set of information. This is the nature of a constant institutional ethnography, and it was central to my role, yet left out of almost all accounting for that work in my and others' experiences. When I ask what is local about this work, what

might be unique, let's say to a UK context, I don't feel I have a great way to disambiguate and respond. Though part of my brain wants to isolate particulars, another part rejects the binarized view of the work being either UK or US related, yet it also rejects the notion that they are fully connected. Herein lies the need for a transnational approach.

For example, if I wanted to hire a student as a peer-writing tutor, I would have to read and understand the budget, often through the guidance of my assigned budget accounts manager as a first step. Next, I would need to contact the appropriate person in human resources to understand how student employees are hired, e.g. how to write a job advertisement according to local specifications, how to list the role, laws and policies on the interview process, how to pay these employees, how to handle conflict, policies related to firing staff, etc. My budget was written with the express purpose of using money to hire graduate students, but I wanted undergraduate students. Once I sorted that out with the account manager, the HR staff told me that the position I described didn't conform to any of their existing undergraduate job profiles, so there was no way I could hire someone on my preferred terms. To hire graduate students, it's more or less one form filled out and filed with the business office, payment comes as one lump sum whenever I wish. To eventually hire the undergraduate students required multiple phone calls, emails, and in-person meetings as well as trainings on policies and practices, as well as editorial oversight on how I phrased the language of my job-postings. But which aspects of these structures were because they were in the U.K.? Or which ones were due to a corporatizing impulse in higher education? Which parts are totally similar to U.S. contexts? It's all of them, in some ways—this is the rub.

In none of these professional interactions was I reassured that my goal was achievable or within the scope of my role or institutional norms. In nearly all of the interactions, there was a local way of describing and discussing these plans that often eluded me, either due to linguistic/rhetorical norms of under-statement, sarcasm, or perhaps outright corporate-style misdirection on whether something would work or not (one of my colleagues, who is American, would ask one of her colleagues, who was English, whether or not an email response meant yes or no). At the same time, all the accomplishments came not only from my maneuvering, but from gracious, patient collaborators creating ways for me to redefine or work around limitations at truly no benefit to them. Merely hiring and making sure employees were paid on time required layers of cultural, professional, rhetorical maneuvering through inquiry, collaboration, and reflection. In the political climate of the university, I would have to ask myself whether the roadblock was institutional norming, in which case why and to what ends? Was it ideological; did process theory mean a shift in thinking too far for some? Was it personal; do folks object to my personality? Was it national; does being an American, and therefore an outsider, lead people to reject some ideas? How was I being read in an interaction? How could I interpret what I was being told would work or not? How could I figure out what's really going on since everything kept changing? These questions are pre-loaded in the work; the answers are not.

Perhaps most importantly, what impact did my understanding of these answers and how I navigated the institution have on the ultimate failure of the project? Like I said before, programs are always rising and falling—that is the exigence of this research. Crucially, any answer I might offer would be partial, due to the contingency and

multiplicity of any event, due to the ways my background and training informs my perceptions, and the limitations of any perspectives to know completely (this partiality is a major player in the dissertation...). So, my study is not about unpacking my failure, it is, in part, about understanding and filling in the gaps in the representations of this work so that others can build on that failure in the service of future successes. The questions that frame my study were the ones that puzzled me and so I pose them to other TWPA's as we collaborate to help make sense of—and account for—the labor they generate in our institutions.

Above, when I wrote that I “hired folks;” recalling Nedra Reynolds, all of this work was boxed up in that phrase—contained, not unpacked. Why did I do that? Why do we do that, as a field? Is it because we think the minutiae won't make for a good article? Is it cut in the service of larger themes or concepts? Is it too mundane or universal that it can't be considered new knowledge? Is it not scholarly? Is it un-professional? I want that work I did, all those uphill battles, as well as the work of those who supported and collaborated with me to accomplish these goals, to be counted. Not only that, when I was doing my job in later phases, I wanted to read more about how folks before me had done that work—to make-sense of a new context and navigate these changes—both locally and cross-institutionally. Part of that sense-making need was supported throughout my work in texts like Lisa Granobcsik-Williams' (2006) *Teaching Academic Writing in UK Higher Education*, which outlined national trends that led to an opening up of admissions, the separation of teaching focused versus research focused institutions, the national raising of tuition rates and how all these moves manifested in different programs and classrooms. I

learned more about the exam systems, recruitment, and the league tables that rank each university and hold great sway.

If I had read Terri Kim (2010) back then, I could have learned, perhaps, more quickly about changing conditions for transnational academics in UK universities. She describes the *casualization* of academic labor as part of a globalized neoliberal market regime that prefers short-term contracts (p. 399). University decisions were increasingly driven by entrepreneurial forces, and internationalization is often only legible through lenses that can be counted and measured in treating knowledge as commodities and identities as conveniently flowing without friction. University academics were being evaluated through business-driven metrics statistically analyzing publication circulation numbers as impact factors rather than rating content, for example (p. 397). And there was no structure whatsoever to on-board me in a way that understood the knowledge I might lack coming from a different national context, yet I, and many others were recruited and hired because of our outside expertise (which as outsider could then likewise be dismissed as irrelevant). Being at a university that was actively seeking out more international students and faculty was (and still is) also coincided with a concurrent massification of higher education *and* a long-term decline in government financial support (p. 397). Kim is absolutely right that being a transnational academic means electing to be a stranger and a minority whose position has been “structured by political and economic forces determining the boundaries and directions of flows” (p. 401). Making sense of these forces is a professional survival skill for transnationally mobile scholars for many reasons, one of which is visa vulnerability.

The end

There were (at least) two simultaneous realities happening in the writing center: one was its overwhelming success and the other was its impending failure. Each semester, I and writing center staff would compose a report to update anyone who would read it about our progress. We kept statistics from our bookings about where students came from, which was always increasing in number and diversity. We kept track of all the workshops we offered in different disciplines and whether they generated income for the center, which were always increasing in number and diversity. We kept track of all the content we created: writing guides, blog posts, advertisements, and videos. We kept track of letters of support from different faculty and staff who wanted to see the center continue. We shared data from workshops in other disciplines that they gathered about our work. We collected and analyzed data from student responses to post-tutorial surveys. We kept records of conferences attended to present on the work done in the center. Our reports overflowed with positive results from as broad of a swath of campus stakeholders as possible and explained how we stuck to a tight budget. All of this was documented, composed, and circulated. Yet, there was no real audience for such a measure, there was no room to which I could go and plead our case. The only readers we had were the ones who agreed we should be open but (apparently) had no ability to make it so.

There were still so many doors that remained closed to me at my institution despite this rapid knowledge-making as I filled in the map around the writing center in an ever-growing radius of scales (department, university, city, country, continent) through articles, books, conversations, and conferences. My ability to rhetorically maneuver various sites and stakeholders and tailor my message to suit exigent needs between student writers, instructors, and staff had sharpened. But still, there was no access to the

power and the purse-strings—what they called “the deanery” and upper administration. I was distraught. There was no way for me to make sense of these two things, the simultaneous success and impending failure, because I had followed all the recommendations of my field, in fact I had in some ways gone beyond them, and none of them really helped me understand what was happening fully.

The writing center project that began from a single shared office for me had grown into two offices and two consultation spaces across two campuses operating day and night with a full staff of ten to twelve people at any one time. We received funding for an additional assistant director instantly upon making the request. Then, during the interview process we found two strong candidates and asked to hire them both and that request was approved the same day. All of our productivity happened in the three semesters of being open for business, and after that third semester there was nothing left. The grant that funded my position and all of the staff ended without so much as a note from those who managed it. I believe that my ability to understand the institution and my role within it was seriously lacking, but I also felt that there was something importantly lacking from scholarship in depicting the realities of this work.

The hundreds of students we reached each semester would again have no place to go with our process approach and our one-to-one attention. There would no longer be a resource for the over-burdened instructors who sent their students to the writing center. No more drop-in workshops in the library. No more writing center voices in staff meetings or curriculum change committees arguing and offering ways to articulate writing expectation more clearly. No more collaborations that include the perspective of process pedagogy informed and re-shaped by our knowledge of the local conditions.

When students wanted a place to go for help with their writing, we were the answer that accepted everyone, that had the most availability and centrality on campus, that had the most time and staff to devote to writers and was also the most popular. International students failing their theses and at the end of their visas facing deportation without their degrees, nurses returning to school after long careers now struggling with the academic discourse demands they couldn't navigate, writers from all programs with feedback and scores that they could not understand how to improve—they told us how they would now find themselves feeling more or less alone in that liminal space the writing center used to share with them. We told them there would be no more writing center and their faces sunk. This says a lot about the values of an institution—a lot that *needs* to be said. But how to say it?

The writing center had tapped into and articulated a need for increased support and offered to continue delivering that support at a fair price. More than rejected, the offer was ignored. Nothing I knew how to do seemed to make that much difference to the success of the project in institutional terms. The sense-making work I could do with the tools available to me hit a limit, partly because I cannot write that the institution did this like it's a stable, singular thing. Nor can I pinpoint good and bad actors. Beyond that sense-making limit lies a way to navigate these institutional realities as a tangle of different practices, ideologies, texts, and a diffuse sense of local concern that in some ways connects and other ways breaks off from global knowledge. Institutions and experiences like mine are sites of inquiry for understanding how institutions function, and what they value through writing and global institutions offers a way to broaden the map and broaden the discourse in composition. More than increasing the field's awareness,

though, there are important and difficult questions lying in the exigence of a global or transnational education paradigm. Academic writing as an act, a discourse, and a field sits at important epistemic, cultural, linguistic, and social intersections where power materializes across an institution. I believe we need to continue moving in whatever directions help us see ways to understand and use that power ethically—in ways that promote equity and respond effectively to student needs.

I believe one important step in a productive direction starts with capturing the work that is already done by TWPA's to make sense of their institutions with as much richness as possible. Working ethnographically, we might co-construct a better understanding by working to hear and represent in more detail what really happens. My closest colleagues, ones who had the most experience working in this institution, insisted that I was up against an academic writing “culture.” I must insist that such cultures make useful frames for discussing amalgams of forces and certain scales of activity, but they are not stable nor discrete concepts. And they are inherently difficult to articulate. My colleagues insisted that I was an outsider to this institutionally localized writing culture, as were others who sought change. The map of that locality, though, doesn't follow a geo-political border like a nation or a city, nor does it confine itself to the borders of the university. So, how do we understand and analyze it? For this project, through institutional ethnography and theories of mobility.

To consider how writing is a foundation of nearly any institution, across many languages and places, means the map of the academic writing cultures that inhabit them is large. Much like the labor of any WPA over-flows from the limits of its official job description; much like how mobile knowledge resists being contained; languages, genres,

and identities exceed the supposedly stable bounds of their origins and call on us to understand that mobility instead of simply devising new (sedentary) categories. The nature of the work demands a way to articulate and navigate through these concepts. Amy Zenger, I think, is exactly right that there need to be more nuanced theorizations of program creation and development in transnational contexts. Those theorizations should be built on the work already being done to make sense of the consequences of this unstable, but profound, mobility in places like Border Studies, Sociolinguistics, Cultural Geography, Literacy Studies, Gender Studies, Comparative Rhetoric, Critical Race, and also Composition.

TWPA work, for this project, is not just what happens to Composition and WPA work when it leaves the United States. My concerns are rooted in transnational/mobilities paradigms; how we navigate the complex issues that arise when material and rhetorical borders are reconfigured. What do we need in order to bring about new narratives and theories that serve a more mobile understanding? My interest lies in the reconfigurations and sense-making that occur when looking *through* a transnational lens, and what I am looking *at* for this project is WPA work, because I find it to be a rich site of inquiry. That transnational lens asserts the fact that the reality is tangled and seeks not to un-tangle it. Transnationality resists the urge to separate, isolate, and taxonomize. TWPA work, positioned as it is at an intersection of many powerful streams of knowledge and material effect, allows us to make sense of and potentially leverage that tangled-ness in the service of our programs and commitments.

I study WPA work, because that is how I came to my understanding of transnationality, which means I have a place in the TWPA community—something I find

essential to navigating and researching this topic. TWPA work also raises crucial unanswered questions that can inform composition studies (as WPA work is central to composition) as well as contribute to the broader global writing studies discipline. The questions raised by TWPA work are crucial, because it has been my experience and I see it in many other cases as well, that writing programs worldwide appear to survive or perish based on institutional factors much more-so than their effectiveness with students. Maybe more importantly, writing work sits at a powerful nexus of forces influencing the production of knowledge in ways that need to be unpacked. To understand writing's role, we need to know more about what's happening on the institutional level in transnational writing programs—so, as I see it, let's start with the people doing that work day-to-day.

The next chapter will chart a development of WPA literature becoming TWPA literature. Following that, chapter 3 will offer a description of the various existing methodologies grappling with the theoretical consequences of the academic mobility (as a response to sedentarist conceptualizations) at the heart of TWPA identities. Then, I will include other narratives of TWPA work gathered through interviews that point to a few key transnational events that help us understand the efficacy of and need for more nuanced understandings. Lastly, I will conclude with what I see as important ways forward through certain aspects of mobility and social theories of practice. Amy Zenger (2018) pointed out the need for more nuance in order to capture and better theories of transnational relationships inherent to TWPA work; and these better theorizations should work in the service of actual programs toward better futures. That is the task I take up in this project. In making transnational work and institutions more visible through TWPA narratives, we may begin to ask new, better critical questions about the confluence of

powerful forces in the global education world that are inextricably tied to writing as a form of knowledge making and a commodity; not just what is happening in all this mobility, but how and why.

CHAPTER II

THE GLOBAL TURN FROM WPA TO TWPA

The need for a more globally situated, internationally cognizant position for composition and rhetoric has been taken up in various ways. Critical voices frame the importance of not only turning towards other distant contexts, but for a transnational understanding of how power and place are mobile and material. Many contributions to a more international/global discussion do the equivalent of planting a flag to mark that a writing program or a piece of scholarship exists in/from a particular place. These are valuable in that they show a growing diversity of voices and representations for writing studies. Using the term “transnational” to describe work that is “establishing” a location can be a bit of a stretch, though, because that requires a more critical approach to power in relationships and more complex tracings of place. Works that take a more critical, theoretical transnational approach to discussing writing studies contribute a more nuanced understanding of the work that is more representative and instructive.

A transnational approach need not be international, as a mobilities orientation reminds us, but for the purposes of this project, I am primarily looking at sites outside of the U.S. as they are too often excluded from WPA research. Thus, I see TWPA literature as a strong sub-set within this under-represented transnational group of scholarship, often grappling with the rich intersections of different scales present in institutional work. Even these more nuanced TWPA texts, though, have their limitations—often the narratives

struggle to describe complexity within the confines of short form articles, and they try to fit the work through an external and often limiting framework. It is this gap in language and theory that my work aims to address by taking a more sustained look at power through an institutional ethnographic approach (outlined in Chapter 3) that will trace the navigation of individuals' experiences as they work to make sense of their writing program realities. This chapter looks closely at these trends in the literature to better articulate a transnational approach and the ways in which TWPA work can be located and contribute to its development. Lastly, I will arrive at how my work can address the calls for more nuanced theories to push TWPA understandings further.

Transnational framing

Broadly speaking, the long-term trends of increased access to higher education and the more recent expansion of higher education into a global marketplace via new technological (mass media, transportation), economic (fast capitalist) and ideological (neoliberal) developments—with the concomitant increases in diversity and mobility of students and scholars—has translated into desires for new voices, new narratives, and new theories to help understand and represent this growing heterogeneity. With that being said, these changes are part of a long history of global movements that predates and continues through these modern developments. As a particular orientation to international/global developments and changes, the term “transnational” can describe physically crossing national borders, but it is also a paradigm evoked when the unit of analysis shifts from the national to challenge conventional notions of racial, gender, ideological, and linguistic identifications. Transnationality works, also, to highlight the presence of diversity and marginalized voices within geopolitical boundaries. The

transnational, in a sense, not only crosses borders, it re-draws the maps, and points us to the very constructedness of those national identifications that we might take for granted. So, it is about much more than nations interacting (i.e. international)—it opens the doors to a conversation about categories. It shows us a more mobile, manifold, and contingent world rather than a received set of sedentarist notions of sturdy, blunt borders.

A transnational orientation requires attending to power and place while containing the potential slippage between transnational and global/international through acknowledging mobility of categories across time and space. Transnationality is not a *rejection* of categories, it is a recognition of, and engagement with, their fluid and emergent character. Scholars pointing to the specific limitations in composition related to its insularity are not simply calling for comparisons with other contexts or inclusion of distant voices, but for a reassessment of ontological and epistemological commitments in the discipline to power and identity. Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism*, a cornerstone of post-colonial studies, introduced the notion of imagined geographies as powerful identity constructions. In the case of his argument, he described a Western cultural perspective that popularizes a view of Eastern cultures as other (e.g. uncivilized, feminine, weak, ignorant). Though these geographies are imagined, that doesn't mean they are immaterial, which is something Wendy Hesford (2006) took up when she borrowed Said's term in her call for a "global turn" for rhetoric and composition.

Hesford uses the term "imagined geographies" to describe disciplinary spaces/approaches as "entangled" within the Composition discipline but entangled more so as composition reaches out towards other disciplines and different physical geographies (p. 789). She cautions us to not duplicate top-down, imperial approaches; to

“turn away from preoccupations with disciplinary identity,” (p. 797) and to engage both global and local signifiers as traveling yet bound by material forces (p. 793). She frames the global turn around these entangled imagined geographies and the need to move beyond recognized and reified binaries like self/other that helped define (and confine) earlier approaches. The turn toward the global field requires supporting scholarly and pedagogical work that resists binaries and what she calls “disciplinary homeland nostalgia” (p. 797). Boundaries and binaries are up for reconfiguration, yet never to be separated from their various material realities.

Hesford’s global turn resonates strongly with how I and others use the term “transnational.” One way to visualize the transnational shift is to think of a map and the information it presents as certain layers, or scales, of meaning. The first image might be of a geopolitical map that tracks national borders and delineates land and sea. Things that are salient at this level are relatively few, though not small: federal laws, citizenship or legal status through passports and visas, global sporting events (World Cups, Olympics), international military conflicts, and also that amorphous sense of a national identity. But choosing to add the layer of the languages in use by people in these spaces, for example, yields a messily entangled set of data that not only does not abide so strictly by national borders, but also has multiple layers on top of each nation for often different practices among different communities, not to mention the presence of transnational communities connected through mobile individuals (immigrants, refugees). Or, perhaps closer to the core of this project, a layer for a single disciplinary network of scholars like those in writing studies would spread and stretch across borders, too, and not fit neatly along linguistic borders either. Instead, the knowledge and people using disciplinary discourses

are mobilized and connected in different ways around the globe. A transnational focus points to these extra-national ways to connect or separate identities and spaces based on various markers, yet also maintains that one cannot simply reject the notions of national borders—they are salient for various legal permissions like visas as well as rhetorical realities of how one is treated in particular places.

A map presented with just these three features is already, as Hesford would theorize it, entangled; disciplinary identities shot through with the different languages both within and across different national contexts; national borders shot through with a variety of language users and disciplinary identities. National histories, laws, societies all filtered through the local experiences of a particular person in a particular location, yet also in some ways connecting across certain types of difference with other particular locations if there is shared language or disciplines or anything else. Lastly, a transnational theorist would also want to point out that even those national borders are in flux (e.g. Spain and Catalonia, Israel and Palestine, Iraq and Kurdistan), subject to change as points of interpretation yet emerging material realities.

It is in this spirit that writing studies can and should be taken as a global discipline that is transnational; its discourse and materiality provide a layer on an ever-changing map that crosses national borders and is still subject to certain national realities. Writing studies is shot through with different scales of meaning (individual, pedagogical, departmental, institutional, disciplinary, linguistic, epistemological, theoretical, geopolitical, and other factors)—each one of them a matryoshka doll of further layers (like an individual can be read intersectionally according to race, religion, gender, age, etc.). A full world map of all these layers is not the purview of this project, but the image

of a map should be useful as a way to make sense of theoretical entanglement of the emergent, unstable nature of boundaries. A full map would also be a bit futile given the realities of mobility. A material map appears to us as stable, the information empirical, the view complete, but a transnational orientation reminds us this is not so. A map is an incomplete glimpse of a constructed sense of place with select information highlighted. Seeing the overlapping of these layers that do not fit within the putative stability and impermeability of national boundaries is one way to describe what it means to orient oneself transnationally—to both use the map and recognize its limits.

Christiane Donahue (2009) has described the dominant view of those in the U.S. for theories of teaching, learning, and understanding writing around the world as “highly partial, portraying the issue in particular ways, largely export-based” (p. 214). She argues even more directly that “the fundamental problem of imagining internationalizing composition as export is that this is precisely its source as colonialist activity” (p. 215). What she means is that this highly partial view places composition at the intellectual center of global writing studies and assumes that composition imports problems and exports expertise—and this is a colonialist set of assumptions (p. 226). She points out that research traditions within the U.S.-based composition field have been highly suspicious of systematic inquiry using “recognizable, reliable, and replicable data-gathering approaches” (p. 230), but that beyond the U.S. in the larger writing studies field, these approaches were never abandoned and still hold great authority. So, to assume that the approaches of a U.S.-based compositionist would be taken as highly influential expertise is not practicable worldwide. In response to this assumed dominance, and in the service of better understanding and global interaction, Donahue contends that we need to “begin

thinking about where our work fits in the world rather than where the world's work fits into ours, and move beyond an 'us-them' paradigm" (p. 214). This requires a recognition that there is no abstract default for composition studies as universal, but that "U.S. framings are always culturally, geographically, and historically located and loaded" (p. 232). There are domains and traditions beyond composition studies that exist, and for a solidly grounded sense of university writing, those domains and traditions need to be included in calculating composition's orientation to the larger world.

What's of concern in the arguments of Hesford and Donahue is the orientation of the very U.S.-centered field of composition and rhetoric. Orientation here means the way those in the field appear to perceive themselves and their work in relation to places and people beyond the United States as evidenced through publications, conference topics, and institutional practices. As these two scholars attest, there is a sense of the default superiority and universality of a "composition approach," that, as it turns a blind eye to the influence and relevance of other contexts, becomes less and less tenable and more and more parochial. The *re*-orientation that is called for would counter these assumptions and *de*-center composition approaches—which have been fitted to local U.S.-based institutional contexts—as the dominating voice/discourse/language for global writing studies, thereby, opening new modes of interaction, better engagement between distant scholars, and the space for different approaches in a larger conversation.

So, the term "transnational" emerges as a way to represent the shifting layers that blur and complicate borders beyond the assumed stability of a nation-as-container. To do this requires finding transnationally rich units of analysis. Applying the term "transnational" as a replacement for national or international risks a slippage that

undermines the power of a transnational orientation. Yes, depending on how one looks at any location or phenomenon, it can be seen as transnational, as existing within the large surplus of layers and connections that cannot be contained within a particular border. But, to think of transnationality as an *a priori* state, simply inherent as a result of the nature of things, erases the potential to take up a transnational orientation as a way to critique power and complexity being enacted through received notions of place, tradition, culture, language.

Understanding power dynamics is central to a transnational awareness. Hesford and Schell (2008) argue that rhetoric and composition would benefit from a more critical engagement with transgeographical concepts, transnational constructs, transnational ethnic configurations, and considerations of epistemological and historical developments connecting disciplinary formations and U.S. imperialism (p. 463). They are critical of how idealized or romanticized distortions of work—like Pratt’s contact zones or Anzaldúa’s transculturations—elevate hybridity or interconnection without giving enough attention to (U.S. imperialist) power. They describe this lack of attention as composition’s un-critical cosmopolitanism and see it as a failure to notice “national nativisms, i.e. increased border control and surveillance in the name of national security, the reliance of transnational corporations on nation-states for the control of labor, the English-only movement, and the strategic eliding of the immigrant past of the United States and other Western countries” (p. 463). Transnationality is inherently a concept of contradictions that require engagement, but, borrowing from Inderpal Grewal, Hesford and Schell write that the term *transnational* has been used in rhetoric and composition in at least two ways: “1) as a synonym for present contexts or context defining forces—with

little recognition of how transnationality challenges traditional understandings of context; and 2) as a synonym for globalization (namely global movements toward the West), with little recognition of how all national formations are constructed within and often solidified by transnational connectivities” (p. 464). By recognizing the challenges to context and national identity construction, they imply that rhetoric and composition can build a better engagement with transnationality. However, their definition of transnationality as “the movements of people, goods, and ideas across national borders...often used to highlight forms of cultural hybridity and intertextuality” points toward a shift in “the objects and areas of study,” (p. 463) highlights more movement than the theoretical approach offered by Dingo, Reidner, and Wingard, which will most align with my own.

As Dingo, Reidner, and Wingard (2013) have also argued, there has been slippage between the global and transnational that has caused a lack of attention to power by composition and rhetoric scholars. In their article, Dingo et al. argue against the use of the term “transnational” to denote global exchange or describe sites for rhetorical and literacy work that happens outside of the U.S. or in locations designated as “other.” They prefer transnational as a “complex, networked understanding of power” (p. 518), a “theoretical apparatus” (p. 520), and a “process” (p. 526). For them, scholars have a responsibility not just to bring readers into contact with those across the globe but to “show the inherent influence each site has on one-another” (519). Living up to that responsibility means addressing globalized neoliberal and capitalist power as central to the transnational ties that connect and direct subjects. Considering how at the core of composition and rhetoric, scholars engage in discussions of globalization related to

intercultural awareness, literacy, and language, as well as describing neoliberalism in terms of institutional work, Dingo et al. write of their surprise that “these lines of scholarship in the field *still* hold to the transnational as a particular location and/or relationship between set locations and as such are not addressing geopolitical power” (p. 519). Reading through the literature that is to come in this chapter, this is a useful guide as we look for transnationality on two fronts: place and power.

Works within writing studies discussing place to a more international/global audience will report (often in English) about a single location (e.g. a writing center project in Romania, writing in Poland), establishing a foundation of knowledge about what’s happening in a particular place on a particular geographic scale. Even if different contexts are established as influences, these might be seen as coming from stable, set locations (i.e. the U.S.-model), and remain brief in detail or complexity. As works begin to embody a more transnational agenda, they will increasingly complicate the relationships between different contexts, they will offer more nuance and specificity in the way they describe their subjects. Importantly, they will also critique the power relations in the tangled connections between different contexts to bring forth a more elaborate picture of what is happening and why for a particular place. Transnationality therefore becomes taken up as a critical, theoretical way to unpack (yay for travel puns!) and make sense of the nuances that an international approach might reduce and smooth over for the sake of other goals (e.g. establishing a place on a map for a single location). Transnationality ties people and places together through relationships that create opportunities to craft effective analyses, ethical responses, and political opposition to the forces of power exerted in globalized, neoliberal developments. To not explore those

opportunities; to not recognize that fixed locations can no longer account for the constructedness of social, historical, and national sites; to not make visible the material inequalities created by that ongoing practice of global power, is (to paraphrase Dingo et al.) to be irresponsible. If we follow the notion that transnational work is also theoretical work, and therefore, WPA work is also the work of a theorist, then there is a connection through theorizing that binds the transnational and WPA—such is how I am defining TWPA work.

(T)WPA as theorizing

In their introduction to their collection on WPAs as theorists, Rose and Weiser (2002) define a theorist as “someone who develops theory or adapts/adopts/tests theory as a way of conceptualizing, organizing, explaining, analyzing, reflecting on, and interpreting experiences and specialized knowledge gained through experience or observation” (p. 2). They describe individual WPAs recognizing the theoretical nature of their work in order to be successful, the importance of WPAs as a group sharing an understanding of the work, and the importance of sharing how the work is like theoretical work in other disciplines, but also unique (p. 2). The goal, as stated in the editors’ chapter at the end of the collection, is to argue that “writing program administrators must themselves be theorists” (p. 183). This depiction, paralleled in their earlier definition of a theorist, sees a WPA as reflectively seeking explanations of phenomena in order to understand them well enough to act toward a specific purpose in a particular context (p. 183). It would seem to me, then, that this is especially true for doing WPA work transnationally as it is theoretically constructed above. TWPA work requires attention to complex phenomena, the need to understand well enough to act, and the need to achieve

goals in a particular context (which, again requires a thorough understanding of that context). This carries with it the assumption that the mobility inherent in transnational work raises the stakes in understanding and assessing these purposes and contexts.

Rose and Weiser's definition of theory is clear and instructive. They write that, at its simplest, a theory is an explanation, but it's also slightly more complicated: "not every explanation is a theory" (p. 184). For an explanation to be a theory, it must account for more than a single instance for the phenomenon it seeks to explain. For it to be a useful theory, it will fit as an explanation for similar events. In the observation and reflection done to develop a theory, Rose and Weiser see the work of theorizing. This is not the same as problem solving, nor does every situation or problem require a theory to solve. But, to theorize is to observe, and reflect on, "persistent, recurring problems, attempting to understand what they have in common, to identify principles and causes, and to develop a generally applicable explanation for them—a theory about this problem" (p. 184). What I find helpful and powerful in their definition is that theorizing is a day-to-day project that seeks patterns and explanations, is responsive to changes in contexts and rhetorical situations, and ultimately leads to actions fitted to local conditions for a particular purpose. Their theory work is active, and as such tracing active theory work is part of—is always already a constituent of—how I see TWPA work, which is the subject and endpoint of this chapter.

Thus, to under-theorize TWPA work is to assume a frictionless, disinterested mobility of the work to a new location. The best TWPA work that is contributing the most to the understanding of a transnational orientation observes, reflects, and acts as a theorist would to understand phenomena in ways that apply across contexts as

explanations. A mobile WPA, for such purposes, is an important source of knowledge. The rest of this literature review is a brief tour through the points that help us understand how transnational work moved from establishing/explaining to critiquing/theorizing with the inclusion of power, mobility, and materiality in its depiction of writing studies work rooted to particular places. I will move through the works that appear to demonstrate the ways in which particular explanations or theorizations are developed. Eventually, this will help us to understand the ways in which TWPA work that pushes for critical theorizing frames the gap, or finds the cutting-edge, that this dissertation aims to address.

The more critical and focused deployment of the term “transnational” (not simply to refer to different sites, but as a theoretical apparatus attentive to power and the tangled relationships cast across different contexts) is one that I adopt as well, and it informs my reading of transnational literature in the process of focusing in on TWPA work, which, reminder, is the goal of this project. This more critical, theoretically focused transnational orientation raises questions of power (through access to resources, linguistic hegemony, and the geopolitics of knowledge creation) seen interacting with mobile signifiers and the constructedness of place across multiple scales. As such, critically oriented TWPA scholarship points us to ineffectiveness with how transnationality has been taken up and theorized in the consequential struggles to navigate the practical, material, day-to-day decisions and interpretations inherent in TWPA work, knowledge of which is essential to continue developing and progressing writing programs. The rise and development of this transnational orientation parallels literature developments that push beyond the first wave of narratives to establish more places on the writing studies map with more nuanced and complex notions of place and power.

Global/Transnational Composition

There has been a shift from the purely import model of international academic exchange due to changing narratives and relationships for international students and institutions. Nigel Healy (2018) states that in the increasing demand for higher education worldwide, there is still a stubbornly low number—2%—of students willing to leave their homes and to cross national borders for education (p. v). To meet that increased demand, many institutions in the US, UK, and Australia shifted their international recruiting relationships into international education agreements—effectively bringing some version of foreign education to these students. Branch campuses and other configurations of partnerships, programs, and collaborations between various institutions in a globalized context of higher education knowledge exchange are prolific and, by many metrics, on the rise (Naidoo, 2009).

Cross-border enrollments—including distance learning, double and joint degrees, or franchise relationships—far exceed enrollments of international students on home campuses. Institutional reconfigurations and expansions across the globe raise numerous questions about the strategies of curriculum delivery, adaptation, and continuity, as well as questions about the risks of being commercially exploitative or academically neo-colonial (Healey, 2018). In the context of this global interconnection, academic writing is foundational as perhaps the central form of student assessment, knowledge production, research circulation, professional advancement, as well as disciplinary and institutional legitimacy. Compositionists and other writing studies scholars are increasingly circulating around the world and taking up these issues through publications, international conferences, site visits, faculty and administrative positions, and research

collaborations. Partly in response to these trends, increasing numbers of composition programs are globally diversifying their relationships to other disciplines and universities (Anson, 2008; Moscovitz, 2007).

For those interested in writing's role in academic knowledge production, especially the impact of English language writing, this global context raises numerous concerns. A CCCC "Statement on Globalization..." (2017) provides an introduction and a strong reading list in its appendix. Recent special issues of *Composition Studies*⁶, *Across the Disciplines*⁷, and *Literacy in Composition Studies*⁸; book-length collections on teaching (Fraiberg et al., 2017; Payne & Dessler, 2011; You, 2018); writing programs worldwide (Thaiss et al., 2012); and administration (Arnold et al., 2017; Martins, 2014) mark an official commitment by composition to join in the global writing studies conversation and to look outward at the roles these new exchanges offer. One core area is writing research expanded to include international sites for domestically generated writing studies⁹.

One more recent concept driving that global change in awareness is mobility (Blommaert & Horner, 2017; Cresswell, 2002; Horner et al., 2021). Composition has taken up mobility (Nordquist, 2017) and transnational mobility (Lorimer-Leonard, 2018) in literacy studies, primarily looking at learners and the ways they cross traditional institutional boundaries in the ways in which they come to learn writing. The majority of the attention related to transnationality in the U.S. has been devoted domestically to *student* academic mobility. There is a more recent attention to international writing

⁶ Brian, R. & Theado, C. (Eds). (2016).

⁷ Frigo, S. & Fulford, C. (Eds). (2018); Horner, B. & Hall, J. (Eds.) (2018).

⁸ Lorimer-Leonard, R., Viera, K. & Young, M., (Eds.) (2015).

⁹ See conversations offered by Sullivan, Zhang, & Zheng (2012) and Townsend (2002).

programming mobility in response to internationalization and globalization trends in transnational higher education. *Scholar* academic mobility, though, has been under-represented in composition scholarship. As I noted in Chapter 1, scholarship on academic mobility is largely driven by work in the UK (Kim, 2010; Pherali, 2012). This presents a gap to be filled with discussion of how transnational scholarly mobility in writing studies affects program development and teaching practices and in turn speaks back to composition with the new knowledge grounded in the sense-making work done in non-US geographic locations. The potential theorizing done by mobile WPAs can be seen as parallel with other trans-theoretical and -methodological theories/methodologies in literacy studies (transliteracy¹⁰), language ideology (translingualism¹¹), rhetorical theory (recontextualization¹², marking difference¹³), feminist/queer/gender theory (intra-action¹⁴, transmaterialities¹⁵), critical race theory (intersectionality)¹⁶, and others.

Let me note that there is not a clear straight line of chronological, disciplinary, or geographical development from international to transnational voices. Nor are there single collections that embody one or the other completely, or even a clean boundary where an individual article is either inter- or trans- national. There are important parallels in the discourse of Second Language Writing (SLW) that helped form the calls within composition for a more transnational orientation (it articulated the need for reorientation, but it was mostly student focused, and based on an import model). Matsuda (2006) argues that, historically, assuming a “native speaker” as the norm was accurate on the surface in

¹⁰ Smith and Prior, 2019.

¹¹ Horner, Donahue, and NeCamp, 2011.

¹² Mao, 2013.

¹³ Kerschbaum, 2014.

¹⁴ Barad, 2007.

¹⁵ Barad, 2015.

¹⁶ Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw et al., 1995

the mid-nineteenth century, when access to college education was more restricted. As more diverse students increased their presence in classrooms—first race, class, and gender; then later recognizing linguistic and ethnic diversity—Composition responded to the increased presence of non-privileged varieties of English “not by adjusting its pedagogical practices systematically at the level of the entire field but by relegating the responsibility of working with those differences to second language specialists” (p. 638). Consequently, many international students still take an exam upon entrance to their university that will place them in either a section of mainstream composition or sections for Basic or “ESL” writers (Silva, 1993). Matsuda refers to this as a “policy of linguistic containment” (2006, p. 641). SLW describes the development of important questions raised in the context of teaching writing to a growing diversity of students and overlaps with conversations on digital composing (Gonzales, 2018), cultural identity (Atkinson, 2003), and especially to WPA work (Preto-Bay and Hansen, 2006; Rafoth, 2015; Shuck, 2006; Zawacki, 2014). The SLW field maintains the importance of challenging language assumptions by unlearning value systems and developing new ways to understand and support diverse writing identities and practices.

However, this more globalized gaze has had much more uptake in attending to more diverse students *coming to* U.S. institutions and the best adjustments to make in understanding and engaging those students—what Christiane Donahue refers to as import versus export. Or, in other terms, composition, when it has looked towards national and linguistic diversity, has been almost completely in the sense of international *student* academic mobility *to* the United States (which is partly fitting in that the overwhelming majority of official composition courses have historically and are currently held within

United States institutions). There is a much smaller thread that looks beyond composition classrooms to find other international/transnational contexts, and takes a look at *scholar* academic mobility *beyond* the United States to programs located in other geo-political contexts. There is also growing attention towards the phenomenon of those from backgrounds other than North American moving *to* the United States to work as writing scholar-teacher-WPAs. In these emergent threads taking to heart scholar mobility, transnationality, and writing studies, I locate my focus on TWPA scholars. To see this work requires a shift outward from the conventional domestic and student-focused view of composition.

International and Transnational Writing Studies

I think the best starting point for this outward shift towards a global position for composition and eventually TWPA work comes from Muchiri et al. (1995), who issued in *CCC* a strong critique of the limitations facing composition when seen from a more global writing studies view. As part of a research group at Lancaster University in the U.K., the writers discuss what happens when primarily North American-centered materials from Composition are imported into new contexts; both in the U.K. and the writers' home nations in Africa. Their article is meant to remind composition researchers "what they take for granted that is local to their institutions and nation" (p. 176). Here we hit on a key term for the global turn: *local*. Variable in scope, and abstract as a concept, the idea of the local is often binarized and contrasted with the global. In this case, using terms and ideas that aren't accessible or relevant to wider audiences demonstrates a set of assumptions in the scholarship of compositionists. Muchiri et al. describe the very different material factors and cultural conditions students bring to university and outline

how Composition often fails to be relevant to distant local concerns for their own work. Their larger position argues that disciplinary acknowledgement is inextricably tied to material factors, often related to particular places, which are too often overlooked.

Muchiri et al.'s main points are related to power discrepancies in the hegemonic relationships that swirl around the influence of the English language, the geopolitics of knowledge production, and unequal access to material resources (books, computers, space, money) in various places around the world. This is where power and place collide to produce tangles of differential conditions around the world. Muchiri et al. remind readers that "Clearly there is something rather odd about the academic map, so that hundreds of small institutions in North America and Europe are on it, and others elsewhere are off it" (p. 184). Though a map is an inherently geographic visualization, they are arguing to make visible what else comes along with that academic invisibility. They write that "It is important to stress that lack of money and time by faculty members is as important in marginalizing research as geography" (p. 185; see also Canagarajah, 2002; Lillis & Curry, 2010).

Though they do not use the term transnational, the Muchiri et al. article is clearly in keeping with the attention to power and place outlined by the more critical transnational approach established earlier. Their article is maybe not the first to raise each of their concerns for composition, but they connected and laid the groundwork for the concepts by which a transnational orientation could coalesce later. They describe a view of a more interconnected and complex conversation around global relationships, rather than old colonial metaphors and rigid boundaries. The most basic suggestion comes in working to delineate the varied assumptions made by composition research about

students, teachers, language, and universities, because some of these are “refreshing in these new contexts, some have to be questioned, and some seem bizarre” (p. 176). Though it is a somewhat small rhetorical move, it is productive to think through this parsing (some aspects as *x*, some aspects as *y*) as a core aspect of a transnational approach. To not take such an approach means collapsing and reducing differences into simplified narratives that may limit the degree to which real relationships can be represented, which means to support wholesale transplanting of programs or policies from one context to another. To write that there is such a thing as “The U.S. approach” as a wholesale form without unpacking it means collapsing so much important information, but a defining feature of a transnational discourse is to offer nuance through parsing important details contained in such broad geographic terms.

Building on the calls from Muchiri et al. (1995) and acknowledging the mobility trends in internationalizing higher education, more voices entered the writing studies conversation, which up to that point was clearly dominated by Anglophone writers in the U.S. context. Brauer’s (2002) article is often cited in works from outside the U.S. for its claim that North American writing centers cannot be transplanted but should “grow directly out of existing structures and their cultural contexts” (p. 62). Such a notion of avoiding transplantation calls forth the initial need for more representation, for establishing the narratives of what’s happening in other, more global sites. This, what I call, “establishing voice” is prevalent among a lot of the currently existing literature outside of the United States.

The introduction to the self-described first English anthology on European writing studies by Björk et al. (2003) explains that the collection is divided into two sections: part

one is on texts and writers, part two is on teaching academic writing in larger contexts beyond the text-writer-teacher level (pp. 4-5). The introduction piece by the editors also makes clear that the contributors come from a range of different disciplines: “mother-tongue language studies, literature, pedagogy, psychology, rhetoric, and medicine” and foreground different perceptions of targets for the teaching of academic writing as: “epistemological, motivational, social, cognitive, linguistic, aesthetic, emotional” (p. 3). The chapter then goes on to describe the European context in terms of trends in massification, diversification, and international inspiration that have led to the developments reported in the collection. This is a good example of the trend in global writing studies collections of transnational theorizing (of doing the work to parse differences and trace connections between various locations) in the introductions and conclusions but letting individual articles assume or assert national identities.

These transnational theorizations often connect chapters that do not individually reflect such attention to place. This division is instructive as a lot of literature in global writing studies, especially collections, contains a similar divide, and it should also be said that early works pre-date a serious uptake of the term “transnational.” While the first part of the book focuses on concrete suggestions for text-writer-teacher practitioners, the latter part does begin to address the theoretical and methodological underpinnings for the contributors’ various approaches with the critical and theoretical transnational orientation.

In one example of a more transnational orientation from an early collection, Olga Dysthe (2003) outlines a historical and contextual background for the absence of a prominent place for writing studies in Norwegian higher education. She traces various

influences from German and American institutions in the policies and practices of different Norwegian universities. She writes that while experiences in foreign institutions have shaped the program, “local studies carry more weight as a basis for in service training of teachers than for instance American or Australian research” (p. 158). Dysthe makes moves to position Norway among different influences for their curriculum like this: “Norway occupies a middle position between the United States, where students specialize late, and England and France where students start their specialization in secondary school” (p. 163). This middle position has meant that workshops and courses in academic writing have had to be tailored to the specific curricula in local universities that will help students learn to write in their disciplines in particular ways—drawing on process pedagogy, but not first year composition courses. So, rather than outright rejecting other models, they are adapted, and those adaptations are communicated across an array of conditions, and particular influences are traced. Because of its work to parse the nuanced influences (rather than take a complex location wholesale) of its middle location as it establishes a narrative, I would call this a more transnational program report. There is a similar level of attention to representing and parsing relationships across different contexts in the final chapter by Blythman, Mullin, Milton, and Orr (2003) in their discussion of the concept “study support” as its been taken up at two colleges of the London Institute, influenced by the University of Toledo in the U.S. and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Canada.

Frank, Haacke, and Tente (2003), in slight contrast to the delicate and thorough work of tracing done by Dysthe, spend more of their article in narrating the work done in establishing their Writing Lab in Bielefeld, Germany. There is brief mention of the

influence of U.S. writing models in generating government funding in Germany, and they describe their writing lab as an “adoption” by an existing institution of an interdisciplinary research center at the University of Bielefeld, and attribute much of its success to this connection (166). The cooperation with different academic staff and the local influences in these connections are what the article explores, and I would thus call the chapter more of an international program report. The same can be said for the two chapters that follow by Orr and Blythman (2003) and Kramer, van Kruiningen, and Padmos (2003)—the latter of which includes, at the very end of their discussion a section on the European context as a gesture towards larger discussions and explanations of trends (p. 194). This is, again, to point out that rarely can one find a piece that is either inter- or trans-national. Instead, the degree to which engagement with nuance and parsing as contributing to the nature and success of a program is where I find the most salient transnational articulation.

This collection by Bjork et al., then, is useful for helping us make sense of the rest of the literature as it relates to this project in a number of important ways. First, it helps us tentatively separate the text-writer-teacher level of practitioner discussion from the larger program-and-beyond levels where we might find more transnational theorizing and discussion of TWPA-related issues. The majority of the internationally focused texts discuss a particular facet of teaching writing through the terms of student demographics, genre, feedback, etc. and the institutional experiences that shape various developments (Bazerman, 2012; Bazerman et al., 2019). The WAC Clearinghouse group of publications as part of their International Exchanges on the Study of Writing book series (for example Pérez Abril, & Rincón Bonilla, 2013) as well as Brill’s Studies in Writing book series

map out global, multilingual approaches and contexts to writing studies (for example Castelló & Donahue, 2012).

Secondly, among these program-and-beyond texts, we can draw a tentative line on one side of which we find the transnational theorizing work done in the introduction chapter that aimed to distill and connect different trends, disciplines, and approaches across a range of contexts (offering a transnational view of place, it did not embrace a more critical discussion of power). On the other side of that line, we find the work being done to establish a narrative about an important local context to add to a global map of writing programming. In both establishing and theorizing pieces there can be found a spectrum of international (relying on more stable, unified contexts) versus more transnational (relying on parsing nuanced versions of power and place) orientations; see below:

Table 1

International and Transnational Spectrum

Establishing		←	→	Theorizing	
International	← →	Transnational	International	← →	Transnational
Stable	← →	Mobile	Stable	← →	Mobile

With this tentative system, it can be possible to locate the texts which move us toward a more critical, theoretical uptake with transnationality and later to understand how the realities of TWPA work demand the more nuanced engagement with mobility and understandings of power and place it offers.

International establishing

There are many works in global writing studies that are reporting on the findings and developments located within a national context that can be considered international from a North American perspective (Kruse et al., 2016; Sennewald & Dreyfürst, 2014). These works highlight national contexts and tendencies and elaborate on the conditions for writing studies development there. A strong example of a more international establishing approach that begins to look at place and program-level research (but not so much power), the Thaiss et al. (2012) collection is full of program profiles, a genre that allows for a condensed narrative of salient local institutional contexts, notable projects, and influential concepts. These narratives allow a reader to learn how the contexts shape the projects in particular ways, but also, because they share a similar format, it allows for overlaps across each chapter/profile to become clear. All of the profiles are written in the English language, but they represent programs in countries all over the world. Some profiles develop more regional background and student demographics (Doleschal, 2012) while others focus more on institutional histories that led to the development of the program (Gonono & Nelson, 2012). Each program had their own particular way of coming into being, particular scholars or approaches from around the world that influenced their shape in response to certain conditions. These scholars and all their influences taken in aggregate build a map of various routes to writing program creation. These profiles tell the story of the journeys along those routes, even if quickly.

There are themes that resonate in the narratives and could extend around the world it seems. For example, Gonono and Nelson offer a clear description of the scene in Queensland that:

Academics often see the professional staff (in the library, international student services, or learning services) as providing remedial service to ‘fix the problem’

(of students who fail to meet professors' writing skills expectations)...The approach to academic writing at QUT has historically been ad hoc. Apart from the occasional short-term funded project, there has been no coordinated attempt by the university to teach academic writing, even though it remains the most common form of assessment...it is interesting to note that QUT has no school or department for English (and apart from some creative writing or journalism courses)...there is no tradition of writing classes for undergraduate students. (p. 44)

In response to a short-lived program in 1992 (20 years prior to the writing of their article) to establish a WAC presence, Gonono and Nelson write that in retrospect it seems that writing development projects have not continued because they were “very ambitious, not supported by all faculty academics, and rose and fell with the individuals driving them” (p. 45). This is a well-articulated set of truths and assumptions that could connect in many ways the experiences of a range of different scholars. They go on in their article to describe the particular programmatic solutions they have shaped in their institutions and the results. While the narrative is particularly resonant, like many of the chapters, the connections to be made across locations is left to the reader.

In his introduction, Thaiss conveys the goal of the collection and provides a strong case for a uniting principle of a global writing studies focus; he writes that the goal of the collection has been to “attempt to convey to a transnational readership¹⁷ how and why the universities in which we labor attend to (or have neglected) ‘academic writing’ as a complex set of skills to be learned by students—and to be used as a vital tool in their learning of their major disciplines” (p. 6). In this sense, writing studies with a global scope is part of official institutional labor at universities and connected by the ways in which the institutional view of academic writing is taken up or neglected as vital skills to

¹⁷ Can and should we assume readers will be transnationally oriented, or is this an example of slippage when really the writer means international or global?

be learned. So, this is what the majority of the chapters do: they come together on a shared genre, on similar narratives, and a similar premise (as well as the same language), but offer different routes to that shared sense individually.

The two threads in play across all of these forty or so profiles in the collection are the brief narrative of a program and the global audience they write to. The brevity and professional tone present in the pieces means that these are narratives fit for condensed publication; sharing challenges or triumphs, but not going into much detail for parsing differences. They are fit well within a local viewpoint, moving through scales from influential scholar, writing program, department, institution, city, region, and maybe dabbling into national discussion. This is, to me, essentially placing a very important flag to mark a place where a program exists and giving us readers a glimpse at its nature—what I would call an establishing piece. The value of this is immense—it makes visible such programs, and it places them in conversation along a common genre so readers can begin to connect and separate between them.

To recap, it's not that certain texts or collections are framed in (inter)national terms are grounds for dismissal; it's about the degree to which narratives are offered that detail a level of complexity and interconnectedness, that complicate notions of singular identities, that connect different socio-historical contexts—and by-and-large a single program profile and a short word count can really only do so much, so can a single article. Yet there are those who are able to present a more complex picture and push for new terms to describe these relationships. It is also important that a transnational critique does not need to diminish the shared goals, the global aspects that might unite and connect across great distances. It is only that they are taking up, more seriously, the

parsing and representing of complex similarities AND differences. Remember Muchiri et al.: some parts are refreshing, some are questionable, some are bizarre.

Another strong example of the establishment voice, which has been critiqued as such, comes from the Barnawi edited collection *Writing Centers in the Higher Education Landscape of the Arabian Gulf* (2018). In the introduction, Barnawi defines the goal of the collection to discuss the “various pedagogical, ideological, socio-cultural, and political issues” facing those developing and delivering writing support in the Arab world (x). The chapters then describe the challenges of a particular program/approach in the context of a nation-scale: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, etc. In the last chapter, Bougata (2018) offers some tentative theorizing across these sites and writes that writing centers are particularly novel in a Gulf region tradition that values orality, which stunts new centers’ success in emerging from the limitations of prescriptive approaches to writing support (253). If we accept Bougata’s description, then it would also help explain the limitations that reviewer Erin Zimmerman found in the development of the scholarship in the collection. Zimmerman (2018) writes that “the text reads as if its authors are at the early stages of writing center practice and research” but that Barnawi’s book “signifies a burgeoning site for writing research and practice” (138). As a professional in the region, Zimmerman writes that she would have expected to see more critical discussion about access to materials through limited costs and permissions, media “overflowing with content relevant to the West compared to matters significant to life in the MENA region, in part because of English being the primary language used in digital spaces,” and more depiction of the “day-to-day challenges faced by tutors, teachers, and researchers in MENA countries” (136). Much of this critique overlaps with the terms of

engagement with transnationality, and charts that as a way forward in developing further articles to move beyond the establishment genre. We can read this critique as calling for a more transnational (and even theoretical) discussion of the power, materiality, and technological forces impacting these sites. It is possible, however to take a more transnational approach to discussing the establishing of writing support.

Transnational establishing

More transnational establishing/theorizing texts are often found in the opening and closing chapters of collections that might otherwise not offer such critique. Thaiss (2012), for example, in the introduction of the collection, offers the metaphor of *terroir* in wine culture for its ability to “honor the variety and rich complexity of persons, languages, traditions, geographies, conditions, and purposes that both inspire and constrain the writing pedagogies and research of these individuals and teams” (p. 6). This is another popular rhetorical trope found in much of the transnational literature: to shortlist the array of scales in play with a kind of transnational focus and (briefly) describe how they interact. Thaiss points to two causes for this increase: “the internationalizing of the teaching of English for academic and professional purposes and the explosion of internet-accessible resources and models for teaching writing” (p. 7). His piece offers a gesture at understanding and connecting various contexts; and his purpose is clearly to show similarities and a framework for balancing global approaches and local concerns.

Chitez et al., in the introduction to their volume *University Writing in Central and Eastern Europe: Tradition, Transition, and Innovation* (2018), take a transnational look at the Eastern European region in that they highlight connections that go beyond merely

the national, yet they also make clear the book's claims and aims are tied more to an initial mapping of a territory through research and focusing on "the particular problems in national contexts" (2). For the introducing chapter, there are many connections made and discussed, which trace influences across different scales and factors: citing how "the term 'Eastern Europe' has acquired over centuries different connotations: historical, geopolitical, cultural, or socioeconomic—which have frequently changed the outline of this entity that is only apparently geographical" (3). In this sense, they are establishing an identity for these geographies that honors connections above and beyond the nation, parsing regional histories, and mentioning multinational projects like LIDHUM or the Bologna accords, which are strong components of a transnational perspective. Each of the texts in the collection tells of what has happened to establish a particular moment in which institutions begin reckoning with the needs of academic writers, and then the various developments and challenges of the writing support programming that emerged in response to that reckoning.

A more transnational establishing article will make the dominant focus a description of the context and local situation through research findings or narratives. Beginning to lean towards a more transnational orientation, articles will also mention in increasing degrees the influence of developments from the US, UK, and Australia (for example); the dominance of research approaches from (usually) Linguistics; a lack of attention both historically and presently for L1 (the local language) writing support versus L2 (usually English); and of the particulars of the institutional developments often described in terms of regional or national geopolitical factors.

Emerson and Clerehan, writing in the collection *The Writing Program Interrupted: Making Space for Critical Discourse* (2009), discuss writing program administration work in Australia and New Zealand. They open by pointing out that from an outsider's view, WPA work in North America appears very homogenous, that each program assumes a relationship with a writing center, that they are based around composition courses, that there is a certain commitment to funding, and there is a shared history (p. 166). While this homogeneity can reveal shared concerns about "access, labor issues, or disciplinary standing," the local cultural specificity of the North American literature is hard to penetrate for those in writing programs that present "very different profiles" (pp. 166-7). Emerson and Clerehan describe the central differences in the larger infrastructure: "entry testing, writing center, Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program, and compulsory freshman composition courses" are not a part of the Australian higher education contexts (p. 167). There has never been a writing requirement for all students to pass, there has never been an institutional or universal approach to writing, and the term "WPA" is "generally unknown," and almost all writing programming is optional (p. 167). Aside from the region's differences with North American contexts, between Australia and New Zealand, there are also "distinct national contrasts in terms of development, theoretical base, and position within the university" (p. 167). They then go into detail about the generative histories of these different national contexts in terms of student demographics, labor conditions, institutional structures, economic and social movements, etc. This attention to parsing the differences across different scales and citing important similarities and differences at these different layers is thoughtful and productive.

Another major contribution in this work is a clear tracing of the theoretical and pedagogical influences that inform projects outside of the North American, compositionist context. Emerson and Clerehan basically map out an alternative generative route for non-compositionist writing programs: genre from John Swales (1990), “UK scholars working on tertiary literacies as social practice (not ‘skills’)” like Lea and Street (1999), Australian systemic functional linguistics (Jones, 2004), critical literacy and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989), and multiliteracies (New London Group, 2000). The central, connecting theorization across the influences for this Australian context is to see writing not as a tool for argumentation, discussion, or expression (by implication the approach in North America), but as “a means of ‘learning, navigating, inhabiting, or transforming the specific disciplines of academia’” (p. 170, quoted from Skillen & Purser, 2003, p. 5). They then go into detail in tracing the influential theoretical and pedagogical texts and the challenges of adapting the materials for local contexts. Thoughtfully tracing these influences (from Australia, the U.K., and North America primarily) they are able to chart the development of their WPA work as a transnational, transdisciplinary phenomenon. While this isn’t explicitly theorizing new terms of engagement for these relationships, nor is it offering precise and thorough day-to-day representations of the work, it is methodically tracing connections across borders and parsing the material differences as these ideas mobilize, while also not completely rejecting the salience of national containers. While the writers seem well aware that they are explaining to a potentially homogenous North American audience, they also effectively trace a path of theoretical and institutional forces that could also apply to other contexts as an alternative to composition. Reading this, one cannot help but see

composition placed in the same de-centered, critical, transnational position for which earlier scholars (Muchiri et al., Hesford, Donahue) have called.

Doroholschi (2018) is another great example of establishing a nuanced place for a program in a transnational context, as illustrated by the following long excerpt:

we were less bound by some of the issues that confront writing centers worldwide, such as the idea of the writing center as a “fix-it shop” (North 1984, p. 435), which gave us more freedom but also meant that we had no traditions that we could resort to when we tried to explain to others what a writing center does and little we could look at in other people’s practice in our own country. Therefore, we drew on some of the models that we got acquainted with during the years of the project in an attempt to create a flexible and sustainable model to suit the needs of our institution: two well-established UK models, the Centre for Academic Writing at Coventry University and the Thinking Writing program at Queen Mary, University of London, as well as two further initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe, the Center for English Academic Writing at the Ivan Franko University of Lviv, Ukraine, and the English Writing Improvement Center (ERIC) at the University of Łódź, Poland. (p. 66)

In this paragraph, Doroholschi helps readers understand that there was not a powerful anxiety of influence or troubled transplantation from the U.S., because the context was simply too different, so they can trace their establishing influences transnationally through these other programs in Europe. They describe their goal to create something flexible and sustainable by borrowing pieces from various models—again, not a wholesale transplantation, but a careful parsing and adapting.

For another transnational establishing example, the Shchemeleva and Smirnova piece (2018) opens with a tour of the above factors in their context, then discusses UK developments, then US developments, and then how academic writing competence is viewed in Eastern Europe and Russia (pp. 76-80). This foregrounds their further narrowing to a particular prominent state institution in St. Petersburg, Russia to test the following research questions: “Does academic writing play an important role in the

university? What written genres do students need and use? Is writing competence supported in the university context? How are writing skills developed in the university?” (p. 76). These questions are asked to help establish the nature of writing in the case of this particular university, but also as a stand-in for trends in a whole Russian or East European geopolitical space. And, again, they are parsing their influences, and adapting to a local context as they seek to establish an identity for their project.

An outstanding example of tracing the development of a particular program across territorial and temporal scales comes from Lisa Arnold (2014). Arnold broadens the notion of composition history to include Syrian Protestant College (SPC), or what is now the American University of Beirut, by looking through their archives to understand language policies as a way to help readers understand current discussions attempting to shift the gaze of Composition scholarship beyond a U.S.-based, monolingual framework via translanguaging and international exchange. Citing the need for increased attention to countries with different traditions in writing research and instruction in order to adapt and decenter assumptions, Arnold argues that such a move in the present and future will be more likely if Composition can claim an international past as well. According to Arnold, “questioning our dominant historical narratives allows for a broader vision of the discipline to emerge” (p. 279). SPC’s unique position as a “fulcrum among languages, ideologies, and cultures” should encourage us to examine limitations in the Harvard narrative and institutional histories that did grapple more with a similar fulcrum-like position (p. 292). She describes the initial formation of the curriculum and language policies as “uniquely American and non-American, at once Western and Eastern,” and that convergence/simultaneity is what makes it so interesting for Composition studies (p.

281). Some aspects of a classical curriculum (fewer electives) mingled with more modern curriculum's focus on English and French texts, and a history of Arabic as the language of instruction portray a transnational, translingual history. Arnold describes this as an institutional negotiation in a non-American, multilingual context, and the simultaneity of being modern and classical, American and not, or perhaps even global and local is an important rhetorical move that is central to understanding a de-centered approach to Composition. As Arnold examines the decision to shift the language of instruction from Arabic to English, she argues that it offers an example to help scholars understand what languages might do or represent in a given context as certain languages and ideologies can be simply too dynamic to fit the various stated goals of the University over time (p. 283).

In the intervening years between Muchiri et al.'s call for more voices and attention to assumptions about power/place, following Brauer's and others' calls against transplanting, and the later rise in voices establishing the presence of programming across the world map, it is safe to say that a critical, theoretical transnational approach has been increasingly present in the more nuanced tracing of influences for a particular place, and to a somewhat lesser degree on the critique of power. In different ways, and from different locations, scholars are reporting about their adaptations and influences as they develop local writing programming (Braine & McNaught, 2007; Wu, 2013; Zhang, 2019). There are still many contexts from which reporting needs to be voiced as the voices so far predominate from the European context. There are a few texts in which power and place are more deeply theorized and critiqued as we work towards a theorized TWPA role.

Transnational theoretical turn

Moving further along the spectrum away from establishing and toward transnational theorizing, a number of texts are not seeking to report from a specific local context but move the conversation to other areas of focus. Sylvie Plane (2017) argues that writing is a complex organism that resists any holistic view, but in trying to understand it globally, “we must resolve not to settle for a piecemeal grasp, nor to apply the methodological filter to any one approach in particular” (3). She argues for a move away from a focus on national borders and more towards linguistic and epistemological ones because these units of analysis can ultimately make more visible research that is unified in the purpose of developing an understanding of writing to enable more effective learning and usage (4). Her points resonate strongly with Hesford’s call to move away from homeland discipline sentimentality and towards new methodological approaches that reconfigure nation-state signifiers.

A strong example of naming and tracing these national, regional, linguistic, and epistemological differences across contexts as a way to articulate an argument comes from John Harbord’s (2010) article, in which he advocates for writing to be taught in local languages. After describing a local context of his area of focus (in this case pre- and post-soviet Eastern Europe) and the history of academic writing being seen as an inherent ability and autonomous literacy, he methodically points out how institutional development of writing instruction is influenced (and often hampered) by the identities of the initiators of change. He writes:

The interests of the stakeholders involved in any process of academic innovation, both locals and outsiders, inevitably determine to a large extent how that innovation develops, consolidates and is institutionalized, or not. Because writing is a part of language, because ideas about writing come from countries where the

dominant language is English, because the stakeholders from the center are often concerned with the promotion of English as such (cf. Phillipson, 2001), because those stakeholders rarely speak the languages of the periphery and therefore communicate with those who speak English, namely teachers of English as a foreign language, for all these reasons, the internationalization of writing is complicated in particular ways that merit further investigation. (p. 2)

That academic writing comes to be inextricably influenced by Anglophone traditions and interests, as well as U.S. institutional norms, means that approaches are not adapted, they are transplanted (p. 6). As such, tying writing to English brings with it problematic implementation, but if that connection is severed, implementation of writing as its own area of study can grow from a local sense of expertise (p. 9). Just as within the US, or between the US and other English-speaking contexts one assumes the need for caution in translating a particular approach, one needs “proportionally more caution, rethinking and discussion with local stakeholders” to ensure an effective fit across other language contexts (p. 11). The framing of the arguments, the deliberate ways this piece traces influence across different scales and resists reducing the complexity of various stakeholders, while highlighting writing as a central underlying influence marked as a transnational object of study, represents the best form of transnational discussion. Mobility, power, and place are all present while specific absences or national markers are contextualized and limited in their scope. The citations draw from a diverse range of geographic and disciplinary focuses. And, the argument itself makes a theoretically rich and nuanced appeal for a change as well as practical ways to enact that change institutionally.

This text from Harbord makes another important turn—instead of reporting about a program, or supporting the claim that one cannot transplant, it offers steps for what to do next. In short, it looks ahead. Lee (2014) also looks ahead as she argues for a

transcultural framework for EFL writing center contexts. Trends in the research for working with L2 writers in U.S. contexts are described, then arguments from various international contexts on the unsuitability of materials/concepts from the U.S. contexts applied in these predominantly EFL writing centers, leads Lee to offer tentative conclusions: that tutor experience should shape practice, that international writing centers do not serve the same populations as U.S. writing centers, and that international writing centers have had to “adapt the U.S. model,” which has resulted in numerous struggles and frustrations at the lack of fit (pp. 136-137). Lee argues that while writing centers have recognized and adapted to problems of transplanting U.S. or U.K. approaches to periphery contexts, there has been a lack of discussion about the “theoretical frameworks that have guided their adaptations” (p. 131). A transcultural framework is offered to address this lack of consideration by leveraging knowledge of a local culture more as an advantage and understanding power discourses as competing and contingent. Lee is taking the established foundations of writing research from different international contexts and beginning to push for more understanding of underlying theoretical approaches that connect across these varied spaces.

Katrin Girgensohn (2018¹⁸) remarks on the growth of writing centers and therefore writing center directors (WPA positions) at German institutions but asserts a gap between “the demand of knowledge about writing center leadership and evidence-based research that generates such knowledge” (11). In order to address that gap, Girgensohn, during a one-year stay in the U.S., conducted interviews and observations with a variety of writing center directors in order to gain a “more nuanced picture of the

¹⁸ See also her book-length manuscript in German on the same research: Girgensohn, K. (2017).

everyday work of writing center directors as well as the typical challenges and strategies used to deal with them” (12). This is her way to move forward and develop the discourse and knowledge about writing programmatic practices. She builds her analysis not in terms of transnationality per se, but on the perspectives of organizational studies’ neo-institutionalism as a framework for the concept of institutional work by which to understand and systematize her findings (12). The ways in which institutional work is described, though, appears to honor the social practices of different actors and inherent stabilizing (centripetal) forces of institutions, but does not directly assess power relations in the construction of expertise or the geopolitics inherent in transnational connectivities. The level of nuance she is after, though, parallels clearly with the ways in which critical transnationality has been framed by Dingo et al. She does point to the nature of writing studies, and writing center work as always aiming at change, at a sense of constant negotiation, and that even the best institutional work does not necessarily lead to institutional success, “because it is embedded in very complex and continually changing contexts” (p. 21). Though this work *is* transnational research, it does not take up the questions and challenges inherent in theorizing transnationality explicitly—Girgensohn ends her article noting that the lack of contextualization of the study between the U.S. and Europe is a limitation (p. 21). It does take a nuanced look at institutional work and attempts to frame the conversation of WPA work under a new transnational unit of analysis through the concept of institutional work and the constructed nature of institutions.

Power in transnationality

One collection, though, where power is taken up more in earnest, comes from Bennet, *The Semiperiphery of Academic Writing: Discourses, Communities and Practices* (2014). The book focuses on a delineation of power between center and periphery contexts; locating discourses, communities, and publication practices among what it calls the “semi-periphery” as its focus (p. 1). The focus here is on power tied to geography as understood through lenses related to academic writing both professionally, and programmatically/pedagogically. In a certain sense, the chapters are partly taking a transnational approach in that they are delineating and grappling with specific local and global factors in describing the context, but, in another sense, these works do seem often to lean heavily on a stable notion like a U.S. model or a term like “Polish writing” (Gonerko-Frej, 2018, p. 81) or “Czech authors” (Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2018, p. 42) at the expense of a more thorough unpacking of such concepts.

The insights, though, of this volume are crucial to recognizing the power relations that have been largely absent from the other collections. This marks an important shift towards more transnational theoretical work, I believe well embodied by the editor’s concluding chapter. Bennett uses a Bakhtinian centripetal/centrifugal framework, arguing that numerous centripetal forces operate on the semi-periphery to encourage researcher-assimilation to a dominant center characterized by location and economic clout. She also cites language (“Anglophone monolingualism”) and epistemology (“a strong empiricist orientation”) as markers by which to understand this hegemonic power relationship (p. 246). Her Bakhtinian framework also allows a more nuanced, complex theorization of this center-periphery relationship, arguing “this cannot be analysed unproblematically as a top-down phenomenon; for though policies and practices are clearly being implemented

at state or EU level, there also seems to be a general grassroots conviction that such changes are synonymous with ‘modernization’ and ‘progress’” (p. 244). This theorization calling for resistance to reductive views of a top-down phenomenon is a crucial aspect of grasping the realities of writing’s role in transnational institutions. By transnational, I mean that the institutions are located outside of composition-based structures; also that institutions are transnational entities as a result of the diverse range of national demographics in the individuals who comprise them; and also that institutions contain a diverse spread of the knowledge, policies, and partnerships by which they are informed. In short, Bennett’s description of a very heterogenous set of approaches even in the local context are a core aspect of understanding transnationality.

Building on Bennett’s nuanced critique of power and reminding us of an often-ignored transnational connection, Toth (2013) details her time working at a Native American tribal college as a white Composition-trained teacher. Through her narrative, she grapples with the intersection of Native sovereignty, settler colonialism, and academic literacy. She offers an approach, grounded in story, which “moves beyond the well-meaning, but misguided worry” that teaching academic writing in this transnational context is purely assimilationist (p. 29). To work through these issues, Toth describes her reflective practice, the local institutional context, and a set of strategies to ensure ethical and productive engagement. She argues that *any* writing pedagogy with the goal of developing student awareness of structures of inequality will benefit from an understanding of settler colonialism (p. 14). She takes a lesson situated from the experience, but making it transferable to contexts beyond a tribal college. She also uses personal narrative to describe her own reflection and navigation of these issues. Her

approach, guided and informed by critique of settler colonialism as a power structure and not just a historical event, works to balance a sense of critical language awareness among Native students and teachers through a Composition writing curriculum while also offering her a chance to see her own “responsibility to help foster conditions that support positive, self-determined Native futures” (30). Through her reflective narrative, her use of settler colonialism as a critique of power structures, and her nuanced parsing of different places, identities, and relationships involved in her writing pedagogy, we see her constructing transnationality as Dingo et al. would theorize it.

While Toth’s work demonstrates a novel transnational engagement with a critique of power ideology in settler colonialism, Girgensohn’s work brings us very close to the core body of literature that also seeks to develop better understandings of the practices and approaches to institutional work done by WPAs. Theoretically attuned transnational orientations would connect these two to address the gaps with a more nuanced look at those contextual limitations that Girgensohn closed with. Scholarly research, as it becomes more transnationally oriented, seeks new terms to describe nuanced connections and make visible the power relations inherent in the dialog and navigation of complex contexts. These trends and terms also apply to the work done under the term TWPA, which is where this chapter turns next. There is an inherent transnationality to WPA work in international contexts. This next section seeks to understand how the critical, theoretical transnationality as described by Dingo et al. has been taken up.

TWPA

While many of the works above would appear to be highly relevant to writing program administrative work, and in varying ways discuss a transnational nature to the

work, the term TWPA has not been present. Thus far, this review has critiqued the ways in which transnationality is taken up in establishing and theorizing writing programs. What hasn't been critiqued as much is the representation of the work and the voices of mobile scholars who are working in a location outside of their upbringing or training. The deployment of the term TWPA has brought with it associations with mobility—of one scholar moving between institutions and locations. To unpack the term itself, though, requires acknowledging that it comes from a particular location, a predominantly U.S.-based discourse has produced the term WPA, and also TWPA. It does not necessarily circulate globally in job titles nor in scholarship. As such, it is inevitably partial, and the terms by which it is accompanied (from a particular Anglophone composition discourse) will inevitably shape what counts as legible.

TWPA work and scholarship is inherently rooted to a material place, so it speaks with part of an establishing voice helping to describe the context in which it is located. To an increasing degree, WPA work and scholarship is locating itself transnationally—this is especially true of work detailing events at international sites. Amy Zenger (2016) reminds us of the importance of understanding transnationality by avoiding the (compositionist) tendency to binarize (local/global) our conception of space in writing research. The literature in this section more deliberately looks at scholars who are mobile and who in various ways take up the terms of a transnational orientation in narrating their institutional work. They will grapple with the tension between global and local terms, they will offer more nuance, they will challenge uncritical notions of smooth exchange and romantic cosmopolitanism, they will give us glimpses of the challenges and power dynamics present in the work as they have seen and experienced it.

Papay (2002) tells the narrative of visiting the writing center at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa in 1999 to work with peer tutoring programs while on sabbatical from Rollins College. Her article shows a concern by Papay to learn from the practices at the writing center, to connect potential links between theories and practices (e.g. point out how the local tutoring practices are indeed more theoretically collaborative than peer tutors may recognize), and to help frame and articulate the work being done. Papay writes, “There was so much to learn; so many fruitful studies could offer North Americans a better understanding of options we ourselves have not considered” (p. 7). Upon daily meetings with the director, Andrea, Papay finds that the theories and practices in the center were well founded and the work was “lacking nothing but funding in the face of inordinate need” (p. 10). Peer tutors realized the parallels between their own concerns and experiences with those voiced in North America, but, according to Papay, “even more striking, though, were the ways in which seemingly comparable practices were undeniably embedded in vastly different needs and local circumstances for South African centers” (p. 11). Papay described three principles that appeared to demonstrate these local circumstances and govern their work: the need for a safe house in the context of post-apartheid work, the power of a process model of learning (with attention to language politics and power in this articulation), and “respect for student-generated learning embedded in a contact zone” (p. 15). Papay writes of her experience as observing “universal ideas transformed by local needs” and the principle that through collaboration and community people can resolve challenges of complexity and difference (p. 17). In the local ways of being and doing, Papay found rich differences: “While we struggle to teach American students the pleasures and practices of collaboration, I rarely

met an African anywhere who did not envision a cultural imperative wider than the self” (pp. 18-19). The imperative of collaboration, language practices like code-switching, and local cultural norms all made up this mixture between universal and local practices shared and expressed between writing center colleagues through institutional work. Papay is articulating the rich tension inherent in turning the North American gaze outward to observe the so-called universal at work in local terms.

Marna Broekhoff (2014) offers a discussion of starting a writing center in Namibia. She writes that the complexity of this task can “hardly be overstated,” and categorizes the challenges upon reflection in these four areas: infrastructure, matrix management, hierarchy, and bureaucracy (p. 68). Clearly these institutional restrictions were completely central to her struggle, though they were inextricable from cultural, social facts. She thought she might choke in all the red tape, but that “a good administrator has to learn how to peel it off” (p. 70). In keeping with a central tension of transnationality and the role of theorizing as part of WPA work, her concerns are both common and specific, and that in doing writing center work “bureaucracy, cultural differences, limited funding, and supervisors’ limited administrative skills must be navigated” (p. 68). This article viewing complications in the work through the lens of her four terms is really just the tip of the iceberg of what we can learn from her experiences.

A collection whose introduction and chapters are pushing for more nuance and terms of engagement, an interesting contrast to the more establishing Middle Eastern Barnawi (2018) text, can be found in the Arnold et al. (2017) collection on writing research in the Middle East. In their editors’ introduction, they describe and frame the

local WPA work as an “intricate ‘in-betweeness’” in a super-diverse¹⁹ Beirut context richly layered in language, politics, history, and cultures, which requires “an abandonment of prior assumptions” and is “best viewed as constant negotiations” (p. 6). Taking this up, TWPA James P. Austin (2017) critiques and complicates important questions raised by scholars about the uncritical, unidirectional flow of composition curricula into international sites. He points us to the work in transnational literacy studies to help develop “more expansive frames” which offer a more complex and nuanced account of “global-local interactions that are neither strictly unidirectional nor wholly collaborative” (p. 80). His experience demonstrated that curricular development in Cairo was “richer and more complex” than “western imperialistic hegemony” dressed up as composition and rhetoric (p. 72). Theado et al. (2017) argue for the positive effects of resistance between U.S.-based and Iraqi-based instructors, which is to say that through engaging, debating, and disagreeing, their online curriculum collaboration flourished (p. 159). They see this work as a response to calls for models that go beyond binary, us-versus-them discourses and theories. Their notion of “productive resistance” worked when all parties recognized that their knowledge was locally situated, therefore contingent, but that they were also connected, because “all parties are staked in these transformations” (p. 172). In various ways, these scholars are echoing the call for broadening Composition while arguing for terms of engagement that can move beyond simple binaries by complementing that call with specific, local concerns understood through experience. They are theorizing new ways for, or calling for better theorizations of, transnational engagement based on their observation and reflection.

¹⁹ Blommaert, 2013; Creese & Blackledge, 2010.

There is one collection that, as a whole, offers the most in-depth and lengthy look at TWPA work. In the introduction to the 2014 edited collection *Transnational Writing Program Administration*, David Martins writes about his experience working as a WPA overseeing a branch program located internationally. He notes, “writing teachers and administrators involved in the creation or development of international programs must negotiate...tensions based upon what they know and value about learning, teaching, and writing” (p. 2). Again, we see an editor framing the terms of engagement as navigating or negotiating across spatial scales and complex demographic markers—all of which are in flux. The collection, then, would need to take up these terms to engage with the transnational contexts, and it does so with a lot of rich observation and reflection. Various chapters tackle different contexts and approaches as they impact transnational writing work: digital affordances, mobility of first year writing to branch campuses, socio-cultural adaptations across geographic contexts, language ideology, institutional discourses around globalization, economics of outsourcing, and understanding and engaging with and educating the “other.”

As WPAs are increasingly called upon to oversee and facilitate initiatives and partnerships, Starke-Meyyering (2014) argues the need for reflection to better understand the place for writing programs in helping to explore and rethink that role in globalizing higher education (p. 309). Her work offers, I think, the clearest way of seeing the role of a TWPA. She locates the TWPA as a crucial site for understanding transnational higher education in both global and local terms because of its position at an intersection of different institutional forces. By positioning the TWPA institutionally, she argues there are strong parallels between the traditions of WPA work demonstrating a commitment to

cultivating new and better learning environments in a daily political/institutional struggle (Adler-Kassner, 2008; Fox, 2009) and the struggles that are central to globalization in higher education (Bassett, 2009). Composition has had an uneasy relationship between its ideological commitments and its role in administrative/management institutional hierarchies. But, writing studies narratives positioning themselves as part of the global turn are increasingly embracing organizational and management theories (Lape, 2019). The WPA role, in a globalized context, arguably raises the stakes in many commitments, and it is this location of the TWPA *institutionally*, highlighted in the context of material, ideological, epistemological, and ethical forces that I borrow from Stark-Meyyering's piece.

Secondly, Stark-Meyyering is explicit about focusing on a certain kind of labor involved in TWPA work, the kind that I am also interested in investigating. She offers the terms "cross-boundary knowledge-making," which describes "mutual inquiry into the understanding, questioning, re-seeing, and negotiation of normalized, locally-bounded ways of knowing, doing, and being that (re)produce, organize, and normalize the activities of the communities, institutions, and disciplines in which we participate" (p. 318). Starke-Meyyering is one of the few that makes this transnational knowledge-making explicit as a form of labor, highlighting that budget lines do not account for the "much increased workloads involved in not only thinking through one's own pedagogical design, but also in inquiring into and learning the pedagogical practices, institutional constraints, and affordances of partners, let alone co-constructing and realizing a collaborative pedagogy and learning environment" (p. 323). Such workloads have a good chance of being higher than, say, working within well-established home contexts, due to

the increasingly complex relationships of transnational institutional contexts. In current composition and global writing studies scholarship, however, this labor has been largely under-theorized and underrepresented as theory. The global, institutional logics Stark-Meyyering cites might not account for that labor, but we should not make the same miscalculation.

Shanti Bruce (2014), writing as a TWPA, details her experience electing to teach classes in a branch campus in the Bahamas, where she is confronted with differences she did not expect: she discovered that the entire branch campus ran on “Island Time,” a schedule that is different to what is officially printed; students arrive late and leave early. Despite her concern that “Island Time” reduces valuable contact time for students, which puts them in a place of inequity compared to their home campus peers, Bruce decides that insisting on starting class at the posted time would risk disrespecting the culture and ignoring material exigencies (p. 152). She similarly chooses to adjust to and accept non-standard academic language use, like U.K. spellings for words and local island-specific meanings to words. Importantly, though, she emphasizes that it is important “not to assume every difference we see is an appropriate cultural difference” (p. 158). The set of processes through which one can make sense of these differences—to appraise and mark some differences as appropriately cultural or not—is under-theorized and worth ruminating on further.

I believe these processes of appraisal are central to transnational work, yet it is not something that one can just assume happens naturally or without serious consideration—a consideration that is lacking in the existing scholarship. Crucial to fully developing these assessments of appropriate cultural difference, according to Bruce, is being there.

She emphasizes that learning about these concepts before going would have left her with a “superficial understanding,” and that “those in the trenches truly understood island time, and now, so did I” (p. 155). This is one epistemological clue towards understanding the conditions of this particular knowledge-making process. The idea of parsing a personal/professional positioning and then assessing the acceptability of foreign cultural norms requires a substantial investment in a very difficult rhetorical space to navigate. The piece, while very instructive, fails to offer a discussion on the real meat of negotiating the agency to appraise cultural relevance to specific actions, and then to assert the products of her reflections. The context of this piece is that Bruce was in a position of authority as a WPA from the home campus, and so had institutional support for her assessments and some degree of flexibility to make choices that came with her to her new location. We are left to assume these factors, but I believe there is much to be gained from examining those processes more explicitly.

Another example of an absent narrative comes from one of Anson and Donahue’s (2014) brief case studies where they describe a program started and run by the Lebanese-trained WPA Mariam Ghalayini in Saudi Arabia. In Ghalayini’s programmatic context, “choosing ‘appropriate content’ is about matching the practice of second language skills to material that is culturally familiar, ideologically safe, and sometimes intellectually bland...the result...often leads students to complain of being disengaged from their writing and feeling a lack of purpose” (p. 32). Anson and Donahue argue that this case “exposes flaws in our assumptions about the universality of writing programs that might be imported or exported” and they argue for an increased ability to adapt to local propriety and context (p. 33). Here, they leave a space for the continuation of practices

that may run counter to the best interests of student writers in order to preserve an aspect of local propriety.

In his Afterword, Horner (2014) cites this as an example that “particular ways by which we understand difference frequently limit our response to it, leading—if not to attempts at its eradication—then to reifications of difference that preclude the kind of working ‘with’ difference” (p. 334). Engaging in the work of transnational writing program administration, according to Horner, is ideological, and we should not shy away from the struggle “in the day-to-day decisions, teaching practices, and representations” of WPAs, teachers, and students (p. 340). By not depicting Ghalayini’s story, we are missing a full accounting of the negotiating involved as well as the new knowledge or theories it may produce.

When Anson and Donahue (2014) take apart the term “program,” for a transnational audience, they see it as “shared work” and “different insights,” yet they conclude their piece by asking why the need to identify other contexts as “programs” even matters (p. 42). Forcing other sites into the language and lens of U.S.-based Composition (rhetorical hegemony) can fail to “capture the right understanding or structure,” and they settle on the ultimate value of “deep exchange” (p. 43). They call for locally situated discussions of resources and comparisons that can lead to fruitful new ideas, ostensibly with a dose of awareness of the limitations in seeing only what is missing. What’s at issue here is not that they raise the concern about uncritical exportation, that is certainly valid, but they also point right to the gap in what should complement such caution. That gap comes through in their endnotes about the Saudi context, which point to difficulty in representing and understanding Ghalayini’s work due

to rapid staff turnover or the particular gender dynamics of a women's college set against larger structural (read: material, institutional) forces (p. 43).

In Chris Thaiss's (2016) review of the Martins collection, he praises it for doing the work of establishing "priorities" for TWPA (p. 187). He offers thoughts on what needs to be done to build on this initial batch of collected scholarship. First, he points out that while the volume critiques U.S. centrism, it has mostly U.S.-based writers; secondly, these writers are primarily "theoretical commentators" and there are almost no "teacher voices" (this is a binary that I hope TWPA literature makes less tenable the more we describe it); and thirdly, the collection is polemical and missing traditions of qualitative and mixed methods research (p. 188). The risks of the limited narratives being presented here are echoed in Andrea Scott's (2017) questioning of the influence of U.S.-centric writing program director narratives and their influence on disciplinary identity in German and Austrian universities. This critique would call for more diverse representation and attention to power in the narratives that portray TWPA work.

The group of articles I've just discussed do the work of depicting and theorizing their experiences as TWPAs, and though we gain much from how they come to understand transnationality through their work, there are still gaps that a more sustained look can help to fill. The first gap I've offered is about the space and development of the narratives, and the ways in which the complexity of the work is not given room to express day-to-day realities. Starke-Meyering's cross-boundary knowledge-making is a useful phrase that describes the *theorizing* labor that is performed through a range of possible processes when understood through actual, particular people who translate, parse, distill, navigate, negotiate, etc. It is in these many terms where I propose some

further analysis to shore up this primary gap in research. By unpacking these navigations as knowledge-making activity, scholars can hopefully offer a better way to theorize what Horner called the ‘approach to difference’ through navigation of the intricate in-betweenesses.

Critical/mobile TWPA

Embodying more of the challenges described by Dingo et al. and Hesford & Schell, the next wave of scholarship can take on the limitations of transnationality, not only passively through the narratives they tell, but actively in calling out the limits of current theorizations to understand nuance and power relations. Amy Zenger’s (2018) article connects different pieces of writing program administrative narratives through discussion of mobility and locality. She highlights a central tension in composition and rhetoric’s call for transnational scholarship between an “insistence on valuing the local” and an assumption of a global/local binary that transnationalism “aims to dismantle” (p. 62). One potential way beyond this binary comes through discussions of transnationalism that complicate the relationships between local/global actors/discourses. Zenger offers a look at policy mobility as a way to make more visible administrative narratives in the liminal space between local and global forces—often citing how the assumptions of frictionless global flows as well as stable, authentic local interests are at odds with the narrative of writing programs at her site: the American University of Beirut. Importantly, her narratives are not completely frictionless; they involve complex consideration (see also Arnold [2014, 2016] for a description of the kinds of negotiation and transnational origins at play in AUB). She tells different narratives of how the Lebanese Civil War influenced the department, how external evaluators pushed for more professionalization,

and how those arguments led to unforeseen circumstances in the program development (relocation).

She argues that writing program administration structures and practices do not move “indiscriminately, but follow paths established by disciplines, languages, and personal relationships” (p. 77). The mobility of TWPAs and writing studies programming in general with all its global influences opens up the need to trace those paths and not assume their frictionless movement, nor perfect adaptations across different contexts. She sees limitations in the ways in which a transnational orientation has failed to reconcile the tension between global and local signifiers within composition and rhetoric. And she argues for the need for a better approach:

While the perspective of transnationality allows us to attribute agency to local contexts and subjects, and to avoid framing local programs only as victims of globalizing forces, **we are still left as administrators and teachers with the need for more nuanced theories to develop better understandings of the forces at work in our programs and for processes and tools to help drive conversations and decision making.** (p. 76)

It is in this exact call that my work locates its contribution. In order to generate more nuanced theories, we need more nuanced narratives of the day-to-day work in order to see—as much as possible, as clearly as possible—what’s already happening. Based on these narratives, we need to understand the sense-making, theoretical work that is in practice in the day-to-day navigations of institutions. The TWPAs who are the focus of this project, their programs, the institutions where they are housed, and the places on which those institutions reside are the resources from which a transnational orientation can be developed to better understand the forces at work Zenger mentions. Zenger’s claim is that the realities of the transnational institutional work—deeply theoretical and

played out in diverse practices by individuals—are not being well served by the theories and representations that currently inform it.

One example of an article taking up this call for more nuanced depictions of the administrative realities of institutions comes from Girgensohn (2018). Leaving Germany to study with what she calls “expert” writing center directors in the United States, Girgensohn takes a grounded theoretical and ethnographic methodological approach to examining the presence of collaborative learning in the work of sixteen program administrators. Collaborative learning, she finds, offers a stance her participants use “to deal with the challenges in their everyday work and to institutionalize their writing centers” (p. 11). Basing her observations in theories of institutional work and what she calls “Strategic Action Fields,” Girgensohn is able to make visible the often-elided interactions between and across institutional spaces that lead to a form of legitimacy for programs (p. 12). She locates this work as addressing “a gap between the demand of knowledge about writing center leadership and evidence- based research that generates such knowledge,” (p. 11); and describes her aim as working to “gain a more nuanced picture of the everyday work of writing center directors as well as of typical challenges and strategies to deal with them” (p. 12). Her work is aiming to address a similar gap in which I also find my work.

I do not take as a given that all transnational interaction is smooth, that there are resolvable conflicts, that the work is generalizable through community collaboration. Transnational collaboration and development can be productive, but it is not a given and requires a set of tools in order to work out that way. I advocate for, and aim to contribute to, a critical transnational lens, theorized through the knowledge-making labor of

TWPAs. Globalization and internationalization have always, but especially now in the wake of increased mobility, raised difficult questions. As writing studies takes on questions of engaging across differences, there are powerful forces that need to be understood and reconciled as part of that work: forces at work in the notion of Western, anglophone monolingualism tightly woven through notions of global writing studies, of potentially orientalist, colonialist notions being reified through institutional policy, crises of representation of the complexity of these interactions reinforcing problematic and reductive versions of transnationality. The anchor of writing studies frames these large, intersecting issues through the treatment of academic writers and those involved in the structures that deliver that support. In understanding these issues, we need to push this critical transnational lens towards the goal of new theories by which we can explain what is happening. That is where I find the cutting-edge intersecting theories of mobility, writing program administration scholarship, and transnational ethnography. Chapter three will explain my theoretical and methodological framing for my study and how I will discuss the findings.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGIES AND METHODS

In a sense, this project began when I first reached out to other writing centers in a WPA seminar in my master's program. We were assigned the task of writing a program profile, and I reached out to a director in Hungary, because of my own experience and curiosity working abroad. Somewhat unbeknownst to me at the time, the person I reached out to was instrumental in the European conversation on how to generate a writing support approach rooted in local context and not attempting to uncritically duplicate a U.S.-based compositionist approach. As such, our discussions illuminated comparisons and challenges that were separate yet similar. And so, I began thinking about how exactly one parses such things on a programmatic level for the first time.

Having broken ground on this conversation, when I was later working in England as a writing center director, I felt comfortable reaching out to other writing programs—out of both curiosity and necessity. To do my work of establishing writing support in such a different context, I needed models, I needed strategies, I needed to know what this work could look like. Through conferences and personal travels, I was able to have informal conversations with writing program administrators in the U.K., Norway, Estonia, Romania, Georgia, Ukraine, and Egypt. In a few of these places, I was able to visit the writing spaces, meet some of the staff, see the locations of rooms, share a meal, and share our experiences. These talks were different than other non-WPA conversations

with colleagues at conferences or in the halls of my institution in England. There was something urgent and specific about what we were trying to figure out together. We weren't just sharing details of our work in idle conversation, we were collaborating.

And in these conversations, we could talk about tangled realities in the complex spaces in which we do our work, we could express our exhaustion and frustration, we could relate about the pressures and the puzzles of our day-to-day worlds where one can never please everyone, and successes, if they come, are so short lived. The details of our experiences shared in these closer interactions had more flesh to them; more real and messy versions of the work allowed us to actually strategize responses to talk about our mistakes to consider new options. We were able to move well beyond the initial limitations of place into more shared terrain like commitments, arguments, and critiques. I found these conversations to be personally and professionally enriching as *the* core source of collaborative writing studies knowledge-making and support in my often-challenging work back at my home institution. For a number of reasons, the articles I could find or even the conference presentations or discussions with other colleagues were not able to really speak to, or respond to, the level of understanding that was required to act on a daily basis in the interest of my program.

For example, when Shanti Bruce offers a rich narrative of her experience teaching in the Bahamas and reconciling the challenges of that particular extension of her program (e.g. material limitations and island time), she emphasizes how important it is “not to assume every difference we see is an appropriate cultural difference” (p. 158). While her article raises important topics with clarity, the part of me that remembers what I needed when I was doing the work wants to ask: how did she come to those conclusions for

particular differences? By what process does she diagnose propriety and what authority was she granted to act on these decisions? To me, that's the real meat we need to understand and learn from her work. This is where I take to heart Amy Zenger's point that despite the strengths of a transnational theory that allows for complex framing of contexts and subjects beyond simple binaries, "we are still left as administrators and teachers with the need for more nuanced theories to develop better understandings of the forces at work in our programs and for processes and tools to help drive conversations and decision making" (2018, p. 76). I also take to heart Bruce Horner's call to not shy away from engaging the ideological struggles that occur most powerfully in the "day-to-day decisions, teaching practices, and representations of these struggles by WPAs, writing teachers, and their students" (2015, p. 340). These two voices frame and support the exigence I found in my conversations as a potential source for new knowledge and better understandings of TWPA work.

My desire to respond to Zenger and Horner and locate this under-represented, under-theorized knowledge production process raises questions. How does one go about finding and representing this core of knowledge needed to develop more nuanced and productive theories? What are the methodological and theoretical challenges that come with a transnational orientation to ethnographic research? The previous chapters have worked to describe transnationality as something that steps beyond binary on/off, us/them paradigms and towards more inter-connected, nuanced, complex view of relationships in their ongoing construction and reconfiguration. Transnationality moves us beyond static/stable concepts more at work in notions like the global or international, fitting into broader discourses of mobile as opposed to sedentarist subjects. Turning towards a

mobilities-informed way of seeing asks not for a new model to replace the older stable model, but for a new orientation to boundaries, identities, and relationships.

Transnationality is a part of that mobilities orientation that engages the instability of notions like place and how instability and nuance inform sensemaking.

This chapter explains the terms by which I approached this study of the ongoing work of locating oneself transnationally made material/visible/legible through representing the trans-orienting processes of WPA work; work which often exceeds stated job descriptions, exceeds the borders of the official work space, and exceeds sometimes one's conscious consideration and critique of their own work. This study, though, aims not to develop a framework to follow nor a set of guidelines—instead it seeks to examine these processes as they are already happening and as internationally mobile WPAs understand and articulate them. I will outline the theoretical and methodological influences that ground my methods and allow me to represent messiness and contingency. I want to abide by Horner's mobilities-driven view of representing contexts “not as fixed but as an emerging, ongoing, contested, and contestable product of a variety of agents” (2015, p. 336). And in working to represent narratives as neither whole nor finished, I want to “allow for greater consideration of the full range of competing needs, desires, beliefs, and practices about writing” (p. 336). In short, my goal is not exactly to figure out transnational work or resolve all the puzzles of participants—it is to honor the knowledge-making and sense-making work undertaken by each participant through a fuller representation of their experiences, while also keeping in mind that my representation is itself partial and driven by these specific interests.

Methodologies

In the first half of this chapter, I want to explain why I chose a particular focus in how I envisioned this project. To conceive of my ethnographic study, adopting a critical transnational lens and attempting to represent in a more complex and nuanced way the actualities of TWPA work has been informed by the tools developed at a methodological intersection of comparative rhetorical inquiry, critical/institutional ethnography, and theories of space/place present in geography. Because of my finding a lack of complexity and nuance in representations and theorizations of TWPA work, I wanted to find tools by which to see, understand, and represent the work better. To do this, I had to find scholars who faced these same questions of representation and saw the world in ways that fit with my experience of the challenges in the subject of transnational work.

I knew I wanted to perform an ethnographic study, because it would allow me to spend time with individuals and re-create those rich conversations as a starting point for my inquiry. But questions still remained about the particular worldview and methodological approach by which I could best articulate my findings. I found influential guidance in different places. If I were to narrate based on my own story, I came to comparative rhetoric as the first real germination of these concerns of understanding the interdependent relationship between self and other across time and space. Secondly, the sociology of Dorothy Smith's Institutional Ethnography was an essential guiding force helping to shape the nature of my inquiry into what might actually be happening as a source of knowledge rather than fitting a theoretical framework onto a contorted representation of reality. This study, strictly speaking, is not an Institutional Ethnography as outlined by Smith (2005), and later articulated for writing studies by LaFrance (2019), but it is heavily indebted to these ideas. Lastly, theorizations on space/place by

philosophers and geographers, described for writing studies by Reynolds (2004), fit an important piece into the puzzle of my transnational ethnography.

Locations/space/place

Rebecca Lorimer Leonard (2016) has argued for a turn from “methodological nationalism,” which is a research approach based on an assumption that units of analysis, whether nation, language, culture, or religion are bounded, fixed, and stable (p. 127). To move beyond this assumption means designing a project that moves beyond received notions of culture or context. She cautions, though, not to ignore salient material and discursive borders around cultures, nations, and languages, but instead to treat borders as “socially significant but historically odd, as only meaningful in relation to phenomena diffusing across them” (p. 128). This position resonates well with later chapters that work with relative mobility and scaling. As this project is an ethnography, I see Lorimer-Leonard’s description in some ways responding to Hesford’s (2006) point that we need to see “how global ethnography can reshape our approach to the rhetorical concepts of identification and difference and broaden our understanding of text, culture, and context” (p. 792). In this section, I will sketch out how I’ve connected this call for methodological transnationalism to my particular approach to ethnography.

Specific attention to location has been discussed in composition, especially from Anzaldua’s (1987) borderlands methodology and in American studies as a borderlands paradigm (Cutler, 2017). A borderlands paradigm, emphasizing layered and fractured commitments to place and shifting identities, stands as a parallel, and sometimes contentious paradigm to transnationality. Shepley (2009) and Mauk (2003) offered insights into how student conceptions of university space impact literacy, learning, and as

a result composition pedagogy. Looking beyond pedagogies and more towards programs and institutions, Porter and Sullivan (1993, 2007) and Porter et al. (2000) attended to curricular and institutional locations of writing programs—both physically and discursively. Similarly, works like O'Neill, Crow and Burton (2002) argue for the importance of composition/writing programs to claim their own disciplinary location separate from English or other departments. Brinkley and Smith (2006) help us re-compose space and assert a postmodern critique of time and space in the work of human geographers as relevant to the structures of rhetoric. These works chart both physical and abstract locations for writing processes, pedagogies, programs, curricula and identities.

Though not often cited in transnational literature, comparative rhetoric has been an interdisciplinary field deeply interested in blurring binaries of representation across different material and discursive locations and actions. LuMing Mao describes the advances made in comparative rhetorical scholarship as “expanding beyond euroamerican-centric studies of rhetoric” to “further expose the increasingly blurred boundaries between, for example, the indigenous and the exogenous, the past and the present, and the local and the global” (p. 211). Mao’s work asks us to reflect on “how one’s cultural make-up influences the outcome of research and how networks of power asymmetry and interdependency shape and define discursive practices at all levels” (p. 212). Along with reflection, Mao asserts that we must also develop:

new terms of engagement that can capture the contested, but no less interdependent, dynamics informing the relationship between our own positionalities and what they entail, on the one hand, and our objects of study and their own local histories seen in the present time, on the other. (p. 215)

Mao argues that his method of recontextualization “insists on developing terms of interdependence and interconnectivity, aiming not merely to reverse our evaluation of the self/other binary or any other binary for that matter, but to recalibrate it or to replace it” (p. 220). What replaces a binary understanding of interaction and identity is a model of the self and other as unstable categories that shift. One informs and influences the other in set of potential recursive processes. Ultimately, this describes a way to *enact* meaningful interchange, which Mao describes as, “an intersubjective process through which other and self engage in a cross-cultural dialogue with an abiding sense of self-reflection, interdependence, and accountability” (p. 222).

Nedra Reynolds (2004) wrote about attending to the *where* of writing and brought cultural geographers to bear on composition research at length in her *Geographies of Writing*. She interviews student writers at the University of Leeds on their sense of location throughout the city as a part of their writing processes. She leans on de Certeau’s (1984) argument that walking in the streets is a rhetorical act and brings readers in on a larger theoretical debate of the terms “space” and “place” in her notes:

Space and place are two distinct terms ...Space is the more conceptual notion—a realm of practices—while place is defined by people and events. In one sense, places are fixed positions on a map, or you can follow directions to get there. Space, if you will, structures our habitats but cannot be inhabited. Places touch people’s lives and evoke memories and emotions. (p. 181)

Place in this sense is located on the more material side of the spectrum, and space encompasses place while also including much more abstract concepts of influencing how that place is understood and navigated. Space alludes to something co-constitutive through action and sedimentation reiterated or adapted through time.

The space versus place discussion is lengthy, and there is not enough time to parse all the particulars here, but for the purposes of this project it is instructive to understand broadly the debate between de Certeau and LeFebvre in how to consider space in relation to the everyday—"the everyday" is a term resonating in many ways with transnationality and ethnography. De Certeau's notions of strategies and tactics are probably his most well known in composition/rhetoric, but his way of thinking through the concept of space is also important. De Certeau (1984) equated the relationship between space and place as similar to reading a text or walking a city—the authors/urban planners in these cases structuring their work around places (e.g. landmarks or tropes) and the readers/walkers performing or putting into practice a space—in a sense practicing places into spaces. Or, as he wrote: "space is a practiced place" (p. 117). The tension then is between the planned and structured place and the more anarchic alternative potentials of moving around that and thus performing space. Space in this sense responds to and assumes a sort of stable intention.

LeFebvre, less known in composition but perhaps more influential (especially to geographers like Soja and Harvey who are discussed in composition), begins from the notion of space as a trialectic (LeFebvre and Harvey, 1992). The three features of space are conceived space (the structure of the state), lived space (desires, dreams, memories of those living within the space), and perceived space (the way dwellers use space). Space in this sense is a slightly more complex negotiation, but also unfolds like a "continuous social dynamic" (Vermuelen 2015). Place is merely a pause in the ongoing flow of space. This is critical because of where one locates agency among these forces, as described by Vermuelen:

For De Certeau, agency resides almost exclusively within space. According to his Foucauldian logic, the only freedom you have is to formulate alternative sentences. For the actor, after all, the script is beyond reach. It's not his to change: it's the author's. If we follow Lefebvre's conceptualization, however, it is *place* where the intervention occurs. It is place, after all, where the complex trialectic of space is tangible: it is where we can get our hands on it, where we can latch onto, and potentially intervene in, either of the three flows of space. De Certeau understands agency as the enactment of a script not our own, whereas Lefebvre sees it not as a container for action but as the construction of action itself.

The interpretation here by Vermuelen is particularly resonant with this project through his usage of the terms "container" and "construction." LeFebvre gives us an improvisational, relational, and radical sense of our environments charged with more practical possibility and dynamism. Our actions aren't merely responses to a set text or location, but these locations are co-constructed and informed by our ongoing-locating selves. There is more agency to go around.

Notions of movement, contact, and interaction are often rooted in structuralist, sedentarist notions of place and identity; the problem with binary notions of place is that they collapse a whole world of possibility into simplified, romanticized reasonings. Gupta and Ferguson (1992) lay out the core assumptions of anthropological study of cultural others that necessarily must shift in order to see how a space becomes a place in a transnationally oriented view of context. In their view, the assumption of ruptured space (i.e. borders), or what they call "the premise of discontinuity" offers a starting point from which to "theorize contact, conflict, and contradiction between cultures and societies" (p. 6). But, space is often seen as neutral and de-historicized, the formation of which is often analytically absent when beginning with the assumption of naturally disconnected spaces, rather than always hierarchical interconnection as the historical norm.

Transnationality, for Gupta and Ferguson, has rendered any "strictly bounded sense

of community or locality obsolete,” but it has also enabled forms of identity outside of “appropriation of space;” not that space is irrelevant, but that it is “reterritorialized” to reconceptualize community, identity, and cultural difference (p. 9). Removing the anchor of identity from a particular space by assuming a borderlands identity as the norm for postmodern locale means seeing the world as a “difference-producing set of relations;” and to “turn from a project of juxtaposing preexisting differences to one of exploring the construction of differences in historical process,” which connects and separates on multiple grids beyond simply physical territory (p. 16). This new representation of territory and distance align on grids of class, gender, race, sexuality, language—or in institutions along roles, disciplines, departments—and are “differentially available to those in different locations in the field of power” (20). Sociologically speaking, they point out, the distance between the rich in London and the rich in Mumbai can be closer than between those of different classes in the same city—and it is the production of this collapsed or expanded distance for which transnationality aims to account. That is one part of the nuance that a transnational view offers to TWPA work: a different account of distance.

For me, this awareness that my research must remain cognizant of the perspective in which it casts its observations and the ways in which I and my participants collaborate to create space and difference as a kind of performance of exploration—rather than unearthing some objective, core truth—is crucial. As I see it, navigating TWPA work requires “placing” oneself—pausing and considering a data point (which can be located and parsed among a series of containers, moments, actors) —and orienting to the ongoing flow of Lefebvrian space. Thus, day-to-day work is in tension between theory and

practice, but one's awareness of location—or here what might be called a “translocation” as a never settled, never stopped series of places—requires tacking between actions (reading, writing, speaking, listening, observing, moving, being) underwritten by ongoing reflection and consideration both personally and collaboratively. In a sense, this is the process of spatial co-construction; the daily mobilities—as de Certeau would say in some ways blindly and in some ways sighted (1984, p. 93)—by which we work in the service of our projects. The next section moves to a more specific sociological, methodological guidance for this ethnographic study beginning in the work of Dorothy Smith.

Institutional Ethnography as Sociology/Methodology

Smith's sociological work is rooted in Marxist materiality, which she paraphrases as a position that “the social comes into being only as the doings of actual people under definite material conditions and that we enter into social relations beyond our control that our own activities bring into being” (p. 25). Her work is also driven by her experience of canonical sociological research in contradiction to the consciousness raising work of the women's movement, in which she was an active participant. Smith writes about what she calls the “ruling relations” experienced in the women's movement as a “dual consciousness, with the particularities of being mother and housewife, on the one hand, and, on the other, the abstracted discourses and forms of organization creating the matrix of a consciousness outside the local and particular” (p. 73). Here exist resonances with the entanglement of local/global forces inherent in the transnational orientation that Hesford and others have theorized. In this sense, Smith notices that integrated duality between local particulars and what are perceived as much larger, dare I say global, coordinating pressures. Smith is interested in making visible what she calls the “ruling

relations” as larger coordinating forces that connect and locate individuals in a social matrix. In the case of this project, the ruling relations are where the sedentarist versus mobile metaphysics—in its many forms of mono/multi/ trans-lingual, inter/multi/trans-national, center versus periphery institutions, and the commodifying global neoliberal market capitalist developments—become salient.

Smith’s mode of inquiry is rooted in what she calls the everyday/everynight lived experiences of people as the starting place to understanding the ruling relations. She holds in tension the extremes of inquiry that reduce the social into “properties of individuals or to reconstitute it as a supra-individual blob” (p. 7). Here she is navigating an always emerging middle ground between these extremes, but to do that, the work must remain vigilant against abstraction and the development of “conceptualizations that lift phenomena out of time and place, constituting them as discursive entities in the peculiar timelessness of established sociology’s discourse” (p. 7). It is this universalizing, essentializing move that her work remains ever cautious against. What this means is that instead of placing participants in the position of a data point to explain the state of universal concepts (e.g. society) as stable terms one merely updates by simply explaining the behavior of an individual outside of a connection to those forces, the aim is to be able to “explain to them/ourselves the socially organized powers in which their/our lives are embedded and to which their/our activities contribute” (p. 8). This gets at an ontological position where the observer or researcher is not separate from the object of inquiry.

Smith connects her ontological commitments (and what is a very mobilities inflected version of social reality) to which a researcher is embedded and indebted:

Inquiry is in and of the same world as people live in. Hence this sociology is self-consciously attentive to the social relational dimensions of its own practice, a

critical attention that is, of course, never perfected. It is always also about ourselves as inquirers, not just our personal selves, but ourselves as participants in the social relations we explore. In discovering dimensions of the social that come into view when we begin inquiry from the actualities of people's lives and experience, we discover the lineaments of social relations in which our own lives are embedded. For this sociology, there is no outside, no Archimedean point from which a positionless account can be written. Writing the social is always from where people are. Discovery is of the relations that generate multiple sites of diverging experience. It is from those multiple and diverse sites that their dimensions, organization, and organizing powers can be brought into view. (p. 8)

The conversations in which I participated while working in England demonstrate this idea as being a part of a community of people across different contexts trying to make sense of how to develop writing support in their institutions, many of us mobile scholars of some kind—I felt a part of something. That something was a transnational writing studies, it was a social space like Smith describes. In conceptualizing my research project, I wanted to maintain an awareness of the separation between the contexts in which I and my participants are separately located. But, I also wanted to maintain a position recognizing that our conversations were not happening outside of, or separate from, our everyday/everynight worlds, nor were they separately contained by our local realities.

As such, Dorothy Smith's description of there being no outside point—that the researcher and participant are part of the same world, and that research doesn't detach itself for a chat to elucidate that world; that this conversation is part of the ongoing flow of sensemaking work in which we are performing a knowledge-making collaboration—was, unsurprisingly, very grounding. While I was trying to investigate transnationality as it is actually experienced in the work of internationally mobile WPAs—and potentially link it up to larger sedentary, global neoliberal capitalist pressures—I wanted to avoid a temptation to develop a sort of guide or template that would abstract and reduce particulars to a kind of idealized set of tropes or rules. In short, I just wanted to talk with

them about what it's like, to raise questions of where they make their cuts in containing certain aspects of their worlds, and to honor and make visible the sensemaking work they perform. To work with them in discussing potential connections with ruling relations was part of the collaboration that I felt must happen *with* participants as much as possible. Such considerations inform what is called critical ethnography, articulated for composition and rhetoric in works like Brown and Dobrin (2004).

Michelle LaFrance has taken up Smith's Institutional Ethnography (IE) as valuable to writing studies, especially given Smith's insistence that the ruling relations are often mediated through texts. LaFrance describes Smith's work as a response to "positivist paradigms and universalist models of empirical research," which, Smith argued, "frequently oversimplified and reified the material conditions of sites of study" (p. 4). Ethnography, according to LaFrance, is a go to in writing studies as it allows richness and specificity and a more holistic view of the area one studies. What LaFrance articulates about IE so clearly in her description is how the feminist materialist standpoint theory and the notion of the ruling relations that coordinate everyday/everynight worlds "collapses distinctions between broader discursive forces (such as professional and institutional discourse) and the ways we carry out our work" (p. 5). In this sense, IE offers a way to trace connections between larger discourses and how they organize and inform what can be seemingly disconnected, or irrelevant, acts in our everyday lives. So, the goal of IE is to "reveal how our lives take shape as a process of negotiation of social relations...to investigate how the individuals within a location co-create the dynamics and processes under investigation" (p. 5). In the terms of this project, these social

processes are the ones in which mobile WPAs locate themselves amidst a spectrum of power dynamics related to their identities.

In searching for a way to offer a more nuanced representation of TWPA work, IE resonates for its attention to “highly specific and individualized ways in which work actually takes shape within institutional settings” (p. 7). As a method, IE offers a standard set of data collection practices of observation, survey, text analysis, etc.; but as a methodology it offers a way of collapsing distinctions²⁰ between everyday particular actions and larger discursive forces by making visible the day-to-day work done to materialize institutions. The main argument of IE, here as described by LaFrance, is to highlight the overwhelming attention paid to theorizing institutions or analyzing materiality in broad rhetorical patterns in the writing studies field, rather than “the ways individual people actually negotiate those discourses in an everyday sense” (p. 14). IE calls on us to see an institutional site as actual places filled with actual people who take particular approaches to their work—rather than as a collision of ethnicities, or nationalities, or disciplinary identity, or job titles (p. 17). So, for the purposes of this project, I found the attention to the interconnectivity of these social relations, and the collapsing of the ruling relations down into the everyday/everynight activities to speak to the mobilities paradigm as well as the call for greater nuance in approaching and representing TWPA work. It spoke to the gaps I found in considering my work and the knowledge made by others who do similar work.

My transnational institutional ethnographic project needed a way to move beyond received notions of physical, cultural demarcations and begin instead with an assumption

²⁰ Similar to what Gupta and Ferguson (1992) describe in their transnational reterritorialization.

of material and abstract distance as a product of social, historical processes—not to call borders obsolete, but to attend to the ways they inform everyday/everynight activities. The institutions that house writing programs are transnational spaces—interconnected across physical and disciplinary geographies—that are co-constructed through the distributed work of those who perform myriad tasks in the shared effort of delivering writing support and tuition. IE takes these theoretical notions of space/place from philosophy, anthropology, rhetoric, and others, and enables a pointed critique of how the ruling relations organize individual activities. These ruling relations filter through different aspects of TWPA work as language ideologies, identity formations, disciplinary commitments, institutional politics, multi-scalar policies, neoliberal capitalist pressures, etc. It is this potential for critique based in the everyday work of WPAs, especially internationally mobile WPAs, that I see as rich sources of knowledge on the nature of TWPA work and for developing a critical awareness of the forces at work in the construction of writing programs worldwide. Without this transnational orientation, it is harder to see the real power struggles beyond the limited sense of physical-geographic local versus global interests—there are more complex and variegated grids of identity and power, and more diverse spatial scales at work. With a more nuanced view of these processes—of creating or collapsing distances—we can leverage more complex and critically aware voices in response to the challenges writing programs and scholars face.

Influential studies

The main goal of my study was to take an ethnographic look at internationally mobile WPAs working in postsecondary higher education institutions. Through interviews, I gathered narratives about the day-to-day challenges, experiences, and

strategies of mobile writing scholars, especially in the context of identity and institutional change. My study represents others' experiences working to navigate limitations in their transnational roles in an effort to develop better strategies for engagement across global contexts. This focus is meant to address the need for more nuanced narratives and theorizations in transnational writing program administrative work, and the ongoing need for models of engaging with difference and the roles writing studies scholarship can play in responding to global forces in higher education.

From my experience as a mobile WPA in a transnational writing program, I remember moves to standardize, digitize, monetize, and privatize learning—and these pressures are in many ways mobilized through writing's role in knowledge production and commodification. There is a potential for critique and resistance to forces that diminish one's capacity to create knowledge, to promote accessibility, equality, in pedagogy and assessment and policies; to counter exclusionary, discriminatory practices in the ways writers are taught. This potential for critique is needed in the ways one approaches their role in writing support/research, but the first step to strategizing these potentials is to understand as clearly as possible what is already happening, what the context of this work already looks like. Merely representing the work as it is being done and the ways it asserts trans-realities is the critique this project offers. This is why I take to heart Dorothy Smith's ontological shift in resisting imposing a top-down term or framework (also Latour, Bourdieu, Schatzki, and many others). Taking into account transnational theorizations of space and place as ongoing, emerging, co-constitutive; I prefer a modestly multi-sited ethnography with other internationally mobile WPAs and I look to WPAs in the spirit of Starke-Meyering's (2014) locating of them at an

intersection of powerful forces. I take WPA work to be theoretical in the sense of Rose and Weiser (2002), and take up Zenger's (2018) call for more nuanced theorizations of transnational work. I see a potential for reciprocity and connection in studying the transnational navigations of internationally mobile WPAs and how they understand their institutional spaces as analytical entry-points to broader trans-oriented moves one makes in a global writing studies field.

Brice Nordquist's (2017) work on high school students in transition is an example of composition research applying a mobile and emergent methodological view of literacy and place through an ethnographic study. Nordquist writes of initially observing the high school research site as stable and being unquestioning in his role as observer. Then, he comes to see ethnography is about relationships in conflict and negotiation, and how they co-construct place—not just as a synonym for description. After authorities declare a state of emergency in the school and make drastic administrative changes during his project, students increasingly reach out to Nordquist for guidance on their academic futures. This leads to a shift in methodology to multi-sited ethnography with a mobilities framework. These changes in the research site call forth a rich sense of place as emergent; “Formed through movement, places are events rather than things, topics rather than objects” (p. 12). He claims that “places may be perduring and consistent, but they are never inert” and draws attention to a balance between the very local practices of literacy and the global macro views of mobility to what he calls “intimately small and mundane mobilities” (p. 16). There is an emphasis in his work on the everyday practices that negotiate and co-construct places, especially when faced with such dramatic instability in the role of his research site. His work challenges dominant educational

discourses that enforce systems of “singular, unidirectional trajectories” (p. 16). The emphasis on place as emerging through everyday practice is reflected in his methods in which he uses time-space mapping to draw movements—participants kept time-space logs of movements through school and the city. He also did mobile interviewing on buses as part of his multi-sited ethnography. The idea is to track a more mobile sense of literacy, and the everyday places students form their views and make their decisions about their educations in much more varied and complex trajectories, which dominant narratives of social and literacy mobility often elide.

Similarly mobilities-oriented, Prior (1998) offers his sociohistoric account of writing and disciplinarity as situated, distributed, and mediated activity to contrast received structuralist norms. In his study, he worked to articulate a version of disciplinary enculturation through examining the role of writing in the streams of activity of graduate students. His work speaks back to common tropes and structuralist discourses that imagine disciplines as “autonomous objects existing in a detemporalized space, as territories to be mapped or systems to be diagrammed” (p. 25). For example, the common notions of the process of graduate school and its inevitable completion call on spatial metaphors that

Equate disciplinary enculturation with *entering into a place*...the trope that rules and conventions *govern* interaction, and normative allusions to “appropriate” behavior and “initiation,” all mark a reliance on structuralist approaches to language, knowledge, and society, a basic territorial image that figures the discipline as both authoritative and unified. (p. 4)

His sociohistoric orientation offers a view of a discipline as an open network of other intermingling scales—interpersonal, institutional, social, etc. By looking at literate activity as dispersed across all these difference scales, manifested through practices, and

often conforming to and simultaneously resisting these structuralist impulses, Prior is able to describe an ongoing emergence of disciplinarity through these institutionally located activities.

Later, Smith and Prior (2019) outline their hybrid flat CHAT methodology, which they describe as an “architecture” that enables historically-infused “complex trajectories of becoming” (p. 2); and looking at writing through the lens of what they call “transliteracies,” Flat CHAT sees literacy dispersed “across many concrete flows of activity and emerging continuously across space, time, people, environments, and semiotic resources” (p. 3). Their methodological hybridity supports a broader sense of the development of these concepts over time without the limitations of fixed categorization. The modifier *trans-* in this case is meant to offer a “valuable ambiguity” about the movement of phenomena across conceptual and analytical space, which “signals both mobility (across-ness) and complexity (beyond-ness)” (p. 2). They argue that “Seeing learning and development as matters of *across-ness* rejects a teleological stance that aims to fix people’s lines of flight into tightly controlled, pre-fabricated channels, arguing instead for a focus on joining into open-ended, agentive projects of becoming” (p. 9). The focus on joining these transliteracy factors through the flat CHAT lens is described as a “methodological imperative,” because trajectories of people and texts need to be traced more fully “*across* time, space, and culturally-marked boundaries” (p. 10).

In their study, they look at two different sites: one of them in the description of their subject Nora becoming a Biologist, and the other in looking at a youth program on writing. By demonstrating the various historical factors/literacy activities that contribute to these individuals/groups’ becoming, they demonstrate a complex set of connections

that inform the emergence of an identity. Their ethnographic approach looks across various contexts in socially networked, and geographically dispersed events over time to see how a sense of identity emerges, aiming to trace the processes by which it changes. They do this through extensive interviews, textual analyses, video collection, etc.

Nordquist's mobilities focus and Smith and Prior's notion of transliteracy allow them to trace a trajectory of an idea, identity, or practice as it moves, thus resisting notions of stable, binary (on/off) activities. Both of these examples are focused on working with students, but they do not look at administrative narratives, or at the development of these institutional programs from the perspective of WPAs or other administrators—especially not transnationally. Looking more towards administrative work, Katrin Girgensohn (2018) traveled from Germany to the United States to do what she calls “expert interviews” with writing center directors to understand how collaborative pedagogy influences a potentially collaborative administrative approach. She finds that WPAs “use a stance of collaborative learning to deal with the challenges in their everyday work and to institutionalize their writing centers” (p. 11). She takes a grounded approach aiming to address a gap between a demand for WPA knowledge and an evidence-based approach to producing that knowledge (p. 11). Her goal in this sense is to stabilize and systematize the findings through a concept of institutional work as defined in organizational studies. Administrators are seen as actors moving in relation to institutional imperatives of stability and legitimacy. She states her aim to “gain a more nuanced picture of the everyday work of writing center directors as well as of typical challenges and strategies to deal with them” (p. 12).

While this approach to finding nuance is valuable, Dorothy Smith (2005) would be critical, perhaps, of how this approach follows a mainstream sociological goal because of the way it “clamps a conceptual framework over any project of inquiry,” which determines, dominates, and constrains the interpretation of “the actual” (p. 50). Girgensohn’s focus was on developing a way to make visible the collaborative learning strategies present in WPA work, and to offer a more nuanced view of the social strategies involved in running writing centers, and so, in this sense it is still a strong contribution to the field. My study, however, seeks to resist this move of setting terms above the participants and instead remain open to what the actualities of the work may reveal.

In another administrator-focused study, Esterberg and Wooding (2013) describe the goal of their ethnographic project as aiming “to understand more about how university administrators think and process knowledge, how they undertake sensemaking of their institutions, and how their life experiences influence their work as administrators” (p. 59). The researchers’ findings point to common experiences with a lack of job training, gaps in responsibility and communication among institutional actors, and a lack of shared governance. They treat departments as local and disciplines as global—in a sense—and locate individuals as constantly negotiating their commitments to both, as well as pointing to habits of mind as more indicative of institutional/disciplinary location. Though not explicitly internationally or transnationally oriented, this study describes the salient tensions and more nuanced terms that I believe writing studies scholars are requesting. Such links only help to build a transnational orientation that works to complicate such boundaries, so seeing such strong resonances

even when globalizing terms are absent only further supports the value of transnationality as the norm.

Questions and considerations

Earlier in this chapter, I raised the questions of how to actually represent the conversational core of knowledge among WPAs, especially in communicating the transnational orientation to identity, work, and place inherent in my approach. As the previous section described, I come to the project with the position that I am inside this co-construction of place; that my participants and I are collaborating on the sense-making work of articulating, reflecting, and performing identities-in-place-making. As we are not interested in a linear progression towards an essential code of conduct, nor fixed notions to be isolated and examined, I resist the impulse to impose a set of values or terms on the conversations. These methods take to heart Kirsch and Ritchie's (1995) point that when one intends to "preserve the value of experience as a source of knowledge," it is important to recognize the impossibility of full understanding, to embrace the incompleteness of this task and reflect on the motives of the project (p. 13). In later chapters, this incompleteness really resonates with what participants describe. Where possible, I have wanted to ask open-ended questions that allow participants to choose their own terms, and when helpful to offer my own experiences and the findings of my own readings. I have wanted to also push for connections beyond those simply located in work-spaces, which means inviting connections across contexts and professional relationships in consideration of sense-making. At the same time, these goals are bound by the reality that our conversations are focused around particular terms and events and norms of behavior in interviews.

When planning the interviews, it is always in my mind to not assume that transnationality is a concept that participants will identify with; to endeavor to create a space by which participants can offer their own terms; and that the knowledge we create is a product specific to a time and place where we have our conversation. Kirsch and Ritchie remind us that the internal and external demand for coherence can “reduce complex phenomena or erase differences” for the sake of the theories (p. 24). It matters that our trajectories brought us to each conversation and the impulse to extract, de-personalize, aggregate, and thus de-territorialize that knowledge is resisted in sometimes small, subtle ways. And, in reading through my transcripts and notes, it is also clear that this impulse is not always perfectly performed—there are times when the impulse to reflectively probe an idea begins to feel like attempting to isolate and thus reduce the nuance and dynamism of a concept or event. This is the central push and pull of the project—to resist the urge to resolve while also pushing a conversation to go further in its collaboration.²¹ The rest of this chapter outlines the methods I have chosen in my navigation of these different forces.

Research questions

- What are transnational writing scholars actually doing as they make knowledge necessary to navigate institutions and negotiate agency?
- How do transnational writing studies professionals describe their own processes of negotiation and navigation of cross-boundary knowledge-making and transnational literacies in their experiences?
- What are the central concerns to those doing day-to-day transnational writing work?

This is an ethnographic project, but it is not a traditional ethnography or an institutional ethnography *per se* (I don’t spend an extended amount of time in a single

²¹ For more on the dilemma on the inevitability of researchers shaping that which they research, see Lu and Horner (1998).

research site, nor do I include texts as part of my data collection). My study uses ethnographic tools to pursue its questions; tools that, as Sheridan (2012) described, are especially helpful to “connect everyday language use with larger cultural practices” (p. 82). I focus more on the narratives of participants as they describe their everyday worlds in the context of transnational consideration and their WPA roles. Soin and Scheytt (2006) have argued, in their call for more narratives in organizational research methodologies, that stories help us construct and interpret the “rich tapestry of organizational realities” (p. 55). Aligning with the theoretical framing above of transnational work and institutional space as dynamic, non-binary, and mediated through everyday material practices, Soin and Scheytt describe narratives as useful in highlighting an “interpretation of interactive situations as opposed to neutral, objective, and/or reified matters” (p. 73). For the scope of this dissertation, it is this interactivity as understood by the participants that I have wanted to discover. I am interested in fitting narratives in with the theoretical frame to see, first, whether participants agreed with such emerging theorizations, and next, how they describe the processes by which they navigate such contingency.

Methods

Participant selection

Because this is a project about international mobility and WPA work, I wanted to start with others whose experience might most closely resonate with mine in order to most closely create a sense of collaboration—so I chose to seek out internationally mobile WPAs who had part of their professional training experience in higher education in U.S. (i.e. compositionist) institutions. Participants were recruited from previous

professional contact and snowball sampling. Though there are many more potential interview participants who do WPA work internationally, not all of them are internationally mobile in their roles. I believed that the richest site of potentially transnational navigation for the purposes of this study, and thus theoretical nuance and complexity, has come from the demographic of people who are living and working “abroad” (from the U.S.), seen as outsiders in some ways, and locating themselves among a range of de-stabilizing forces. I take to heart that transnationality does not require international mobility to be conceptually salient, especially given diverse institutional backgrounds and the very real applicability to purely domestic contexts’ intersectionality along many identity markers and spatial scales. And in a certain sense, choosing the participant demographic that I have can work to confirm whether this is true. But, part of how I understand transnationality means that one cannot simply move beyond the concepts of nations, that nations and national-level considerations are an important material and discursive force in the everyday/everynight worlds of all of us. Given that fact, I still believe that international mobility is an essential component to understanding the work and offers the richness in potential knowledge that I seek in my study.

As I have stated in earlier chapters, the term “WPA” covers a broad concept, especially if we move away from the limited nature of an official designation of a role as WPA and look toward the diverse forms of work required to sustain a writing program. This work is distributed across numerous actors in numerous roles—administrative staff, instructors, graduate students—discussion in committee meetings, planning and delivering payroll, recruiting and communicating with the public, etc. Even if one is in

the official role of WPA—under any number of titles—there are often other roles that intersect with this individual’s position: instructor, researcher, tutor. It is this distributed and entangled nature that I believe makes the role rich for ethnographic investigation, especially when adding the extra complexity of transnational orientations to understanding context and the potential outsider status that comes with international mobility. For the purposes of this study, the WPA is one who is officially in-charge of guiding and maintaining a writing program—usually either through a writing center or course-level writing instruction. That role can come under a lot of different terms owing to the diversity of program identities and institutional structures around the world, though it was important to me to include as a requirement for participation that a person had been officially in the role of a WPA, though not necessarily needing to circulate that specific term. An instructor taking up much of the work of a WPA in meetings or in various administrative tasks would not qualify for this project—later stages of such research could welcome this more distributed sense of WPA work. Hopefully, my project could serve as a source from which comparisons can be made to argue for the relationships that distribute the work.

Recalling the literature review of chapter 2, the term “transnational” does not serve as a ready replacement for an international/global individual or location simply as a given of the fact that national borders have a limited salience. The term “transnational” is itself a very modest modifier if one limits the designation to challenging nation-container concepts. Transnationality is mostly a paradigmatic description of questioning the nation as a useful container or signifier for different identities and meanings. To use the term “transnational” to describe a person, for example, or a professional role (TWPA), is a bit

loose in terms of its significance. The function of the term “transnational,” to me, is not simply to designate a demographic group, nor to offer as an assumed connotation some kind of physical mobility across geopolitical borders. So, the question for me isn’t whether an individual is a TWPA or not, the question is more how do we understand WPA work if we locate it in a transnational context? In this sense, I use TWPA to describe the extent to which an individual might engage with destabilized national narratives and identities as a function of their professional roles; not just in terms of the students they are teaching or programs they administer, but in the day-to-day nature of navigating the texts and interactions central to performing their WPA tasks. One finds a rich area of discussion resulting from beginning with a transnational orientation to WPA work. Because I start with a desire to represent TWPA work and writing programs in under-represented places outside of the north American scope of composition studies, I prefer to refer to participants in this study as internationally mobile WPAs—not as TWPAs.

Focusing on internationally mobile WPAs allows me to trace the ways in which the potential relationships between U.S.-based composition and WPA work become reconfigured through individuals working in diverse international institutions. My goals are not purely to question whether WPA is a U.S. phenomenon, but to better see what happens as a WPA enters an institutional context rife with engagement of national and other signifiers as part of the professional and rhetorical ecology. I find the most rich and accessible starting point for tracing these reconfigurations in international sites. In short: the work is not transnational because national borders have been crossed; it is transnational because the reconfigurations and destabilizations of national identity are

potentially central to the everyday business of being and doing the work of a WPA. This is how my transnational researcher ethos allows me to work towards representing the more nuanced and dynamic realities as seen by my participants in their work—but also allows that their own conceptualizations may not always resonate with these theorizations.

Study design

In person interviews took place in East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe; due to coronavirus travel restrictions, an interview with a participant in Western Europe took place over Skype without a site visit. Interviews took place on trains, in university offices, while walking across campuses, in private residences, and online. Some participants had single interviews and others had multiple, based on the topics of discussion and the flow of the conversation, as well as material limitations such as time and availability in a particular location.

Interviews

Whenever possible, I interviewed participants in their institutional locations through in-person visits. Given the mobilities focus of this project, I was also open to meetings and other means of data collection outside of a single site, what Nordquist (2017) called shadowing. This meant conducting interviews on trains, in nearby coffee shops, as voice memos recorded while participants were walking alone and an idea struck them, etc. The audio-recorded follow-up stretches the notion of “interview” by extending the format and time and place of the conversation, which I consider to be fitting with the mobilities approach we are working to uncover. Audio recorded data ranged from 5– to

10-minute voice memos up to two-hour plus interviews. The table below shows the specific information for each interview.

Table 2

Pseudonym	Interview #	Date	Duration	Format
Esther	1	27 May 2019	94 minutes	In-person
	2	29 May 2019	16 minutes	In-person (train)
	3	1 July 2019	94 minutes	In-person
	4	30 July 2019	86 minutes	In-person
Alison	1	10 June 2019	75 minutes	In-person
Ellis	1	17 June 2019	144 minutes	In-person
	2	16 July 2019	71 minutes	Skype
	3	16 July 2019	26 minutes	Voice memos
	4	19 July 2019	152 minutes	Skype
Billie	1	2 July 2019	87 minutes	In-person
Max	1	17 April 2020	128 minutes	Skype

Researcher/participant/collaborator roles

Interviews relied on open-ended questions to enable exploratory conversations and allow for an organic development of ideas and sharing of experiences. All participants were interviewed with the below question structure as a guide, though conversations were dynamic in response to topics as they seemed salient.

- What is your current role—or what were any prior WPA-like roles—and how did you arrive at them?
- How do you see your work in the larger institutional context? How significant is the institutional aspect of your role, compared with classroom level?
- What is your academic/professional background and how does that fit—or not fit—with your institutional context?
- Can you describe any opportunities and challenges you experience institutionally?
- Can you point to any specific moments where you experienced changes or negotiated conflict with your views?

- How do you make sense of the institutional labor required to work internationally or transnationally?
- If your views were changed in any way, what particular experiences informed or caused this change?
- What new understandings, either good or bad, resulted from your interactions/experiences in your institution?
- How do you think experiences outside of the campus space inform or not inform your institutional role?

In general, the interviews were seeking the terms by which participants made sense of their work, of the salience of transnational considerations, and of the trajectories not only in their everyday activities related to work, but in their journeys to their current roles.

In the interviews, I remained aware of my own role in shaping the responses and embraced in a few specific ways the idea that participants and I were collaborators (see more on the shift from interview as research instrument to social practice from Talmy, 2011). I did my best to let the participants offer their own terms for phenomena and sensemaking processes, and in a sense let them “lead” this aspect of the “dance” of our conversation. I was cautious in my interviews to not impose terms like “transnational” or “mobile” and instead to try and hear how/what terms participants offered to make sense of their worlds. At the same time, I embraced the fact that these interviews were ultimately shaped by my perspective and offered my own insights and experiences as part of the conversation as it went on, especially when the participant might have found a limit in what they were trying to articulate. This seemed like a direct and important aspect of reciprocity, along with the gesture of traveling to their sites, of creating an ethos different from extraction of information but one of two WPAs working to solve problems. In short, I wanted it to feel in whatever way like we were “in it together,” though coming from different places and in different positions. This to me seemed to

embody a transnational method: making clear what overlaps exist and where the boundaries are for that particular moment.

Data analysis

These methods and methodologies frame a study that wants to be aware of the influence of me, the researcher, and also make space for as much participant-driven discussion as possible. What I hoped to find were examples of the tangled nature of this work, of the rich complexity in considering the many facets and forces in play for a mobile WPA. The next chapter will offer selections from the interviews as they call into the relevant themes and terms as guided by participants as well as offer some tentative discussion of the ways in which these data help us understand TWPA work. These selections were selected by means of relevance to when participants offered their own terms for sensemaking processes or shared evocative events that we spent time unpacking.

Privacy

There is a central tension in doing person-based research that seeks to represent scholars in a richly local context while also honoring their anonymity and privacy. Given the narrow population of scholars who fit in the demographic of internationally mobile WPA scholars with some background in U.S. composition training or instruction, it would have been relatively easy to identify participants. With that in mind, I decided to adopt the following measures. Biographies were approved by participants with any edits welcomed; I first sent them a totally anonymized version and then asked whether they wanted me to include further details. All data selected for inclusion in the dissertation were approved as well by participants. That way, to the best extent possible, participants

were in control of what was shared and how they were identified in conversations. The level of anonymity offered in the data in the next chapter was chosen by each participant.

The local vs. privacy

An absent piece worth noting here is the serious amount of local perceptions and pieces particular to each place observed by me and shared by participants in our meetings. This has impacted the representation of the interviews of the next chapter in a very important way. An ideal transnational orientation would allow for a more balanced intertwining of consideration for so-called global and so-called local factors. The particular blend between individual backgrounds and trajectories into the specific places they inhabited in their WPA roles and how these all interfaced with the foci of this project and my particular role in co-constructing the knowledge of our interviews is palpably absent and thus under-theorized. Luckily, I found what I needed in their discussions of the work as this limitation helped me to focus on what they were saying and doing that was related to the process of understanding their places rather than settling on a fixed description.

What this means in practice, though, is that a lot of information was scrapped from this project. I had field notes and observations of visiting sites that really helped to place, in rich detail, the ways in which participants made sense of physical and conceptual places of their everyday/everynight worlds. We sometimes met on campus, sometimes met off campus; there were access issues given the nature of campus security or political events, for example, that shaped our conversations in ways really relevant to the aims of this study. Another major loss comes from the fact that the actual languages used, and the prominence of English (or lack of prominence) was left out of the

discussion, again because it would make the participant somewhat easily identifiable. Despite the loss of these valuable pieces of information from the reporting of these interviews, I still think that the gesture of traveling to these sites is still evident in, and essential to, the data. The ethos of *coming to* participants, seeing what they see, eating where they eat, I think sets a crucial tone for collaboration. Our conversations, even if parts were not reported, could include ruminations on and impressions of local aspects as part of the sensemaking work of participants. It is my hope to find ways to collaborate with participants on articles through which we can share more of our perceptions and particulars of place.

CHAPTER IV

THE INTERVIEW DATA

Let us remember the goals of this project here as we are about to dive into the data. Earlier chapters—looking at WPA scholarship, trans-/mobility studies, and global writing studies—described a spectrum between establishment narratives that seek a somewhat stable local/national frame (sedentarist) and, on the other end, more complicated transnational narratives that describe unstable, contingent, and dynamic frames (mobilities). At what might be called the cutting edge of this emerging mobilities approach to global writing studies, we located TWPA work as a focus point for navigating and producing knowledge about transnational framing because internationally mobile WPAs are located at rich intersections of discourse and power that reverberate across many scales/layers/locations. More specifically, this project responds to voices (Hesford, Horner, Zenger) calling for more nuanced and thorough representations of transnational understandings of place through depictions and theorizations of TWPA work as a way to mobilize these messier realities and strategize new ways to take up the challenges they present. In short, mobile WPAs can give us a boots-on-the-ground impression of the nuanced ways transnational—or other trans-orientated—work gets done. Reciprocally, a mobilities approach allows us to capture in more detail the messy realities of the work.

Participants in this study—internationally mobile WPAs—speak to post-secondary education institutions in European, Middle Eastern, and South Asian countries. The starting point for these conversations was to hear what participants had to tell me; how do they describe their work and what terms do *they* use? I was listening for where they draw certain lines and then trying to determine how mobile those lines might be. Then, we spent time on the experiences that offered rich unpacking, that had dense intersections, that took time and effort to parse. These became the events that formed potential anecdotes to share more in depth. Throughout the interviews there were moments where participants shared their impressions and opinions as glimpses into their sensemaking; sometimes they were lengthy parsings of an event, sometimes a dense gem of insight, with lots of richness in-between. In this chapter, I will discuss each participant's insights based on the coding scheme that highlighted key terms, evocative events, and sensemaking descriptions they describe as relevant to understanding their work. Their narrating and unpacking are where we find the rhetorical meat of their sensemaking and the material for articulating more nuanced understandings of TWPA work and transnational theorizations. At the end a brief conclusion will help us transition to Ch. 5 where further discussion will be offered.

Billie

Born and raised in the United States, Billie moved abroad and settled with her husband in their new country decades prior to any academic career. They were committed to finding a foreign community where they could be a force for good. While living, raising a family, and working in her international location in different jobs, Billie was offered the post of a writing center director as a maternity cover (covering for someone

out on maternity leave), which then became a permanent position. She cites her prior experience as a creative writer participating in many writing groups with offering many transferable skills for offering feedback, to which she added her own internet-based research and attendance at two conferences to further develop knowledge of writing center practices. Since that initial phase of accepting the position, she prefers to stay outside of the mainstream writing studies academic community and seeks ideas from elsewhere. Her institution is small, located outside of a major urban area, and very internationally diverse in its student and teacher demographics. Her writing center itself is located in a large open office shared with different subject tutors under other supervisors operating independently. She has a very nationally diverse set of student writers, almost entirely from non-English language backgrounds, doing an American style curriculum with what she describes as “American” writing genres in English. Contrary to U.S.-based writing center norms, many of the tutoring sessions take place in foreign languages with peer-tutors working to compose a texts only in English.

Compared with all other participants, Billie’s professional affiliation with the mainstream communities of writing studies or composition are the least salient to our discussions. Serving as a reminder of the diversity of WPA opinions, approaches, and day-to-day work environments, Billie offers a welcome perspective and a look at the different terms and routines that exist in this professional landscape. She describes a lack of structured support or training in her position and says she has written many—if not all it seems—of the professional documentation for roles, responsibilities, and policies for the center.

No one gave me any (training) really. Actually, at the very first meeting, it was someone else in the administration and they wanted this to be a learning center, so

the subject tutors and the writing tutors to kind of work together. And that person lasted maybe a year and then he actually died in a traffic accident, so someone else replaced him and, and no one else talked about that anymore. (laughs) So that wasn't a thing we were gonna do. I have a good relationship with the other person, but we don't do a lot of things together because she's really doing something different than what I'm doing. They've given me freedom to do it however I want to do it. And in fact, I mainly work from home because I have to do most of the stuff on the computer and my computer at home is a lot easier to use and it's quieter and more comfortable. So, unless I have meetings with people, I'm not usually here. So, people know, especially my tutors know, if you want to contact me, actually we use Facebook a lot. Yeah. So, but they can contact me and I respond really quickly.

Her work differs from mainstream Composition-identified writing center coordinator roles in a number of ways. She does much of the coordination via Facebook or other digital means, preferring to avoid meetings on campus²² as the communication can be frustrating. She describes a lack of direction and conciseness from her colleagues in meetings and points to it as a large source of aggravation that she happily avoids if she can. Also, she defines herself as “creative,” as interested in “ideas,” and does not see meetings as good sources of either—both locally at her institution and globally as part of the writing studies field. Billie, as a result, locates and operates the writing center separate from other programming both administratively and physically. She does not do tutorial appointments with students and avoids campus outside of required meetings; drawing lines of separation in how she navigates her role (between herself and tutors, between herself and students, between herself and academics, between the comforts of home and the frustrations of the campus, between her tutors and other tutors) and thus the footprint of the writing center is small.

²² All of this interview data from Billie preceded the COVID pandemic and any campus closures or public health concerns.

Billie draws what appear to be clear and stable lines between nation-level, discipline-level, and institutional identities and norms. As this study is attentive to how lines get drawn between different groups, statements like this are instructive: “we have very few Americans who attend here. So, it's really different: it's the internationals teaching other or helping other internationals with their writings.” Or as she describes the texts assigned under a national category: “well the English professors here, it's an American University, so they follow the American models.” There's a somewhat clean disciplinary line between English (discipline) texts and scientific texts she describes when training her tutors:

Professors like my husband who he expects scientific papers. And in no other courses are they expected to write scientific papers. So, he's expecting them to follow a certain procedure and certain form. So, it's really helpful for them to hear him explain. And because I know what he's doing, I can ask questions that he can answer for them.

Similarly to how other institutions have a divide between academic and support staff,

Billie describes it more in rhetorical approach:

A lot of people in student services are not jargony. The professors are, so you talk to full philosophy professors, you know, he's going to talk about the stuff he's been reading and stuff's like, it's a whole different thing... None of those [student services] people are academics. They all have a job to do and they want to figure out how to do it.

Billie identifies as one of the student services people and separates the roles of academics by their habits and behaviors. The assumption here is that the job of a student support person resides more in the material interactions and outcomes rather than the production of academic knowledge through reading/publishing or teaching courses. We see a range of ways that lines are being drawn as part of the sense making in her role: academics versus student support, American versus international students and texts, English versus

scientific disciplinary norms. These are lines that scholarship from chapter 2 was working to challenge, but for Billie, these boundaries inform how she locates her role and the degree to which there was flexibility in these descriptions was minor if at all.

One benefit to this separation appears to be a high degree of independence. Even though there is a kinship with the student services teams, the writing center does not have a lot of overlap with other areas of the institution or oversight from above:

Except for the very beginning when I had no idea what I was doing, I think it's been good. I feel really comfortable with it now and it's like don't try and impose it. I mean, no one's trying to, but it would be really difficult if someone came and said, "okay, we really want to look at exactly what you're doing" because, the person who's in charge of student services, which is this whole area, if I have questions or something, she's available, but she doesn't tell me what I should do. She doesn't give me ideas. She's got enough of her own stuff to deal with without trying to—she expects me to know what I'm doing. I'm a big girl.

Taking this independent approach further, the way the role of WPA is portrayed as Billie describes her work is one that appears to hold efficiency and minimalist intervention in high value. When I asked about her sense of autonomy within the university or stability in terms of finances, she explained:

My budget, they changed it recently, but they didn't bother me about it. My budget used to be—because teachers, professors used to be in charge of the writing center—it was connected with that budget of the professors. But it has recently moved to student services, although when the budget came up, I didn't have to do anything. So, I don't know. They tell me at the beginning of the year what my budget is and I'm really frugal and I don't think I ever come near it. I do hire a lot of tutors, but they get paid \$2 an hour. So, it's really like nothing. I mean, it adds up over a semester, but still. And I'm changing it next semester so that they will only be paid actually when they have a session. In the past, I've had them come in during the whole time that they're scheduled but we have almost no walk-ins. So why are they just sitting here for hours on end? So, it's a way to save some money for the university and be more productive with their time.

This describes a lot about the way she sees her role in the institution, I think resonating with a goal of not imposing she described earlier. One could read this description and see

a version of what it looks like to truly try and not impose or grow a writing center influence. To accept the changes in the budget, to minimize costs, to minimize time spent in the center takes a view of the writing center's mission in very clear and simple terms of purely offering tutorials to students as they need them and within a narrow scope of intervention. Other uses of time for students and other ways to professionally develop are not in the purview of the writing center in these terms. This is the nature of the container in which this writing program is described.

Billie prefers reading non-academic genres to generate ideas and various non-writing disciplinary gatherings. Her networks of interaction, though, cross different institutional roles and spaces from conventional academic norms. Billie connects with students and community leaders through other socially focused groups beyond her role in the writing center. Since she doesn't do tutorials in her center, she finds access to student papers through her role in a campus religious organization.

We talk about all kinds of stuff, but there we get to know those kids better and I've helped a couple of them by tutoring them basically with their papers. It's good for me every once in a while to do that, to know this is the kind of writing that's coming in. This is the kind of help that actual students need. So, it's not just me thinking, imagining what their problem issues might be. But I've actually seen them and I can see my husband's papers students turn into him and some of it, it's like (sigh) so bad.

The students that she tutors and the student work that she sees do not come through the writing center, it is in a marginal and informal space. A lot of her overall interaction with the local community does not come through her role in the writing center, but in working with local community activist organizations, which far predate her role in the university. So, her relationships with students cross the boundaries of formal academic support into other organizations on and off campus, and these students maintain connections with her

and her husband even after they leave the area and for long amounts of time. In describing different students, especially students from local marginalized communities whom she has known and supported through various organizations, she says, local attitudes tend to lump together groups:

People of any group, you get someone who's acting badly in the group. It's like, okay, that whole group, that's what they're like. And it isn't it, you know? It's like, okay, is it really helpful to lump people together that way? Cause they're not.

In that excerpt, she is describing the judgments of local community members against ethnic minorities who also reside in the city as being dirty, ignorant, and criminal. When Billie speaks about her efforts in the larger community and social activist work, there is a glimpse of some critical unpacking of how important it is to be cautious in how one identifies groups, and how valuable networks that cross borders can be. In her role as a WPA, though, Billie comfortably assesses boundaries between disciplines, nationalities, and institutional roles.

The richness of her community work with different religious organizations for improving literacy, housing, and other forms of aid to marginalized communities comes through in clear detail, often external of the institutional location, which is indicative of a trans-oriented approach²³ to her community that sees beyond her WPA role. When I ask her whether she sees overlap or conflict between her community work and her WPA work she says that she does find them overlapping. What she describes as the overlap is her emphasis on the importance of how tutors treat people, how to interact with others:

I still have to help them know even things like how to be nice to someone and how to... Not everyone knows that. How to make someone feel good about themselves. So, I try to model this so they come in for this sample thing. I want them to make the other person feel comfortable. I want them to recognize that

²³ With this term I mean an approach that recognizes the instability, mutability of multiple concepts (e.g., place, language, etc.).

using someone else's name, this is a really good thing. It makes other people feel good. You know, that you know their name and that you remember it. And the way you ask a question is really important. So, we might even talk about that at meetings. How could you ask a person a question about that without saying this is really bad? Can you do better?

For Billie, this is a connective value across her different academic and non-academic roles. From our discussion, what's interesting is where lines are drawn in how the work is described and the areas where boundaries seem stable to Billie and the places where she sees overlap. From her descriptions, though, it is clear that she sees real separation between the professional/institutional and the larger commitments to the community through other networks/organizations.

Billie's conversation does well to establish, first, that there are many layers involved in the day-to-day work of an internationally mobile WPA. The role of WPA as Billie describes it is isolated; she performs her work mostly from home, engaging with tutors and faculty through digital means, staying out of meetings if possible, not taking charge of the budget, keeping tutor presence to a minimum in the space. At the same time, there is some boundary crossing in that the student work she engages with comes through student and community organizations outside of the writing center. More than that, her connections to the local community are quite strong and enduring yet have very little material overlap with her work as a WPA. Instead, the WPA work appears to be a small segment of what is a longer standing rich engagement with her local community to which she has maintained a long-term commitment to be present and supportive. The challenges of integrating different academic norms across the mess of disciplinary and institutional space do not come forth in our conversations as these are the boundaries that seem more-or-less stable in the span of our discussion. It is in discussing layers like

human interaction, community engagement, discrimination, and marginalization that bring out the critical and more impassioned voice in Billie's perceived boundaries. WPA work appears to fit inside the container of managing an efficient and independent service for the university—separate from other support staff and academics.

So, the second takeaway from Billie's discussion is how one cannot assume that there is a simple switch that opens or closes all the boundaries between these different layers. The way Billie locates and operates her writing center is a product of interactions between the trajectory she has taken to be in the particular location to do the job, but also in the specifics of the institution (being an American curriculum in a foreign country) and the demographics of students (predominately from non-English language backgrounds and not from the local country). Her commitments to a non-academic community heavily inflect how she takes on her role and how she confronts the very salient mobilities around her. That reaction seems to be to stabilize certain boundaries between layers and rely on them, whereas others are opened. That is how she navigates her role; as a varied set of flexible and stable boundaries.

Max

Growing up in the United States, Max got her bachelor's degree in creative writing and worked in her university writing center before leaving the country. She shows us a path into international WPA work that does not involve graduate education in Composition/Rhetoric. Instead, guided by a particular place and partner, Max leveraged her writing center experience into moving professionally forward in a European context through an MA program in literature and then a position teaching English. She worked doing writing tutoring work as a graduate student in her present country; work which

included grading papers for other courses and doing one-to-one tutorials. In both this position and her later position as an English teacher in her current university, her background with “American writing center” work changed the attitudes of those interviewing her and gave her an edge for the role despite not having the preferred teaching certificates. She indicated that this preferential treatment appears to be shifting towards not giving such advantages.

Her current roles are located in the university’s language center along with other language teachers, program coordinators, and staff. Max has the title of Writing Center Coordinator (along with her original title of English Teacher) among a team of student support staff. Her list of duties is long, including tutoring writers, training and managing a tutor staff, delivering student workshops across different campuses for her university, teaching courses, writing web content, and meeting with faculty. She has the support of a strong mentor with her immediate boss, a growing ability in the local language, and the experience of also being a student in the local higher-ed system of the country to help aid her navigation. These are aspects our conversation worked to unpack.

Max’s unique trajectory among research participants traces a route to her current WPA role through graduate instruction in the local country, thus navigating the writing culture as a graduate student/tutor. Max shows us a somewhat unique transition through different roles as student and into professional in the same national context. She points out a tendency and expectation among colleagues to simplify our mobility stories and our work as she claims “the trajectories are broad, they’re only the outlines of what’s actually happening.” These outlines, as she explains, don’t do justice to the layers and complexities of our movements. She describes the work of knowing why people do

things, or why we ourselves do things, as “this invisible subterranean process that’s happening and we gotta dig down and find out what’s there.” We framed the interview, then, as a chance to do some of that digging work, and to flesh out these narrow trajectories.

Based on her time in these various (student/tutor/teacher/coordinator) roles, Max insisted more than once in the interview simply that “differences exist.” This foundational assertion became something of a starting point from which the specifics of those differences were not as solid. Experiences as a student, like the following, illustrate a potential cause for such assertions of difference:

I often got criticism on my writing assignments—it would say things like you're a very good writer but this is very American and they never really explained to me what about it was American. I asked but it was just that there was something about the way that I was approaching writing and I still don't quite know what it was that they felt was so foreign.

Her feedback on her writing insisted that she was doing something foreign—and in this case wrong as these were explanations for lowered grades. The feedback did not include explanation for these differences, so Max was left to sort out exactly what was making her writing so unsatisfactory in its American-ness. At the same time, she was in a position to help students improve their writing for the local context. From this lack of stable ground from which to guide writers, I believe grew her cautious approach. This is work that continues to this day.

The ongoing uncertainty around this writing-based difference connects to her approach now in working with students. Max explained,

I think that in some ways that has informed my approach working with students, because I know that I'm coming from a different writing background and the fact that the students that I'm working with are generally in the Sciences and my field was humanity-based I tend to really push them to find writing samples in their

field um to use those as models so we can look at them together and kind of identify how they're working together, because I don't want to accidentally impose an incorrect perspective or an unwelcome perspective on the way that I'm working with them and their writing. I know there's a difference, but I just don't quite know what it is.

From these two excerpts we can see a few things happening. First, these experiences as a student informed later practices in a WPA role, practices that bring awareness and empathy to expectations students might experience. Secondly, the American-ness was salient in the feedback that Max received, it was something used to identify her and her writing, but it was not specified exactly how this identity manifested. Thirdly, these American qualities as different from local qualities are *still* not delineated. Despite many years and many roles in the institution, the particulars of these approaches are still in flux. This national identity in the textual production is something fluid, intangible in how it is discussed; it is gestured at and not pinned down. Fourth, Max traced the experiences of responding with confusion to feedback on the American-ness (e.g. foreign-ness) of her work by posing questions and struggling to find resources, experiences which then became a foundation of her understanding of how to support writers in her professional roles. The approach is articulated at the end as resisting the idea of “accidentally” imposing an “incorrect” or “unwelcome” perspective. This caution and the assertion of differences are developed in the material experience and ongoing feedback across different roles without a clear mapping of exactly what those differences might be. These differences are left to be constructed by Max.

Max goes on to articulate a thread across these experiences from student to WPA and the importance of recognizing differences as a starting point.

It created an awareness of the fact that differences exist, which is surprisingly ignored. At least, I find it surprising that it seems to be ignored so often but there

are differences that exist and people just kind of think...they get into their zone and they think their way of thinking about writing is the only way of thinking about writing.

This idea that differences exist can translate beyond simply a place-based identity to a text, but can inform disciplinary, linguistic, or other factors. Being placed in a position to understand and navigate the lack of clarity on the specifics of those differences has, according to Max, made her better able to understand and support students in her current role. Specifically, she can encourage students to ask their supervisors for a template, to ask which journals offer good models of writing they prefer—things she knew from experience were more valuable than asking individuals to articulate specifics.

Throughout the course of the conversation more refined layers of the professional landscape come out. Max explains that the university is an English language institution, located in a country where English is not the local language. The university serves an increasing number of international students—near 50% at the time of the interview. Her team of writing support staff and others in the language center are one of the more internationally diverse teams at the institution, and one of the few who interact with so many other departments. The university delineates academic staff (professors/researchers) and what they call “support staff” (international support office, event planning, libraries, etc.). In general, the academic staff are more international and the support staff are local; and among those of the local nationality, there are regional identities that differ. In this case, though, the very internationally diverse language center and writing support team are called support staff—not academic. This is another subtle, but real way the writing support program is working against the grain of institutional administrative norms as they are doing the work of academics (depending on how

institutions define academic staff as part of contracts and titles) but not treated as such. They are thus, often working from an outsider role both as foreigners and as writing support, but not under the category in which most foreigners can be found/identified (“academic”). Max and her team are working within the more local/regional politics as staff while *also* navigating the globally diverse academic spaces when they work with instructors/students across campus.

So, the local nationality along an international scale, according to Max, has a “reputation for being direct, people talk about this all the time” but she doesn’t see that her local colleagues fit this reputation. The reputation of the region is more of an “underdog” that is often left out from the more famous, populous regions in the country—again as people say. But, while the institution might be located in an underdog region, it is populated with staff from all over the country. So, writing programming as orchestrated by Max’s team (both local and international) manifests in conversations and presentations in different spaces (meeting rooms, classrooms, tutorial spaces, corridors, emails, phone calls) as it is traversing a dynamic set of individual, local, regional, national, international, disciplinary scales. But, these different streams of identification work in complexly layered ways contingent on very specific demographics in particular places. For example, if Max goes to speak to faculty in a particular department, she cannot assume she knows the ways in which they will prefer students to write even if she has been to this faculty before as she might meet with different people, she cannot assume that knowledge of particular language backgrounds will help her prepare a particular approach to how they will want to address students, she cannot assume that the professional titles of those in the group admit some predictable discursive preferences in

how to run a meeting. The institutional-sized container is full of layers, and Max's recognition of them plays a large part in her caution to claim anything beyond the stable assertion that "differences exist" because it allows her to remain open to instability and change.

This notion of differences, of addressing their complexity and materiality, came up time and again as an important recognition and influence on Max's outlook. She repeats often and in different ways that she is "new to this" or lacks the knowledge necessary to answer certain questions:

These encounters that I keep having with students and academics, it's that there's just so many different ways of thinking about writing and that there's no one way to do things and so taking a prescriptive approach toward writing just doesn't feel productive to me even though I don't always know what those differences are, I feel better assuming that differences exist and then being surprised by the commonalities when I find them...even issues like region or individual institutional attitude; there's so many things that I'm still learning and the fact that I'm still discovering new layers so that gives me the sense that I'm still very much learning and I don't know if that feeling will ever go away so this idea of when is expertise enough, I'm not sure...

What remains in this excerpt is her wrestling with a notion, a core idea, of arriving at some level of expertise that makes it possible to confidently assert explanations; there is a sense that the gathering of knowledge is headed in a linear direction accumulating at some point enough knowledge of places this work is done.²⁴ But this notion is at odds with her experience and the demands of her role and this gap is a source of conflict. It seems to a certain extent this linear expertise is true, but it also seems that there is a recognition that this model isn't the right approach. The doubt present at the end about whether any level of expertise is enough hints at the ongoing partiality of this knowledge; to assume unknowable differences and delight in commonalities. She has found the

²⁴ As we will see later, this goes against some notions of intercultural competence.

prescriptive approach to the writing is unproductive, but a prescriptive approach to her *role* and understanding her *location* is perhaps similarly unproductive. To begin with embracing this partiality means we need better ways to understand how one is positioned to speak other than from some local form of authenticity or authority.

Max returns to the U.S.

Max returned to the writing center in the U.S. where she was trained—with the support of her supervisor—to get “an idea about the writing center work that happens outside of the writing center itself.” She spoke with American writing center staff about how to frame conversations around different benefits and how to tie student performance to budgets or faculty goals. She perused different materials used in the center and some WPA literature. When I asked her if these things were transferrable, she responded:

Interestingly very transferable 'cause it was sort of like “think about what they need and how you can construct your argument in those terms use their language use their goals.” That was really applicable here and so when I started networking with people here in other programs in faculties and departments I would go to (her supervisor who is from the local nation) and say “OK I'm gonna talk to this person is there anything I need to know?” Because she knows these people, she works with them all the time...what do I need to know? What do we need to consider? Do you have any advice for me how I should approach this? Sometimes I'd run ideas by her like “OK, I'm going to talk to someone so I think this is what I'm going to say; what's already been done here? Does that fit?” And she would give me advice.

In essence, Max here is navigating different transnational expertise to create a hybridized set of guidance for her local tasks. Her U.S.-based writing center mentors have more experience in having conversations that frame arguments rooted in how writing affects certain institutional goals across departments. Max's local mentor has knowledge about particular faculty members, institutional memory, and local rhetorical practices. This

shows, I think, an expert navigation of her self-described not-knowing; of parsing the resources for what can be of use for one's purposes.

Max's experiences in encountering differences and navigating tentative knowns and unknowns in her work with institutional higher-ed academic writing shows us what might be called a productively cautious approach. As she describes it, "saying that there's a right and a wrong, kind of, is a movement away from the flexibility I'm using every day." This flexibility is an approach related to the non-directive tutoring she learned as an undergraduate in writing studies; it is further solidified as valuable when she faces unclear feedback as an international student abroad; it is even further solidified as she learns to address the variety of needs and expectations as a WPA serving an entire institution. What's salient to point out here is that, while a more solid foundation from which to work would be a sort of welcome relief, it is something that she must, in a way, constantly resist.

One ongoing uncertainty raised by Max—through this flexibility in recognition of the existence of constant, unpredictable difference—is whether and when to speak up. Max wonders often whether her sense of herself as young or "new to this" compared to her colleagues; whether, as a foreigner due to her geographic and disciplinary outsider status, she has become *too* cautious. Too cautious in knowing when to speak up in favor of her own approach, too cautious in taking action in her own role rather than waiting for permission, too cautious in asking for so many other opinions rather than trusting her own; these concerns arise in our interview. In one event she describes, Max went to a national gathering of writing support professionals and witnessed the complex power dynamics between different groups as they debated the outcomes and applications of a

collaborative project. Given the group's stated need to move away from American models and influence, Max felt very uncertain about how to share her views as the only foreign voice in the space (and an American at that). In instances where power dynamics become heated, where different local roles are negotiated, Max feels the uncertainty of her membership status among these writing support colleagues. The work of unpacking such complex situations was often framed by Max in terms of needing more time and more knowledge (of the language, of the institutions and their history, of the field) before being sure of what to do.

Our conversation also moved toward the notion that instead of arguing for particular actions, WPAs can potentially assert the value of a non-directive approach (which her colleagues code as the "American" approach); of the importance of recognizing the fact that differences exist; and of the unique necessity for WPAs to work amongst those differences—basically asserting the importance of nuance as a possible way to find a starting point to speak to any room. This notion of caution is something so transnational in that it exemplifies a clear tension between being locally layered—tethered to an individual, tailored through their personal trajectory and life experience and disposition—but also universally applicable as a concept related to early-stage academics in any field, as well as the experience of being a foreigner more broadly. Parsing the caution is a place where important sensemaking work can be done. It is also a tiresome form of work, it is largely invisible (subterranean), often uncouned in institutional considerations, and as Max describes it, requires a kind of discipline in one's intellectual resistance to the short-cuts of ignoring differences.

Alison

Alison describes her background as fitting with an ESL identity, despite being a native speaker of English and having American parents. She grew up abroad and feels emotionally connected to the location of her upbringing. She credits her desire for interesting places and her different career trajectory as an older, returning student to a Comp/Rhet PhD as giving her the luxury to take risks—which is how she describes her choice to take this position and decision to stay long-term. Coming to the country where she works was seen as a career risk, or what she calls “career suicide” according to the field. Alison found her position upon reading a “teeny” line in the Chronicle. While at this institution, she has had the titles of Associate Professor, Writing Center Director, and Writing in the Disciplines Director. Upon arrival, she found a program hoping to respond to criticism from an accreditation process by hiring instructors from “the West.” One specific thing about her institution was the social component of the faculty having gone through a recent war together—this created a social grouping for which she was an outsider. Working abroad where she does was not an entirely random choice: Alison studied the local language of her institution in college and felt comfortable being in places where infrastructure and politics were “unstable.”

From the beginning, Alison decided to try and observe and not impose her way of doing things; to see how things were working before making any assertions—also a form of caution. In her original role as instructor, she felt like there was no place for her in the sense that the Department of English did not offer undergraduate or graduate courses in Rhetoric and Composition (theory and practice). She was not attached to a degree program. At the same time, the writing courses they did have were fixed in terms of the shared syllabi and textbooks and certain approaches to teaching that she found to be so

different. The primary differences, she believes, arose from imagining the core required courses primarily as English language learning courses (with a collection of “skills” to practice –reading, writing, listening, speaking, etc.) as opposed to courses in writing and rhetoric principally. As a consequence, she describes that she felt “allergic” to the teaching that was mandated in the curriculum. Rather than abandon her institution in response to this allergic feeling, though, she saw a role for her voice along with others interested in change. As part of a recent accreditation process that preceded, and partially facilitated, her hiring, there was high-level support for assessment and change in the writing support curricula. In her first year, WPA consultant evaluators came for a visit and wrote a report on potential directions to take the program—this is a report that Alison said she clung to as she worked with others to argue for change.

One change came in the form of a committee appointed by the dean to oversee curricular changes in the forms of new syllabi and texts for a new approach to the writing courses. When she was hired there were people in her program that felt she would bring a certain approach to teaching English as a language that suited a more belletristic approach to language learning (elevating aesthetics and the beauty of certain canonical voices) because she conformed to the identity of what they considered powerful/correct/important (in this case, and this is my own view, she was white, American, and a native speaker of English). They assumed she would hold certain values they’d ascribed to her identity and background as an American and native speaker. Instead, Alison had different commitments to language and pedagogy that went against these expectations. In one part of our discussion, Alison describes a general experience of conversations in her role on campus with other academics:

especially because of the way they think of language, because English is a foreign language and so the values of English are, you know, like people will say to me like, I'll be talking about disciplinary discourses or something, and they'll say, 'excuse me, how do I get an American accent?' You know, or something like that. So, there's a bit of a disconnect about that.

This term *disconnect* is helpful in describing a difference without assigning one side preference necessarily and without the connotation of *a priori* conflict. Disconnect allows differences to interact in different ways, too: in surprising or predictable ways; to be reconciled or perhaps not. A disconnect can be resolved without a particular action needing to be taken or one side to “win.” Resolving a disconnect then is separate from agreeing or acting in a specific way.

Disconnects on this curriculum change committee led to another valuable term, what Alison called “paradoxical disagreements.” For example: where one expects the ‘local’ interests or foreign interests to go one way, but instead they go another. Alison used this term when she described a process of developing the collaboratively edited, custom, locally-published reader specifically created for one course—a course which is roughly equivalent to what might be First Year Composition as part of this (local nationality) Dean-appointed committee. Alison had found issues with the texts being used when she arrived:

I didn't like it. I mean, I felt like I didn't object to all of the readings, but I thought it doesn't make sense to me to have this reader. First of all, the articles in the reader were sort of, you know, the example I always used is "Once More To The Lake." I'm like, what does that have to do with the students? You know? E.B. White? Not only is it sort of this middle-aged man reflecting about a lake in Maine or something, I just was like, why are you using this? And the other thing is that you probably know how things work here, but students wouldn't even buy the text. They would buy a photocopy packet and you'd find them lying around in the rain and stuff. It was just, I really felt like we need to sort of think about how we use readings and why we use readings and you know people who were coming from the US or from other programs were like, yeah, that makes sense. Let's

choose readings that are written by [local] writers or that address questions that are, you know, really compelling about this region.

She is here arguing for the value of thinking more critically about what's present in the reader and looking for ways to better engage and localize the texts. In this sense, it is another disconnect experienced by Alison: disconnect between the curricular materials and the lives and interests of the students. This disconnect was further compounded by the paradox of many local instructors wanting foreign texts, but the foreigner (in this case Alison) was among voices pushing for local and student generated texts to be included. This disconnect is in underlying commitments to language, power, identities. She continues in her narrative:

People who had been teaching in the program, were saying “no, it's good for them to be exposed to American culture. They're learning English and, uh, this is a much nicer book,” you know, so they actually had no sense that it would be, that it should be, localized. They didn't have any concerns about it at all. And so to me, that's what I would say is paradoxical...So I just find those really interesting, I wouldn't have known how to predict that. You just had to find out by sort of running into it and having meetings and realizing that you're on different sides of the question.

The unpredictability of these disconnects, and their paradoxical nature, speaks of different expectations each brings to this kind of event. It also speaks to Max's earlier use of the terms *invisible* and *subterranean*. Whether the program assessors, the dean, or Alison knew it, a substantial portion of the actual work of updating the writing program was going to be devoted to engaging across these disconnects, which meant doing the “digging” that Max described. Alison offered that though these changes were pushed, “we never sort of swept the slate clean and said we're starting a new program with new people and new books and new curricula and everything.” Instead it was a process of “tinkering and evolution and, you know, some abrupt changes.”

I was interested in the actual process by which the new text came to exist and get taken up—what did the tinkering look like? How did the evolution come to pass if at all? So, as Alison described, the committee began by surveying instructors to learn their preferred texts to keep from the previous reader, asking them to nominate strong student works, and introducing new texts as well. These changes were “hugely contentious” for instructors in the program, “like dropping a grenade.” Alison describes it as “a humble reader,” but, a group of people “just really went ballistic. They hated it. And they were just like, ‘I’m ashamed to bring this text into my classroom.’” I asked whether the differences in opinion on the new textbook could be separated across any different identities like nationality, gender, age, etc. Alison replied:

I would never easily sort it out in those ways. And for me, I think one of the questions that I became interested in to do research on is, like, what does local mean? The idea of a local, because you know, if you’re thinking about the question about the reader, like what does local mean? There is no sort of inherently local thing. The practices that were here, were local, they were what was endorsed and they were what had been practiced, but I didn’t think they were good. You know, I personally didn’t, and I thought, well, I was hired, I’m local, too. I get to get in there and fight, too.

Her work to make change was something that required her to see herself as part of the local context, but also included caution in terms of doing research, or speaking for others, or potentially forwarding her own career at the expense of local or early-career colleagues who did not have the same academic resources or mobility. She explained that “the good part was that we had all these conversations and contentious or not they were good conversations and I was in a situation where basically to me it was a good job because it was interesting.” These early experiences led to her embracing the conflict in committee meetings and committing for a long-term position in the institution in order to make structural improvements in the position of the program.

Alison had a lot of freedom to compose her own syllabi, to teach, to travel to conferences, but for others there was not this freedom. She explained,

In the actual composition program, they had a fixed syllabus. You know, it was very restricted. I felt like this will never change unless we change the structure that supports it. And so we have to work on a different level. And I also got angry. Ya know, I just sort of felt pissed off and so my reaction wasn't to say, okay, I'm leaving, but to just say I'm going to see this through to a different stage.

Alison emphasized that for her the ability to influence administrative and governance changes was what it's always been about. So, she worked to get others promoted so that people could not be dismissed on a whim, so that there would be more authority in the department, and a more stable programmatic footing. That would bring the program to another level in terms of its ability to do its work. She alluded to this as a sort of responsibility of her position and seemed more comfortable than producing research to further her own career and leaving the program as it was when she found it when another opportunity came along. Another factor in not producing more research about her role was a struggle to describe it:

I felt like I almost didn't know how to talk about my experience, you know? And I remember saying, 'I think with my body,' you know, I didn't know how to, I didn't know how to say, like, I, I just, I sort of live it and constantly reflect, you know, I used to write in notebooks a lot, just like 'what's going on?'

Alison paints us a picture in what she shares that encounters difference, embraces outsider status in some ways while also fighting for a seat at the table to assert her commitments as part of committees tasked with change. When feeling angry, or allergic, she responds by finding a role that serves the program in a long-term way and commits to sticking around. This is one way to see how local disconnects can trace up to higher-level governing commitments.

Alison pushes back against the ways that transnationality has been taken up when it lacks a critical and complex view of locality. She cites the central importance of dialogue and critiques the “local” impulse to import American programs wholesale, but when American scholars do come, “we’re not into that.” As a result, she says she used to call herself “the trojan horse.” If she was imported to bring American-ness, she can leverage assumptions about her identity to assert progressive change in a transnational context like she did in arguing for more localized curricula.

This kind of nuance in the diffuse ways that particular approaches to differences or pedagogical/ideological commitments shapes the understanding of interactions more productively than particular identity categories like nationality, gender, age. So, what one considers to be the local approach is so distributed and layered that Alison was able to see herself aligned with and supporting certain local voices as she advocated for particular changes. Thus, she was able to see herself as part of the local milieu in some ways, while also being clearly marked and acting as an outsider in others.

Esther

Esther grew up in East Asia, attended university in the United States, and found herself working in a writing center in a South Asian women’s university before attending a graduate program in Composition/Rhetoric in the United States. Upon accepting a position as a volunteer tutor at the South Asian Women’s University, she started working full-time exclusively tutoring undergraduate students (most of whom attended on full scholarship from all over Asia) in their American-style-curriculum coursework. She was promoted to an assistant director position and under the guidance of a mentor (also foreign) learned more and more of the administrative realities of providing writing

support in this unique institution. When her mentor left, Esther took over her role as the director of the writing center. She was responsible for tutoring, training tutors, instituting a peer-tutoring program, coordinating volunteer tutors from abroad (not only at work but also in their journeys in this new country), teaching courses, and navigating the numerous faculty/administrative spaces and actors who had a hand in the day-to-day running of the writing center both locally and abroad at the university's headquarters in the United States. This private, donor-funded institution caused numerous challenges, and after a few years of work there, she left to attend graduate school in Composition and Rhetoric in the United States partly to make sense of that time. After attaining her MA, she left the United States again, preferring to work in an international context.

Esther's discussion began with the strain of local living conditions as important for understanding the realities of doing the work at her South Asian university and the value of a supportive community of people to form a sensemaking network with whom she could process the work. She describes a lot of turnover on all levels of the university due to the living conditions or upper administration decisions; there was local political unrest often closing the school, targeted violence against foreigners in the city, visa issues arising from how the university handled immigration support, shifting recruitment that didn't match institutional support for different literacies, etc. To balance the stresses of the job came the reward of a tight network of devoted colleagues who were willing to stick it out despite the challenges and access to a group of students who seized on the opportunity to gain an education more progressive and enriching than their home contexts could offer. Our interviews also included reflections on Esther's journey to graduate school in Composition/Rhetoric after working as an international WPA.

All of these experiences called for a lot of sensemaking to process personally and professionally. Esther sought a graduate program in composition as a way to obtain the distance and intellectual tools to better process her time in this professional and geographic place. She also uses the term *disconnect* to describe aspects of her experiences while working as a WPA and the experiences that seemed to be relevant or legible to the U.S.-based graduate program. As a result, there was an opportunity in our interviews to reflect on the ways one navigates working across different geographic, disciplinary, institutional, and other locations. Our discussions uncovered different ways to draw lines between experiences in order to organize and make sense of trends/ways of thinking. Among them, Esther described her local discourse community in the South Asian locations vs. composition discourse community in her U.S. graduate program; personal sensemaking vs. disciplinary/academic sensemaking; slow, gradual sense-making processes vs. faster day-to-day, ground-level challenges; “trial and error” administrative work vs. mentor-led job-training; just doing the work vs. engaging and reflecting with the program/sensemaking work.

Esther’s interviews described an intense and unstable time in her life, the unpacking of which lent itself to numerous follow-up interviews. Because of the follow up interviews and the nature of what Esther was describing, we were able to probe more reflectively on boundaries and the affective dimensions of sensemaking work. Early on in our conversations, she mentions the importance of time in generating the knowledge she shared. The importance of time came up in response to personal changes in learning when/how to speak up in a local context that operated very differently than the one in

which Esther was raised, and different from her personality. To do her work successfully, as she moved up into more leadership roles, required adaptation. As she explains:

I really think that I never would have learned this [new skill of speaking authoritatively in meetings] had I not stayed there for three and a half years. I think it definitely was a slow, gradual process where little experiences, little incidents, little observations, fleeting moments on the day-to-day level, just accumulated over time and led to this realization. It didn't happen overnight for sure. It's not like someone gave me this tip and all of a sudden I was able to be this way and assert myself and get things done and get heard anytime I wanted to. It was definitely a slow and ongoing process and I think that learning happened both on campus and outside of campus.

Here we have an encapsulation of a lot of different themes from our interviews. While we tend to give a lot of attention to big moments, or evocative events, it is also important to try and account for steady accumulative knowledge building up from fleeting or marginal moments—these are difficult even for participants to recall. To adjust our rhetorical habits, our personalities, or our perspectives does not come at the flip of a switch; these are parts of ourselves that come with us and become fodder for reconfiguration. So, these aspects of ourselves cannot be switched easily when entering a new geopolitical or institutional space, the learning required to adapt cannot be marked only in big leaps from acute events, and the knowledge required cannot be contained by the boundaries of a campus. These factors are heightened due to the intensity of the differences felt by Esther, but they could also be made more visible by the emphatic instability of the environment.

Instability, recall, is a foundational reality to a trans-oriented perspective; so, a heightened level of instability can serve as a valuable set of conditions in which to understand the nature of a trans-orientation, but clearly that knowledge comes with a cost in time and stress; it is also knowledge-making that is distributed across many actors and

many relationships to any individual. In keeping with the theme, though, Esther said she was unsure about whether her particular background and personality made certain adaptations and instabilities more difficult than they would be for others—one ongoing tension of this mobility.

The initial source of instability in our conversation was the institution in which she worked. On its most basic level, there was a lot of turnover and promotion happening:

I will say that during the three and a half years I was there, the administration, basically, the people I would need to report to and the people they needed to report to, it was just constantly changing semester to semester. There was no stability. So, just when you thought you got to know someone and got to know how to approach them, how to justify things, how to argue for things, it would change. Then the next semester they are no longer your supervisor. Oh, now this person who used to be your friend and colleague is now your supervisor. And now this person who everyone hates is now the acting dean of faculty and Oh ... So it was just constantly changing and unstable and that also made it really hard to just accumulate this repertoire of strategies because one strategy that was good one semester might not work the next.

The response to this level of instability is a level of adaptability. Especially when Esther's role grew beyond her initial task of tutoring, it became necessary to attend more staff meetings, to deal with more people, and to learn the power dynamics present in the campus. Similar to Max's description, the university "staff" designation was mostly populated with local-nationality people, whereas the more "academic" designated roles were from a range of national, linguistic, and disciplinary backgrounds. Esther also mentioned that her colleagues who were binational, half-local and half-American, were often treated, both on-campus and off, with more hostility and ambiguity, and they were *essential* in helping Esther to navigate issues as they had valuable "insider" insights. As a WPA, Esther was working across all these lines of difference; and there was this ongoing

instability among the roles of those people whom she needed to support the writing programming. Echoing Max's description of her "daily flexibility" and Alison's constant reflection; Esther describes her approach like this:

I think one of the things that helped me back then was just being really receptive and attentive to anything I could absorb as useful and just kind of you're constantly listening; you're constantly open to information that might be unexpected or contradict things you previously believed in.

So, in parallel to professionalizing from tutor to WPA and beginning to teach her own writing courses, there is the extra invisible labor of navigating this instability and difference; there is the work of remaining open, attentive, responsive to the unexpected changes. I pointed out in our interview that she was describing at least two big parallel learnings at the same time. Learning to be an admin, but also learning how this particular institution works; learning language, seeing a new social fabric or many social fabrics in this new place. When I asked how much work since day one has gone into figuring these things out, Esther replied:

A lot. I mean, it's probably the kind of work that just never really stopped from the moment I stepped foot in [the local country]. It's continued since I've left even, because, when I left, there were things I didn't understand. When I left there were still things I felt like I needed to figure out. And that's partly why I went to grad school in Comp because I had these unanswered questions. So yeah, a lot of work went into making sense of things. I think a lot of the work though was more of a passive sort of absorption of knowledge. I don't think I necessarily had this constant effort going in ... like a conscious effort, stream of effort going into figuring all these things out. I don't think I necessarily had the terms and the language that we're using now for example, as we're having this conversation. I hadn't gone in with a background in composition, I hadn't gone in thinking I would be an administrator. A lot of it was just a very day to day micro-level figuring out of how to do certain tasks.

When I asked Esther about how much her foreigner identity was a factor in this time, she responded, "I didn't have the bandwidth to really deal with what does it mean to be a foreigner." This notion of *bandwidth* in just how much one can attend to at a given time

is important—these micro-level tasks may be all one can manage given all this instability and novelty. What these excerpts are also trying to account for in understanding Esther's experience is the role of passive absorption, of a lack of language to articulate to herself or others what was going on, of the ongoing project of making knowledge that extends beyond the confines of space and time while she was doing this work.

To do this work in this environment required taking on this extra sensemaking labor through reflection and consideration of these differences. As Esther described the high turnover rate, she was able to explain what she saw happen with so many people who came for a short time and left:

I think the people who didn't really like it there or didn't stay, they just weren't ready to listen to what was going on and just kind of...They weren't ready to be a part of the community. They weren't ready to change at all. They wanted to do their thing in this new place. And when things didn't go their way or these unexpected things happened that upset them, they just, would freeze and decide they hated it there and they wouldn't be able to function. And this is not unique, obviously this is common knowledge, like adaptability, being open to changing and learning was the characteristic I saw in the people who did end up staying for a while and who really thrived there and loved it there like I did.

While it might not be clear so far in this discussion, Esther did love this time in her life, and a big part of that was the work she was able to do and the knowledge it required her to make. The people who didn't love the work and the place and therefore left were not only responding to the stresses of the campus environment, they were also dealing with the difficulties of life beyond the institution. For Esther, this sensemaking work was distributed among a community of colleagues, many of whom were also roommates and neighbors in university housing. When I asked her about a typical day, this is what she described:

If I tell you about the daily routine like what actually happened, there will be plenty of in-between time, like oh then we'd come home...and then someone

would cook dinner, and then just a group of us would just eat dinner together and talk for hours about: can you believe that happened today? Did you hear what so and so said at this meeting? Or oh my gosh, I got this email, what should I say? Maybe we were just big nerds, but that was 90%...that was so much of what we talked about. How do we figure this out? How do we approach this problem? What should I say to this person? All the politics; just spent hours analyzing stuff. Sure, a part of it felt like gossip, right, like it's just workplace gossip, but a lot of it was not just gossip, it was super productive, like to help me, what should I do you know. So and that was all off campus. At home.

This shows a degree of immersion in this environment where what seems like so much of daily life is consumed by sensemaking, adapting, re-orienting to what's happening in the institutional space. Just a reminder, this is a place with an American-based curriculum and an English language institution, both of which align with Esther's linguistic and academic backgrounds. What is so abundantly clear from what she is describing here is a magnitude of difference being confronted in ways that overwhelm the potential stability of linguistic and curricular connection across contexts. What's also important to note is the significant difference of a living situation surrounded by colleagues in shared campus housing—with colleagues filling personal space and professional concerns dominating their interactions. Esther couldn't just leave campus to be away from her colleagues, and thus the separation between these two worlds was substantially thinner than others commonly doing TWPA work. This certainly led to a different level and kind of sensemaking work as it was distributed so often among colleagues across different spaces.

Esther writes student profiles

The central event I wanted to highlight from our interviews helps to capture the power dynamics, as distributed across place-based identifications (for example when different linguistic or geographic identities get layered over institutional hierarchies)

inherent in such a transnational context. Esther told me about an annual task for the writing center as part of onboarding the new class of incoming students. In the midst of her early-semester duties of orienting volunteers and tutors, making schedules, etc., an email would arrive from the dean to request profiles. A profile was a text description of each incoming student to be composed by writing center staff and produced through a one-on-one interview. This meant one hundred twenty or so interviews and profiles drafted in the beginning of the semester:

We'd have like a whole week where every day, you know, every hour, multiple people would be in these different cubicles interviewing students and just churning through all these interviews of all these students. Of course, a lot of the students have just arrived, aren't really great with their English, like we don't know them, you know, so it's just like cold, you know, tell me about your life sort of questions. And um, and then we'd write these up and then send them back to the Dean. And the Dean would send them to the U.S. office where they would then use these profiles to send to potential donors or put them up on their website, or send them to current donors who want to know about what kinds of students they're supporting.

These profiles had to meet very specific genre expectations—as communicated from upper administration through examples for guidance and feedback on profiles—in order to achieve the intended goal of getting funding by appealing to donors.

The thing that was just this continuous source of frustration was that they wanted these to be written in a certain way, right? So, they wanted these profiles to basically mirror the structure of this autonomous literacy narrative. So they wanted the story of the student who used to sell flowers at the airport in Sri Lanka who then decided to take matters into her own hands. And, you know got an English grammar book from the Bookstore and studied it by candlelight every night for three years and went to English tutoring lessons after work, you know, and then like made it and is now here.

This is certainly fitting a Westernized individual norm for exceptionalism and imposing such versions (or as Max would say “trajectories”) onto students. But, this demanded narrative didn’t fit all of the students, so that meant Esther was put in the position of

coaching her tutors to dig around for ways to find the right kind of narrative to please the deans and donors; to dig around for struggles or misfortunes, to cast the students as so grateful for being given the opportunity, etc. Without these struggles, Esther said she and the staff understood that these narratives would not be seen to help the mission of the school. When Esther ultimately tried to fight against the way these narratives were portraying these students and the compromising position this placed the writing center, she had to make her case to the dean of students at her campus and an intern in the U.S. office who had ultimate control over this aspect of the university. And, according to Esther, everyone hated this intern.

When I asked why everyone hated her, Esther said that she would come and “visit;” she used air quotes in the interview and I asked her why she did:

I dunno why I put it in quotes. Um, cause “visit us” sounds nice. “Visit us” sounds benign and you know, productive and like, “oh wow, we get someone from the U.S. office so we can show them what we're doing and all the hard work we're putting into all of this and keeping things running. And this is a chance for us to really kind of show someone over there what's going on here.” But it would always end up with her just kind of swooping in and telling people what to do. And she was this like fresh graduate from Harvard or something who had no idea like what any of us did. And she was just the CEO's little minion, you know? Um, and there was, there was just, yeah, this huge disconnect. She would, she would come in and say things like, “oh, why don't you do this and this” and then it would just be so off the mark of what was actually happening. You know, it was very clear that they just didn't know what was happening. Like didn't know...she just thought like none of us are working, you know, none of us are doing our jobs. And we're all working 75 hours a week.

As I summarized this whole scenario in our conversation, to much laughing and agreement from Esther, one can trace the power dynamic as a millionaire local to the nation where the institute is based but who resides in the U.S. sends an unqualified, under-prepared American intern to come and boss around and demean the struggling and overworked diverse staff (U.S., British, South Asian, East Asian, Australian). So, the

staff find themselves caught between the interests of their students; their own sense of complicity, exhaustion, and stress; and the unpredictable directives from the U.S. office, which do little to account for local conditions apart from those that forward the financial viability of the school.

In short, Esther didn't get far with her concerns about the profiles. So, to map out a bit of the power dynamic in place, there is Esther as the WPA (from East Asia) who is coaching a team of tutors (some students and some foreign volunteers) to interview an incoming group of young students from across Asia, according to specifications directed through the Dean of students, an American intern, and the wealthy CEO/founder of the school. And this CEO is based in the U.S. but is also a local from the South Asian country in which the institute exists. How do we trace who is an outsider? How does one locate themselves among such diversity? As Esther described it, it was about finding ways to manage the day-to-day, but there was a slow accrual of complicity and frustration growing. Esther remarked how even after leaving this role to attend graduate school and much time to reflect she found theoretical frameworks unable to capture the layers and nuance required to navigate these experiences. We spent a while in our conversations working to unpack these layers together. Esther at one point said this:

It's complicated, right? It's like, okay, I have maybe these, these moral sort of theoretical qualms about it, but like at the end of the day, this is what gets the funding and the funding is what potentially could help build the new campus that everyone keeps dreaming about. You know? And so that's, that's the complexity of it, you know, I have no like concrete answer to that. Like that's, that that kind of captures the...why it was difficult to work through some of these because there were layers, you know, it was always on the one hand, on the other hand, it was always like, well, this feels uncomfortable and this seems wrong. But on the other hand, it, it achieves this and this, you know, I mean, it's, in some ways it's kinda like on the one hand writing center pedagogy, we don't want to focus on grammar so much, but on the other hand, like they're going to need good grammar to get

into Grad school, you know, or stuff like that. And there's always like multiple layers on layers.

She still wants the tools to make sense of this experience, saying, “I felt at the time that I was just in this soup of experiences, just this like hailstorm of all these different things, mixing of institutional and country experiences, right? Just a tangled mess of things.”

What is coming through in these descriptions is grappling with the complexity through rhetorical moves describing many sides to an issue or using metaphors like hailstorms and tangles. This multiplicity speaks to the ongoing dynamic of trans-located work.

So, what do people do to get through the work when they are in the midst of it? They try to put up borders. One way to compartmentalize is to talk less with one's colleagues about what's going on. Another way to compartmentalize is to try and build a separation between home- and work-life. Another way to compartmentalize is to just chalk it up to the price you pay to get access to these students in these ways. I asked Esther about whether she was able to compartmentalize across different places and separate herself from the exhaustion when she remembers the work.

Joe: Can you like extrapolate or put in a box all those things that wore you down and were significant amounts of labor and required all this off campus talking and propelled you to graduate school with all those questions. You know, can you compartmentalize those things or are they so intimately tied [across contexts]?

Esther: I think I did compartmentalize, uh, but I think me personally, it was just, I couldn't not, I couldn't not feel drained and couldn't not be burdened by these bigger things. And like it kind of affected people to varying degrees. And I think like maybe some people had better, better strategies for compartmentalizing... what I kinda realized was it is definitely just possible not to talk to anyone, you know, it is possible to just go to work, go home and you'll get work done. Like you'll do the job, you know, and you'll get paid. But then once you start talking to people and you ask yourself, is there another way to do this or is there a better way to do this? Then that just opens up this whole other, it just opens up all these conversations that could be happening.

The important connection here is not that these are just intellectual frustrations, there are requirements of the job, and they are also work. Esther argues, “it's more work to be trying to figure out these layers and it's work to be frustrated by all the contradictions in the hypocrisy and the corruption. It's draining.” To understand the nature of the work, these disconnects, contradictions, and layers are part of the TWPA role; the success of one's programs often depends on the ability to do this sensemaking work, and this sensemaking work takes a toll. Again, there is an accumulative effect over time; “the stress and the sort of frustration that arose from the bigger stuff was this kind of like underlying kind of chronic, slow, gradual, almost subconscious process.” That work is also distributed across a community of people in the immediate area, and also others in the academic field who share in these roles in other places. The connection between these two communities, according to Esther, is not so easily bridged.

When Esther left this role, she came to the U.S. to study Composition and Rhetoric at a Master's program. Her goals in the program were to get the relief of articulating her experience through the benefit of new terms, time, and distance from the subject she said she felt “too close” to in order to fully make sense of it. What she found, though, was difficulty in fitting her experience into the terms being offered, even in the literature about colonialism, the global turn, translingualism, and transnationalism. She said:

I do also remember feeling when I was in the Masters, I remember feeling like any day I could just go back and none of this would matter. It doesn't matter like what these people are saying because this is just this intellectual discourse. There's just a lot of theorizing and talking and talking and talking and I just remember, I do remember feeling like I would be perfectly fine leaving and not being a part of it, you know? Because at that point I also didn't really see how those worlds could be bridged in a satisfying way. I didn't really see a bridge...I felt like there just wasn't a whole lot of overlap. There just wasn't, I wasn't reading

about people like me or my students or administrators I worked with over there. I wasn't hearing anyone talk about or ask questions about any, anything, you know, that I was coming in with.

So, yet again, Esther sought out her sensemaking from the margins when the classroom space, the reading lists, and the formal requirements of her study did not provide a place for her full experience to fit. She wrote emails to professors, came to their office hours, tried having conversations with any peers who had worked abroad off-campus. Even still, it was hard to find a place, and to have the conversations she wanted to have, and as a result, Esther said, "I felt like I was alone in that." Part of the difficulty in reconciling the experience and finding the right conversations was due to the way experiences seemed to need to fit into one or the other container.

It's really hard because on the one hand, yes, there are things that I did and encountered and experienced in the writing center that people elsewhere would totally relate to. Right? But at the same time, everything about everything I experienced was totally [local to that nation] and totally unique. So it's, it's both.

This either/or issue made it hard to locate and situate the experience in one set of terms or similar discussions. It is an ongoing tension that is spoken about as if there needs to be some way of being reconciled; this is the work that never stopped to this day since she stepped foot in the country from which she seeks relief. At the same time, Esther is demonstrating how one takes a thoughtful approach and unpacks the different sides, how one can juxtapose and draw possible connections/separations that are valuable in helping to outline disconnects. Rhetorically speaking about the layers and tensions and allowing them to remain unresolved is a practical demonstration of transnationality.

Ellis

Ellis describes herself as a young, white, female, southerner raised in the United States. Her titles have been Assistant Professor, Writing in the Disciplines Director, and

Writing Center Director at a global University with an American-style curriculum. Her decision to leave the United States and work as a Comp/Rhet scholar at an international university was not driven by professional goals or personal identity, but more so “wanting to just go out and see what’s there.” She describes her childhood as one moving around a fair amount due to her father’s work, so, mobility has become part of her personality; enjoying settling and resettling in new places, learning the “culture,” and then moving to “change the scenery.”

Her desire to work internationally informed her job market search as well as the fact that her husband was an instructor in one of the local languages present in the country where she currently works. Though her role was as an assistant professor, she knew that she was likely to take on WPA roles, too. The original plan was for her to take over directing the composition-like program, but after one semester she was approached to take over the writing center and writing in the disciplines programs. What’s salient here is that this institution had a lot of structures in place to support writing and similar structures borrowed from composition programming in U.S. institutions, though their local flavor left a lot of difference to navigate. Through our interviews, Ellis articulates the underlying, invisible work that is part of being a Rhet/Comp-trained internationally mobile WPA (like the extra time required to carefully draft emails for rhetorically complex audiences). We are able to locate some of the transnational features of this work through looking at policy, identity, and place.

Through our interviews, Ellis articulates different aspects of the work of being a Rhet/Comp trained, internationally mobile WPA—and we are able to locate some of the transnational features of this work through looking at policy, identity, and place (among

other aspects). Beginning with the basics, in describing her work, she says “I feel like my mental energy, like on a daily basis, it's all going towards communicating, you know, like getting a message across.” When this communication occurs through email, she cites the crafting of the texts as part of “all the invisible work that no one sees” a WPA do. The consideration and knowledge required to successfully communicate across differences aligned by discipline, nationality, institutional role, personality, gender, et cetera create layers of potential markers to inform such communication. Ellis points out, “there's not just one learning curve, right? Cause you're having to learn a lot of multiple layers.” It is in the explication and navigation of these layers through narrating observations, experiences, and methodical reflection that Ellis is able to articulate TWPA work for us.

Similarly to Esther and Max, the practices of a transnational outlook are articulated as she continually raises potential differences, then complicates them; assesses the limitations of categories, and asserts the ways in which these practical differences manifest themselves on the day-to-day. For this reason, this section will include more lengthy excerpts to demonstrate the ways in which this knowledge is unpacked and the limits are assessed in different areas. Ellis shares about not-knowing, partiality, isolation, the delicate discerning of how people/issues fit between geographic, cultural, professional, institutional lines—and the work required to know and articulate them in the hours drafting emails or the brief but dense considerations when replying to questions informally. The word she uses to narrate important moments is as “shifts” and she describes encounters with new experiences as something to “file away.” As she describes it, a shift is “a change in perceptions of awareness of context and how I have to behave in a particular context or how interactions might occur in a particular context.” *Shift* is a

term featured in Blommaert's (2007) description of scales as a vertical access of value in tracing mobility-sensemaking. Throughout his article, which will be discussed further in the conclusion, Blommaert discusses various ways speakers shift across scales of meaning/power; for example, when a person expresses an emotionally driven discourse that meets a higher scale-level rational legal discourse and feels disempowered (p. 7). Blommaert argues that even basic conversations can "trigger a whole range of indexical shifts, redefining the situation, the participants, the topic, the scope of acceptable statements on the topic, and so forth; they also firmly set the event in a normative, general norm-oriented frame" (p. 7). Shifts in scale and the recognition and revision of indexes can help us understand the everyday work that Ellis is describing in her anecdotes.

One example of a shift came when Ellis was chatting informally with another professor who pushed her to share her voting record and specific positions, and this approach was very different from the privacy Ellis was accustomed to in her home location.

Yeah, so I guess that one is more sort of a cultural shift in the sense of like oh, okay, here for whatever reason people tend to be more open, or at least my assumption in reading the way he interacted with me is that people are more open in talking about these things. In the US nobody asks these questions right? I mean it's really rare except for good friends to be asked like "who did you vote for?" and if you answer kind of in a roundabout non-answer way they accept that and they don't push so for him to keep and be like no no no I am not going to get out of this conversation unless I answer this question...um yeah that just sort of felt like oh, ok this is a very different kind of exchange than I am used to so in that sense I would consider it more of a cultural thing which again like I can't say if that's [local nationality], I just am assuming that he was [local nationality] and I don't know, he could have lived elsewhere and picked it up somewhere else but so that just reminds me of a conversation I had with somebody who was talking about like she lived in France for a while and when you're there and you're like, "ok, I'm gonna go now" they're like "ok, bye" whereas in the US there's like another 15 minutes of talking from when you say ok I am gonna hang up 'til when

you actually hang up you know, so it felt like one of those kind of moments where like oh, this is a different reality from whatever sorts of cultural influences that we've been trained to do and to think and to say and to know and now I am outside that.

So, interacting in this way was disorienting because she didn't have a guide for how to respond given the lack of previously experienced cultural norms. What I find interesting is the way in which she begins with an anecdote, and then in explaining the reasons behind her interpretation she states her assumptions and complicates them with the idea that they might not really be rooted to a local identity. What's also important here is that Ellis is using nationalist constructions of identity to make a point; she uses a nation container as a marker of difference to describe her *transnational* sensemaking (much more on this in chapter five). Reflecting on a moment, she realized she was outside of her usual assumed cultural influences and must reassess her rhetorical choices. These and many other experiences influence shifts in her perception and behavior as she works to locate herself. She explains that,

There are ways that I'm sure I've adapted that I can't pinpoint that when I suddenly have a different audience, I'll shift and probably not even recognize that I'm shifting again; or be able to articulate why that particular shift is happening...maybe that's the way I see these shifts where it's like this is what I do on a normal basis and then every once in a while if there are like two parallel lines that I am between and I am following these lines, every once in a while it gets a little blurry because I am encountering something that is different.

The idea of the parallel lines here follows the idea of two separate places (home and abroad let's say) between which Ellis locates herself. One way of describing these shift-moments is that those lines become blurry and the position between them that she has grown accustomed to becomes uncertain, and she no longer knows how to follow. The other aspect in her description is the awareness; it is hard to keep up with the changes

through constant reflection, so it is possible that these slower, unconscious processes are happening that shift her perceptions and actions and don't reveal themselves.

Ellis, in multiple instances, expresses the difficulty in parsing or tracing potential reasons and explanations of experiencing differences because of the demands for her time, because there are limitations on what one can completely know, and because of the complex layers involved. She also expresses that this may or may not be particular to her location; that there are always limits on what is doable and knowable.

It's a difficult question because I'm American, I'm female and I'm young. So, when I have meetings with other people around campus, often I'm talking to people who are not American who are not female and who are not young or as young as me (laughs). So, those three things, I think they're sort of hard to pick apart in terms of like which of those factor in—and it could be one of those things; it could be all of those things.

Parsing out these aspects is not an academic exercise, or a personal journey of discovery, it is integral to her professional role as a WPA. She gives an example of the importance of being able to make sense of these layers on a day-to-day level:

Somebody stops me on the sidewalk between here and wherever walking across campus and they're like "oh, you're the person doing the writing center and I teach this course" oh, and then it's sort of like I have to sit there and go, oh, what do I know about this department and what do I know about writing in it and how do I communicate some of those things to this particular person who is coming from this mindset and so yeah I mean I do think it's happening a lot and I think it's happening very quickly and even though it is conscious, I don't know that it is something that's easy to articulate.

Understanding "this particular person who is coming from this mindset" requires an accumulation of experiences, perceptions, observations—in short a wealth of knowledge—to be accessed and put into rhetorical motion in order to successfully represent herself and her program to her very diverse audience both formally and informally. But, importantly, one cannot simply ruminate on all the intricacies as there is

an expectation of a reply quickly; one has to make very quick use of knowledge in order to craft a reply. This day-to-day need to put knowledge to use in new ways means one needs a certain amount of limitation on how far one can reflect or parse. Ellis continues reiterating that there are limitations on how much one can access this knowledge and articulate it, even though it is relevant to so much of the work. Sometimes it is enough to simply maintain one's "tiny realm" of influence rather than needing to survey what's going on in the whole world and to ruminate on what's unique or not about one's location. This echoes Esther's comments about personal bandwidth and whether there's enough to reflect on everything when the day-to-day work is all one can manage. And then, even when things are parsed and understood through reflection or collaborative conversation, there are still limits on how much one can adjust oneself to what's learned: "sometimes I still can't get my southern American female brain to say the thing that I actually need to say for that listener." So much of our discussion returns to limitations in how much is solid ground in one's knowledge and interpretations; and also limitations on time and energy to contemplate and reflect as well.

The concept of location has a complicated role in determining meaning or informing actions, too. Ellis pointed out that she doesn't consider herself as a "transnational person" because "it's still just me. It's just a different location." One example is the experience of getting advice on how to communicate to local institutional audiences more clearly by colleagues and when to say "no" or disagree—again similar to what Max struggled with as well. As Ellis explains here:

One of my staff in the writing in the disciplines program, she laughs at me because she, there are moments where she's like, Ellis, you have to say no. Like, they're not, they're interpreting your kind of working around the no as a no, it's okay even though you're trying to get them to this other point of that, especially

with other faculty, she's like, you're trying to lead them to this thing as the right answer. And she's like, but what they're hearing is you not saying no to this other thing. And it's like, oh, okay. So that's, again, I don't know if that's necessarily like a culturally local thing, but she like notices those moments as somebody who's local, usually it's after the fact because she won't like do it in front of the other person, because I think she doesn't want to like then discredit me in some way. So it's after the fact, she's like, you need to like go back and so, often, then what I do is kind of like do a follow up email or whatever where it's like, okay, so we said this is not going to work.

In the above anecdote we have a set of power levels and social norms being negotiated through collaboration and communication across different lines of difference. What I also take away is that pinning down the particular local-ness of the rhetorical practices is less necessary than getting the feedback. Also, one cannot assume the ability to just communicate differently to meet local expectations automatically—it takes persistence and community support, in some cases. Communication strategies here help articulate a way to separate a feeling of continuity-of-self in different locations, while also describing changes in action; or some things being more resilient to change than others, despite all the parsing/reflecting one can do.

Ellis used the term *isolation* to describe interactions like the one discussed about her staff above and in struggling to find relevant resources for her work; isolated in the sense that there appeared to be no other local professionals dealing with the particular set of needs she faced. Her isolation was felt increasingly more as the dean dispatched many of the staff needed to support her programs. Literature on Intercultural Communication, popularized by language education scholars like Byram (1997), shares a view of cultural knowledge as something that can be acquired through various formal or informal means; an accrual of this knowledge will lead to a set of skills that produce successful communication across cultural/national lines. This concept—that one can gather local

knowledge and attitudes as a “precondition”—was something about which I asked Ellis as she described her feelings of isolation (p. 33). When I asked whether a larger body of knowledge about her new country would have helped her to feel less isolated or to facilitate better communication, she replied “that wouldn’t help at all.” The ways in which Intercultural Communication scholarship assumes stable cultural information and individual representation of nations has been critiqued by scholars like Wayhudi (2016), and Ellis’s description parallels their critiques and points to the idea that while learning about local histories and conditions shapes one’s perspectives, there isn’t some linear accrual of some stable forms of knowledge, nor a precondition of it, that can reliably lead to some form of “successful communication” to prevent, say, policy decisions that adversely affect the program.

The complex relationship with the diverse “local” knowledge and the discussion of Ellis’ professional commitments is perhaps best articulated through policies (like plagiarism, privacy, accessibility, and Title IX). Policy mobility in itself is interestingly complex as a transnational unit of analysis, but here greatly enriched by how these policies are mobilized in Ellis’s trajectory. In discussing these policy commitments that are closely tied in with WPA work, we attempted to trace the ways in which these commitments come with her to her role just like the policies themselves make the journey in this U.S.-based foreign university. In our conversation we spoke about accessibility as a change seen as coming from a U.S. location in its influence in the institution. Ellis brings a commitment to student accessibility to her work and points out that there is a student disability office created to oversee policies and support students. She wondered how much education and consideration went into the creation of the office versus simply

“importing” it because they have one in the U.S. or it is mandated by a policy. While one can compare attitudes from her U.S. training and her experiences with local instructors, basing one’s perspective in this national container is not always productive:

Ellis: I remember somebody in a meeting one time who actually was American, saying like, oh, well, just because like my one student can't run as fast as my other students. Like, why would I, you know, adjust everything in my course for like the slower runner and it's like, oh, you're missing the point. You know?

Joe: So, it's a great point in the anecdote that that was an American who...

E: I know. Yeah. So that made it worse. Like in my mind somehow that made it worse just because as an American, like we have these rules and regulations and expectations in place. Everywhere, you know, we have elevators in all of our buildings here. I mean, that kind of like broke my heart even more than if it was somebody who was local where it's like, okay, they work in a place, they live in a place where nothing is accessible. You can't walk down the street with a stroller much less in a wheelchair. I've watched students like pick students in wheelchairs up and carry them up into the classroom building. And it's like, are you kidding me? And I mean, and that's a very obvious visual.

J: So just to stick with the sorting out. This to me is a really good example. I'm really curious to know like, what do you do to sort it out?

E: I cry (laughs), inside and outside. Yeah, I think within my fiefdom of the writing center in the WID program, I try to at least get the people that I work with to buy into it.

Ways of delineating a particular commitment or perspective to an issue based on one’s nationality here is not helpful; the diversity of opinions around an issue are not so predictable. The arguments and scope of one’s power to make change is limited in how much one can plan.

Privacy is an issue important to WPA work when thinking about how to discuss student work with different audiences: tutors, professors, administrators, parents, etc.

When this privacy is also compounded with accessibility questions and who has a right to know and distribute certain information on a student’s behalf, these issues become even

more consequential. Her commitments came with her to her post even before there was a policy in place like FERPA, which was later adopted.

With the writing center, it's a little different because there hasn't really been a written stipulation in place until I got there. I think there was kind of verbal one among the tutors from the previous director, I'm not sure, but at least there was an agreement with the tutors like, hey you know there is some confidentiality here, don't over share. But really, it wasn't until I got there and I was like "no no." I had problems with this and it was difficult because I did have to articulate because at that time when I first started FERPA didn't exist here so it was like, shit, how do I articulate this in a way that people are at least gonna accept? Maybe they won't be happy about it, but at least it's there, black and white, explained: this is what it is.

I do think that the assistant director and I sat down and she was sort of like "okay, why?" you know, like "explain to me why," and she's like, "it's not that I disagree with you, but I need to know exactly what the reasons are." And so it tends to become like, "okay, we're here for the students, we serve the students, we do not serve the professor" and so it was kind of like articulating these things about what my beliefs were about the role of the writing center, how we serve the writer and not the larger institution and that if the writer then wants to make decisions about information that they were given or what they did they can do that, but we're not going to take it upon ourselves to do that without at least their permission.

When I asked her how she might be able to trace these commitments and see what might be informing the positions she arrived with and how she made sense of them, we were able to trace Ellis's discussion of her values for privacy and alignment with different policy positions in terms of her perspectives being raised in the American South and how family dynamics and social roles in the transition into adulthood, personal responsibility, and autonomy are connected with age and leaving home. See how she draws comparisons between her two locations and points out which differences exist through her experience and how they depend on particular definitions of each place:

I would be shocked *shocked* if any of my students have had to like do their own laundry before, really like clean a bathroom, or just basic sorts of chores. Okay, a lot of students in the US, because they're living on their own, because their parents don't have housekeepers, they learn to develop some of these kinds of responsibilities, so I do think there is sort of a lot of like sheltering, I guess, that's going on here that makes the transition a bigger shock to students when they show

up and they're like: I don't know what a syllabus is, I've never heard of this word before; I don't know how to read it, I don't know why I'm reading it, it's hard to read it is really long not a lot of it makes sense to me what am I supposed to pay attention to in it...

In the US we think nuclear families, right? We think independence, you know, this child is of age they are now an adult, therefore they can make their own decisions, therefore they should be able to choose what major they want and what jobs they want to have in the setting of it, right? So, all those things feed down into that from societal concepts that we don't even recognize exist, whereas, here families are much bigger than that and so for many of these students they're gonna take over whatever company their father owns or they need to be educated because that's going to help them find a good husband who has such and such level of education and job. So all of those things about family and the ways families interact in the perceptions that they have on what students should do/should not do, or their children should do/should not do, I think stem from these bigger things whether they're religious, which I think sometimes they are but also just sort of like cultural/societal sorts of beliefs that they're impacted by that they maybe don't even necessarily recognize.

So, when thinking about privacy commitments, Ellis is aware of how these concepts of independence, family size, and social norms from her background have informed her ideas about protecting the privacy of her students. While these definitions of each place are partial and offer much potential to be complicated and unpacked, the relevance of their broad containment is effective in helping to call forth local adaptation. They are limited constructions in that they do not assess a full depth of difference (which is acknowledged), but they are also productive in that they allow one to think through ways to adapt to local needs. The question is not whether these are fully fleshed-out descriptions of these two places, but rather what do these juxtapositions allow to happen?

In these potential ways to understand differences, she can begin to know what impact different arguments might have for different audiences, but it doesn't mean that her commitments (the ones she came with) necessarily, or automatically, change. Ellis explained that learning more about the pressures her students are under made her more

sympathetic and thoughtful in her assessments of plagiarism, but that her sympathies towards instructors who aren't attentive or understanding of their new locations or new policies was not similarly generous, noting that they're in positions of power and have a greater responsibility. Ellis points out that in her rhetorical positioning the way place factors into these rhetorical shifts is minor and somewhat nuanced.

There was a lot of thinking on my part in making sure that I was trying to articulate these things clearly and I don't think I was necessarily thinking like, "oh, I have to write these for a (local nationality) audience." I think I was thinking more of "I need to articulate these to professors who are going to want to know information that I feel like they shouldn't have." How do I articulate this to other people who feel entitled to this information about their students? I think it was more kind of like, "Okay, FERPA doesn't exist and that's what would have been my go-to answer, like, 'oh it's illegal for us, right? Where here's what FERPA says and here's why we follow it in the US, I can't do that here. I couldn't do that, so it was the location that forced me to think through the rearticulation, but I think the audience that I was thinking about it didn't necessarily have to do with location. That (rearticulation) had to do with what was their rank...somebody who is the chair of whatever or who's you know this professor emeritus or has whatever kind of ranking they think entitles them to this information, we can sort of say like actually...no.

This is a fine-grained way of making sense of how location-specific consideration is—or is not—relevant. In some ways it helps trace an explanation for the differences in her experience of independence and social norms, but those norms do not necessarily shift her commitment to privacy and giving students more agency over their information and choices. Ellis knows this is partly rooted in a place from her past when we unpack it. The exigence for how to enact this commitment is a result of the new location, but thinking of specifically local rhetorical practices, specific local norms, doesn't so much factor into the rhetorical construction for institutional audiences. This professional and formal articulation to colleagues fits more with institutional norms, which are inflected in some ways by local (national, regional) concepts, and some ways not.

After all this consideration, FERPA became policy and that shifted the ways in which Ellis made her arguments. In this exchange we discuss the way these policy changes might be seen as being imposed on local practices:

Ellis: it was only like a year ago that suddenly I found out that we're going to follow FERPA. Because before I've just always sort of been like, here's what we're going to do. This is how we're gonna frame not giving out this information to people from the writing center. And now I can say, oh, look FERPA I don't have to give any more explanation. This is why I'm not doing it...

Joe: Do you think that that's sort of problematic? I mean, you, you mentioned like, oh, a lot of these are taking things that I believe in from the US and applying them here. Do you think that someone then says, okay, that's just colonial, that's just oppressive?

E: Oh yeah, I definitely think people think that. Yeah.

J: Do you think that?

E: Ugh...I mean, it *is* colonialism, right? But I think [privacy] is good. I think we need some of this, which is basically a non-answer, because *I* think that they're good, because I buy into them. Right?
(...)

J: So, pre-FERPA, was there like any consideration that like you were an outsider and didn't belong, didn't have a right to tell local professors “no” or that your version of privacy is right?

E: I never felt that and in part is probably because no conversation escalated to where like I had to step in...

We continued to discuss whether ideas could be considered as coming from outside the scope of the university and how its official relationship to the U.S. complicated these positions. In this instance, I wondered not what she *should* have been considering, but more so what was her actual experience in trying to navigate her role and do the best work for the writing center. She responded,

It's sort of hard at that level to even know like okay this is you know something that's specific to this culture whether [institutional] culture or whether [national] culture but, I think the FERPA stuff, the Accessibility education stuff—those are really big obvious ways in which (the institution) is bringing in ideas and policies

and procedures and ways of thinking and doing that are not from (this country). And I think even the writing center itself is something you know not from (this country), it's from the US; and you know the whole liberal arts curriculum you know I mean so how much of what (the local university) is comes from the US? But, a lot of it has just sort of been around long enough that a lot of the (local nationality) has seeped in and then a lot of that in ways that I don't know that I even could recognize. I can pinpoint things that are newer because these conversations are happening I can witness some of this back and forth of learning about it and trying to understand it, or who's not trying to learn about it not understanding it. And some of the things that maybe have been in place longer that I've sort of come into and they're just here so I accept them.

This is a delicate parsing of certain policies or practices that seem more embedded than others due to the amount of time for their uptake, whereas others are in a state of conflict and negotiation. One must consider the institution's title is as an American university: it has headquarters in the U.S.; it borrows its curriculum and policies from the U.S. So, in a sense, where does one draw the line in what is an undue influence from a U.S. academic?

I definitely say things to the wrong people at the wrong time but yeah then I think there is this other level or I wonder, I guess, *is* there this other level to it of like this culture piece you know where I am aware that I'm an American working in another place? Are there inherent biases in the way that I'm perceiving certain individuals or groups or the University as a whole, because it's situated here? That's hard to parse out, well, I mean that could be some of it, I just don't know...I think just being in Rhet/Comp already makes me an outsider in so many ways but again it's hard to distinguish what comes just from that and what comes from other elements...I think there were moments where I felt like well this wouldn't happen in the US even though it does happen in the US.

In these quoted excerpts from different points in our conversations, Ellis is showing the difficulty in the entire prospect of finding solid ground in terms of just who or what should be considered local, and how her own biases might be informing her perceptions. The locations of these concepts are always in movement.

The notion of who is local gets even more complicated especially when thinking about the unique role that U.S. policies play in the institution given the practices that surround it in the rest of the local country and the complex backgrounds that her students

bring to campus. By assessing the realities of the local context, she and others experience these sort of reality-checks where their perceptions seem to drift in and out of connecting the relevance of what's happening institutionally with larger political and social forces around them and navigating how much of that to attend to.

The one side is like [this university] is set apart but then the other side is like, yes, but we're surrounded by all this other stuff (corruption), like it trickles in sometimes it's more than a trickle, you know? In many ways, I think I get sort of high and mighty, like I can't believe this can happen here, but then in other ways it's like well, look around and think about this context a bit more, because of course this is happening here, you know? So, I even see myself differently depending on whatever the topic or issue is; I might go one way or I might go the other way, and that is hard to negotiate...I've had moments talking to my husband like this and he's like "hello, have you seen where we are?" And then other times where I'm talking to professors, like, "why can't you get that this is where people are coming from? You're surrounded by this, you have to work within this." Those kinds of things are really prevalent everywhere right? We're always being inundated by whatever the culture and the context are but maybe that's what it is like as an outsider. Sometimes I'm noticing them more than if I was from here and I just wouldn't pay as much attention.

In this description, everything is framed as one side and another, in some ways and other ways, sometimes. She is describing how she finds herself sometimes being reminded of the connection with other local realities, then also feeling that others are acting without regard for their surroundings. It is possible, in this depiction to sort of move in and out of one's awareness of their location—of needing to be reminded. How much of this is due to the formal influence of U.S. institutional policies in a foreign institution, surrounded by a foreign location with more local influences, and recognizing that the barrier between these spaces is only tentative and constantly in flux? The recognition of these details yields a valuable insight about the fact that local students who come to this foreign-inflected institution find themselves disoriented, but, according to Ellis, "I think it is a harder transition for them, you know, it's like all of a sudden being here as a student is

foreign, whereas a lot of those kinds of things I connect with because it's so similar to where I came from." We see here another kind of paradox (recall Alison's use of the term) of the location's transnational hybridity, on policy levels Ellis is more of a local than the students—or perhaps even colleagues—who are from the country in which the institution is situated. This is an excellent illustration of the nuance of locality, that one cannot treat the local like a fixed object, it threads through and across different aspects of this work. This effect is central to the reality of her day-to-day work in locating herself among different policies and people.

So, policies and commitments cannot draw straight-line, frictionless trajectories across places/identities, and we see through Ellis' experiences how this is a rich site to locate TWPA navigation as ongoing, partial, and layered. The way one sees the sense of the place from which they come impacts how they understand the experiences in their new place; and how they construct the new place also factors into how they are able to navigate. She describes here the ways location should be considered in perhaps an alternate way that lets more progressive commitments take hold:

I think there's some really good things about it, but there's also kind of this like, oh well we want our program to be like theirs so let's, we'll just import it. And that becomes problematic because we're not the same context. We're not the same student body. We're not the same faculty as that. So, when thinking about plagiarism or about FERPA or about accessibility, like all these things, there is this moment where we have to be like, okay, but this is what is existing here. What has existed up to this point? What people know, what people, I hate to say like are ready for, but...what their awareness is up to this point. Okay, I think it's great that we started an accessibility education office, but maybe what needed to happen was a whole lot of information gathering and dissemination first to get people to buy in and be like, "oh my God we need an accessibility education office." And then once people are like, "why don't we have one," then create. I mean not to say that I have all the answers or that's the right way to go about it. But I think in some ways the location does impact a lot of these things in particular as to like how well they work or don't work and who benefits and who doesn't and who the audience is versus who the audience is supposed to be.

Here Ellis is pointing out that the structural choices in how policies are implemented—often by local actors—can undermine the ways in which outside ideas are perceived. As they make sense of what is happening, the TWPA is confronted with the contingent constructedness of what’s going on around them, faced with the limitations of just how much they can ever really know about why things are happening. One’s values and commitments emerge as one of the more resistant guides in navigating TWPA work, as a way to orient to different locations through tentative (and hopefully productive) comparisons, and as part of an identity that can be expressed in new terms to new audiences, but which remains constant in its intent.

In the end, these conversations kept coming back to the difficulty in pinpointing exactly what causes what; there’s great difficulty in attributing stable reasons for any particular thing. As she says:

It’s hard to break apart; what of this is institutional things that I am learning and navigating? What of this is [local] culture things that I am learning and navigating? What of it is just policies and procedures of the writing center or whatever else is influencing what my role is?...It’s so hard to pick these things. I mean you’re talking about what background context is it that affects this? It’s like hell if I know, you know, like, let me count the ways that things in my life could have triggered it. So yeah. Who knows?

The language here makes it sound like there’s a layered mass that one can “break apart” to try and attribute different things to. While that process might not lead to solid-feeling conclusions, there is some sense that despite the dynamic changes in the institution, there is a sense of finding a place that doesn’t rest on this constant outsider-ness or feeling relegated to the nation-sized container:

Oh, me being American, I probably don’t think about it at least as consciously now as I did when I first started. I think it’s probably still very much there, but maybe in more subtle ways or more unconscious ways, or at least in ways that I’m

not kind of setting up this, you know, “you're you and I'm me and we're different” sort of thing.

This has been echoed by other participants, that there are slow, sub-conscious processes doing work to locate and orient. And even though there may not be really stable ground waiting on the other end of some linear process of obtaining expertise enough to know exactly what to do and why, the work to understand must be done. Not only for the success of the program, but for one's own sanity:

If you're not trying to understand these things, then you just keep doing the same thing over and over and over again. Eventually you're gonna have brain damage or somebody's gonna be really pissed off because you keep beating your head against the same wall.

What better metric is there for an effective transnational theory than keeping us from beating our heads against the same wall over and over again?

Conclusion

These interviews have articulated overlooked contours of transnational work and given voice to the labor taken to understand and engage with transnational institutional spaces. These participants show us the ongoing work of remaining always flexible, of questioning assumptions, of the paradoxes of the local, of the power of disconnects and the work it takes to make sense of them, of forms of resistance, of opportunities to make new knowledge while acknowledging the limitations on what one can truly know.

Through these interviews, I aimed to understand the invisible work of administration, and what was made visible in this international context is a world that is transnational. That transnationality comes through in different metaphors, terms, events and in reflecting and unpacking to demonstrate a potential sensemaking path through these experiences. What

I find important to note is that this transnational world does not reject the nation-level thread, it only places it in a context of other contingent forces.

CHAPTER V

MOBILIZING TRANSNATIONAL NUANCE

Transnational critique is a two-parter: first, it asks if what we consider local is really all that stable, and whether what we consider global is really all that separate from the local. This more complex set of relations in a given context means that the concept of the local is entangled and complicated by the global, micro and macro are co-constructing one another, that there is an emerging space that resists stability. Secondly, transnational critique creates an exigence to articulate and mobilize other terms beyond seemingly static spatial containers (e.g. the nation) or really any other form of sedentarist containment of meaning. By limiting and specifying the size and relevance of the nation-container as a starting point and placing it in an entangled context, there is a shift in the terms and questions one can ask and the work that one can make visible. This concluding chapter will look for the ways in which terms can be shifted as a result of the knowledge shared by participants in conversation with practice and mobilities theories.

This study interviewed five participants with experience as internationally mobile WPAs working in contexts that were transnational—they felt and were treated as outsiders in many ways. In these interviews, I endeavored to make visible some of the invisible or under-theorized aspects of Transnational Writing Program Administrative (TWPA) work. Listening to the terms by which participants made sense of their experiences and the evocative events that provided rich intersections of complexity, I was

able to locate more granular and nuanced articulations of such work. For example, participants have pointed out the limitations of concepts like language, gender, race, religion, and age to understand contextual differences across time and space as their work unfolds. The ways the participants—working in different parts of the world but all in some ways identifying as outsiders in their role as WPAs—map and navigate their spaces is variable and dynamic and moves across many different terms.

Internationally mobile WPAs, as demonstrated throughout this study, regularly navigate a powerful nexus of increased complexity from which their sensemaking can be applied to other contexts, and understanding their practices is essential to understanding their work. Placing such sensemaking into larger conversations beyond a particular context, as this study attempts to do, requires a transnational attention to difference where one must parse particulars. Or, in other terms: one cannot mistake any of the parts for the whole. By that I mean, the degree to which we express the entanglement and contingency of containers/terms/concepts allows us, to some extent, to make this work more understandable and visible as globally situated without diminishing or overly abstracting it from its local context. Taken as a whole, this transnational work is conceptually daunting if we acknowledge all its contingency. While participants felt the greatness of such a task, their very practical workarounds of framing their conclusions as tentative and their understandings as in-process allow their work to get done and allow them to stay flexible as they continue to make sense of their contexts. This flexibility resists reifications of nationality, discipline, language, etc. and instead attends to the mobility and multiplicity of whatever is available.

Such strategies and the exigencies that call for resisting these reifications are the subject of this chapter. I will show, through reading across the interviews in chapter four as well as offering new evidence that further supports the findings, the ways in which the participants' descriptions can help shift understandings to more productive engagement with difference. First, I will unpack the ways in which these interviews align with and describe forms of entanglement and the processes by which participants use sensemaking to navigate their contexts. Secondly, I will outline resonances in practice and mobility theories to show participants' actions as scaling and discursive work. Lastly, I will conclude with the take-aways from this study and implications for future research. Ultimately, the goal in this chapter is to articulate those more nuanced and complex depictions of TWPA work and highlight the active theorizing made visible by asking mobile scholars to share their sensemaking.

The interviews: a language of entangling

Looking across these interviews for depictions of transnationality, we can see each participant mapping their space in different ways. Billie has reconfigured her professional world spatially in the fact that she prefers to work from home and via digital means. She has mapped those around her at work along a series of terms: colleagues and students ("kids"), American and international, academics and staff roles, creative and not-creative thinkers. She describes a sensitivity to the ways in which people perform or speak about their work, about the rhetorical choices in meetings between "academics" and "staff," the inefficiency and personal aggrandizement of the scholars being such a drag that she avoids even being on campus. This means Billie is leveraging her mobility into digital, spatial realms as a response to rhetorical patterns among social or

professional roles—this is her map. Other participants like Max and Esther also raised these differences among academic/teacher roles and staff roles, also noting that often academic roles are employed by more mobile international individuals, while staff roles are often done by locals. This impacted the social interactions in ways sometimes more salient than disciplinary identity or even administrative role.

Ellis mentioned that one of her staff gives valuable advice on social norms and rhetorical navigation for meetings in private conversation, thus showing how these factors can re-draw power dynamics in small but meaningful ways:

One of my staff in the writing in the disciplines program, she laughs at me because there are moments where she's like, "You have to say no. They're interpreting your kind of working around the 'no' as an, 'oh, it's okay,' even though you're trying to get them to this other point." Especially with other faculty, she's like, "you're trying to lead them to this thing as the right answer, but what they're hearing is you not saying no to this other thing." And it's like, "oh, okay." So, again, I don't know if that's necessarily like a cultural thing, but she like notices those moments as somebody who's local. Usually it's after the fact, because she won't do it in front of the other person, because I think she doesn't want to discredit me in some way. So, it's after the fact, she's like, "you need to go back." And, you know, so often then what I do is a follow up email where it's like, "okay, so we said this is not going to work..."

When I asked Ellis what might be at work in making it hard for her to state her "no" more directly, she responded, "Oh my God. It could be so many things." Then, she proceeded to walk through potential terms of: training, culture of "Southern American niceness," not wanting to "shut down conversations" as a power move, being conscious of how she represents the writing center and not wanting to alienate others, and comfort level: "if I'm comfortable with somebody, I'm a lot more likely to be like, 'shut the fuck up,' you know, than somebody that I've just met for the very first time." Continuing to consider, Ellis offers religious background, gender, and her sense of herself as an introvert. She then articulates it could be "any combination of the above, all those things factor in."

Lastly, she circles back to power and the limitations of her own perceptions and her local staff member who helps her:

She's like, "this is what that person is hearing when you do this thing." I'm like, "oh, I get it. "You know, logically, I understand it. The next time I'm in a meeting with somebody else, am I going to be able to recognize that thing and act on it? Probably not. Yeah. Maybe eventually. It's been helpful to have somebody who feels comfortable pointing those things out and being like, "hey, here's what's going on." It's like, "oh, okay. Yeah." Cause I wasn't understanding why we're still going back and forth over this thing when it seems like I was being clear, but I obviously wasn't being clear. So, that's a big thing that has been interesting for me that I would not have noticed without her pointing out.

These moves she is making and what she is articulating are the ways in which there are many layers to understand potentially why a certain communication isn't being successful, how her perceptions of the miscommunication aren't working to make sense of what's happening, and even when these things are pointed out it is really difficult to then shift ("shift" is Ellis's preferred term) her actions in the moment and behave differently as her reactions are so ingrained to the various aspects of her character she brings with her to her role. There is an enduring gap between that logical understanding and the individual recognition or new action.

The concept, though, of the local staff versus global scholar is similarly complicated elsewhere by geographic mobility, religious affiliation, language ideology, etc. As Alison pointed out in the narrative about devising the new course reader, there are paradoxes in that she wanted to support a more localized set of readings for students, yet the local instructors disagreed, arguing that "it's good for them to be exposed to American culture." Alison, read by her colleagues as an American and in some ways self-identifying as such, saw a paradox in that the local teachers had no sense that the course's texts should be localized. But in the face of this conflict, a committee formed to make a

new set of readings and, according to Alison, one cannot completely draw lines across those who supported changes according to age, gender, disciplinary training, language background, professional role; as she said, “I would never sort it out in those ways.” Instead, what appears to have been the guiding principle informing the discussions could be attached to the language ideologies and pedagogical epistemologies of each actor. Alison explained, “I think what was happening, in one way, is that the program itself was really conceived as a program in second language English....so, many of the approaches were really about differences in those perspectives.” Along these lines, there are groups aligned around these higher order concepts from a range of identity markers.

The language of transnationality can be found in places like these, where there is description of understanding difference as part of the sensemaking process inherent in TWPA work as drawn from this study. Firstly, there are images: a hailstorm (Esther), a soup of experiences (Esther), a trojan horse (Alison), bandwidth (Esther), invisible subterranean roots (Max), parallel lines (Ellis), two-way flows (Ellis), trajectories (Max), bridges (Esther and Ellis), compartments (Esther), layers (everyone); shifting (Ellis), juggling (Max), and brain damage from “beating your head against the same wall” (Ellis). Many times, participants used these images to attempt to describe something that is very hard to articulate. Ellis said, “I’ll shift and probably not even recognize that I’m shifting again; or be able to articulate why that particular shift is happening.” Or, as Alison explained: “I felt like I almost didn’t know how to talk about my experience, you know? I didn’t know how to say I just sort of live it and constantly reflect.” In Esther’s first interview, she used the term “maybe” 37 times (in 90 minutes). Across the board, participants preferred hedges like “could,” “might,” and “maybe.” Echoing Esther’s

image of a hailstorm, Ellis said: “We’re always being inundated by whatever the culture **and** the context are, but **maybe** that’s what it is like as an outsider.” That inundation means that sensemaking requires listing possibilities more than diagnosing a single concept, and rhetorically constructing multiple potential meanings is done with phrases like “on the one hand,” “on the other hand,” “in one way,” and “at the same time,” as seen here from Esther:

it was always on the one hand, on the other hand, it was always like, well, this feels uncomfortable and this seems wrong. But **on the other hand**, it, it achieves this and this, you know, I mean, it’s, in some ways it’s kinda like **on the one hand** writing center pedagogy, we don’t want to focus on grammar so much, but **on the other hand**, they’re going to need good grammar to get into Grad school, you know, or stuff like that. And **there’s always multiple layers on layers...on the one hand**, yes, there are things that I did and encountered and experienced in the writing center that people elsewhere would totally relate to. Right? But **at the same time**, everything about everything I experienced was totally [local to that nation] **and** totally unique. So, **it’s both**.

This is a move that I call *and—not or, maybe not sure*. She opens with saying that “it was always on the one hand, on the other hand,” which articulates that this kind of complexity is simply the norm for her approach. There are always ways by which to see different aspects in making sense of the work. Such an approach goes for understanding what is local on a national level versus what reaches further than the nation in its relevance, to what she encountered and experienced as a WPA interacting with different people in her role, and also right down to the individual interactions of tutors when looking at grammar in writing with particular students. She and other participants use a language of partiality, possibility, and accumulation: maybe this AND maybe that; probably both—and they see it simply as the norm. It is a language of restricted yet capacious comparison, where juxtaposed versions are temporarily constructed for particular purposes and contextualized for their limitations; the productive differences allow for new

consideration, adaptation; they aren't necessarily used to find particular fault or locate insufficiency.

There is resistance from participants to isolating, to stabilizing, to labeling; but at the same time, there is a recognition of the importance of practical efficacy, of the limits of one's scope, of the usefulness of the temporary or portable container—in this sense a container is a particular term. Ellis explained her caution in assessing a given situation:

I'm American, I'm female **and** I'm young. So, when I have meetings with other people around campus, often I'm talking to people who are not American who are not female **and** who are not young or as young as me (laughs). So, those three things, I think they're sort of hard to pick apart in terms of like which of those factor in—and **it could be one of those things; it could be all of those things.**

Here Ellis lifts three aspects of her identity (American, female, young) that *may* determine how she will be read in meetings across campus (often with people who do not share some or all of those markers). She explains the potential configurations of difference and then also articulates how difficult it would be to ever isolate one of them (“sort of hard to pick apart”) because it could be that one or all of those things are factors in understanding a particular interaction.

Another example comes from Max as, like Ellis, she describes her outsider status:

I really do feel like an outsider there yeah because of the language barrier **and** the cultural differences **and** the changing attitude toward American writing center practice **and maybe also** because of my age a lot of the people that I'm working with are my senior by more than a couple of years.

Max here evokes language, culture, attitude, *and* age. These terms evoke dealing with reconfiguration; describe change and navigation and sensemaking through multiplicity; describe something ephemeral yet constant. These factors will wax and wane as participants move through different spaces in their roles. Again, there are discursive

constructions that help articulate these images rhetorically with these tropes: *and not or, maybe not sure*.

The accumulative effect of all this multiplicity is that these participants resist the idea that any one particular factor can unlock or explain a certain event. They want to do justice to their experience that things are tangled and their knowledge is partial; in a sense this is the transnational, mobile norm with which they are being “inundated.”

Simultaneously, they need to find ways to navigate their roles in tangled spaces through finding patterns, through reflection and collaboration; conjuring instructive images to express their feelings and perceptions through working to understand their location. Ellis here describes the ways in which she makes sense of not only the various experiences students/instructors might bring, but also the ways their own awareness of these may be limited:

All of those things about family **and** the ways families interact in the perceptions that they have on what students should do/should not do, or their children should do/should not do, I think stem from these bigger things whether they're religious, which I think **sometimes** they are **but also** just sort of like cultural/societal sorts of beliefs that they're impacted by that they **maybe** don't even necessarily recognize.

Ellis is describing how she has shifted in how she speaks with different people about plagiarism, and she is pointing out how certain structures can inform actions without an ability to recognize it. What strikes me in this excerpt is also the ways in which Ellis moves from one term to another. What enables such mobility, moving from one to another, are these discursive constructions of *and/maybe*: family, the ways families interact, perceptions stem from religion, cultural, social beliefs—in this case connected with “sometimes” and “but also.” The other salient feature of this excerpt is the recognition that behaviors are influenced in potentially all these ways, yet how much

recognition of these influences will be present in any given person is unknown.

Assumptions are things we do not know we are making, so the awareness required to parse these potential meanings, the very exigence for this work is a transnational feature.

This is a clear example of what Starke-Meyyering (2014) called “cross-boundary knowledge-making” (p. 318); a transnational context provides an exigence for such knowledge making as a large part of TWPA work.

So, given a glimpse at the sensemaking of participants, which describe these layered, multiple, partial, ongoing, persistent TWPA contexts, what do we do with this information? The struggle to articulate the nature of their contexts in a holistic way while also attending to the particulars could be taken as a wish for better theorizations of TWPA contexts. The next section builds on these perceptions from participants, which I see as depictions of active theory work, to continue the task of articulating and theorizing their experiences as called for by Rose and Weiser (2002). I will start by looking at entanglement as a defining feature of our discussions and then move towards understanding the discursive work as part of the invisible labor of TWPA roles.

Theorizing: TWPA entanglement, mobility, practice

If we zoom out, we may begin with the image of the individual set against an institution—we can see the trajectory of that outsider relocating into a different organizational context and going about the work of fitting in. On a certain level, this is the conceptual starting point and most basic truth of what’s being discussed with my participants. The move our discussions articulate is in the direction of adding more granularity and complexity to such an equation. By, as Max would say, “digging down” into what’s really happening, we are confronted with a much richer set of relations where

the individual mobile WPA is not completely foreign and the new context in which they exist is not entirely local. Each individual is connected to other individuals with various commitments and trajectories, and the institutional context is shot through with various influences, ideologies, agendas, departments, disciplines, roles, buildings, offices, etc. The WPA's mobility to a new national/institutional context is an exigence to understand mobility in a broader and deeper sense. In this section, I take up that exigence by connecting aspects of interviews with theoretical concepts: entanglement and practice theory, co-constitutive flow, relative mobility, and scaling practices in discursive work.

Entanglement

"I felt at the time that I was just in this soup of experiences, just this hailstorm of all these different things, a mixing of institutional and country experiences, right? Just a tangled mess of things" –Esther

In our interviews, there were some evocative events that I found to be illustrative of the kinds of tangled positions that TWPA work presents. These events were notable in that they model the kinds of messy overlaps between so many different factors with different stakeholders, but also that participants, as WPAs, were in positions where they had to act at these intersections. They had to make actual statements in actual meetings to actual people. Alison was part of an initiative to update the text given to all students in their introductory writing courses. Because she was a foreigner arguing for a localized approach, she called herself the trojan horse, and when the committee shared its proposed reader to the larger (and more local) group of teachers, Alison says they "went ballistic" and refused to use it. When I asked her what she did, she just proceeded to describe how they moved forward with the support of the Dean, continued to develop their product, and then engaged with the messy conversations with different faculty.

Esther, as the director of a writing center at a women's university in Asia featuring a majority of international students on scholarships funded primarily through private donations, found herself in a compromising situation. Each year she and her tutors were responsible for writing profiles of the incoming students that would be shared with current donors and used to encourage further donations. The genre expectations for these texts, to Esther, were problematic in that she and her tutors needed to frame the narratives of these new students as one of struggle and gratitude for being saved from their lack of prospects at home. Not only did students not readily identify with these narratives, it furthered colonialist victim/savior narratives, which the education at the institution was working to subvert. Yet, Esther recognized the precarity of the writing center as it depended not only on the approval of those who were forcing these narrative constructions, but also dependent on the very donations these were meant to inspire. When she pushed back against these genre expectations, she got a lesson in the way power operates among the entanglements of place. A wealthy CEO (who is local to where the university resides, but works from an office in the US) hires an intern (an alum from his own institution) who is a young American white woman, and the intern is the person to whom Esther must discuss her concerns and who ultimately has discretion in changes.

As she thinks through how to word actual emails, how to train actual tutors, how to interact with actual writers and colleagues, she must also think about whether these problematic narratives are necessary in that they will allow for the other work of the writing center to proceed; she must ask herself: "am I complicit in something that I just don't want to be despite the day to day good that we're doing?" She understands that the

University needs those donations but also feels the weight of the other issues in place about the dense relations between student identity, staff and faculty interests, her role in the institution, and the problematic ways power is exercised across all these aspects. Yet, in this awareness, she used what was available to her to try and make her claim about the issues. Those claims were not successful in shifting the task, but they also did not harm the writing center: it stayed open. But, there is no map to help one understand the ways to form these responses; there is the work of determining one's own location and the particular forces in play.

Orlikowski (2006), taking on the very notion of what she calls “human knowledgeability,” argues for the materiality of knowledge, along with its performativity as an emergent, embodied, and embedded phenomenon. Borrowing a term from Woolgar (2002), to add that knowledge is also materially “entangled” (p. 265), she writes that “knowing is material” and “this deep intermingling of knowing, practice, and materiality deserves deeper investigation in our studies of organizational knowledge and learning” (Orlikowski, p. 461). Materiality here is part of a wave of attention, partly ushered in by scholars like Woolgar and his collaborator Bruno Latour, to understand the ways technological artifacts and social actions are *entangled* in the processes by which we create and verify (scientific) knowledge (Latour and Woolgar, 1979; Latour, 2005).

Orlikowski writes that “by privileging either the material or the social, we lose sight of their intermingling. We lose sight of what Pickering (1995, p.15) refers to as ‘the reciprocal and emergent intertwining of human and material agency.’ So, the challenge is to develop a vocabulary and set of understandings that help us speak to such, material-social intertwining” (461). Orlikowski here means to take up the agency of things—tools

in the laboratory, for example—but for the purposes of this project I see it as participants who were working to articulate the actual places/spaces where they locate their work as well as their own material bodies. Also, this perspective on entanglement foretells the ways in which transnational approaches to WPA work may try to take a holistic view without privileging particular aspects or detaching them into the abstract, severed from particular contexts.

Pickering (1995) sought to expand the conception of science by documenting more multiplicity and heterogeneity through the “mangle” of practice, “which sees science as an evolving field of human and material agencies reciprocally engaged in a play of resistance and accommodation in which the former seeks to capture the latter” (23). Rather than asserting assumed and reified boundaries that portray scientists as “disembodied intellects making knowledge in a field of facts and observations” (in some ways an inheritance from the Renaissance), Pickering here is depicting science as a performance of agency distributed across and shaped by social forces as well as material objects (p. 6). As Prior (1998) describes it: Pickering “emphasizes the contingency and unpredictability of...the way plans and projects are buffeted, shaped, and reshaped by heterogeneous fields of material and human agencies in a dialectical dance of accommodations and resistances” (p. 202). Pickering’s mangle is a hot mess; a sort of swirling vortex that can contain humans and artifacts, language practices and their ideologies, people and places and things and thoughts and plans and outcomes and sort of everything. He reminds us that there isn’t a “thread in the present that we can hang onto which determines the outcome...We just have to find out, in practice, by passing through the mangle” and whatever happens comes about by “brute chance” (24). This brute

chance, and the mangle as a concept, lack what he calls “comforting causality,” but the mangle *is* “constitutively interwoven into a pattern that we can grasp and understand;” such understanding is the goal of his dance of agency and dialectic of resistance and accommodation (p. 24). Let’s pause here.

I don’t necessarily hear participants arguing for material agency in the sense of objects or things in the ways that these scholars use the term “entanglement.” What I do hear from participants and see from visiting their contexts is a recognition of the exigence to understand and articulate a complex and emerging series of experiences. Ellis said that, to paraphrase, mobility meant constantly being inundated by the context, and in their own various ways participants worked to articulate how they made sense of their navigation through these contexts. Building on their articulations, I want to place their words into conversation with other theorists who are also trying to articulate rich and complex relationships that resonate with the realities of TWPA work as they’ve been described thus far. In a broad sense, I hear participants describing entanglement in how difficult it is to separate various aspects from others in order to settle on singular stable concepts. In this entanglement, I see the moves that participants make in providing multiple possibilities and embracing the partiality of their knowledge as strategic and productive. The work they are describing appears to show them responding to, grappling with, adjusting for different audiences while constantly reflecting and locating themselves amongst powerful forces. One potential way to see these actions is to move towards understanding contexts as formed through practice theory and scaling practices that inform their impressive discursive work. Participant navigation needs a richly symbiotic

way to understand how participants are able to move through and across various categories while still recognizing the limitations of them.

Practices are co-constitutive

“You're constantly adjusting to your surroundings. It's not just a one directional outward flow of my skills and my expertise and my knowledge. It's two ways.”—Esther

The entanglement that participants mentioned can also be seen through a lens of practices, which I think helps to trace the work TWPA's are doing as part of their complex contexts. Practice theory, in a general sense, shows a relationship between the everyday actions of individuals and the social structures—rules and norms—in which they are embedded. That relationship is contingent and recursive, or two way, meaning that they are both co-constructing one another. This co-construction moves away from attributing social phenomena to an individual's actions. An individual in taking an action contributes to the sedimentation of that as a norm and to the construction of potential rules in response to that behavior, which will in turn influence future norms and actions. We are all embedded in these processes and, in essence, any action can be seen as reinforcing existing norms (if they can be stable and singular enough to be reinforced) or bringing about some form of transformation or change. By forwarding mobile, transnational complexity, WPAs can inform changes they might feel committed to in their work, and also create space for other forms of social change in respect to perceptions of identity or concepts informing the way writing studies is mobilized in a particular space.

Giddens' (1984) concept of structuration bridges a gap between structures and agency (or objectivism and subjectivism) long discussed in social theories by asserting that while an individual actor operates within the context of rules and social structures, at the same time those structures do not exist separate from human action because they are

themselves social constructions. Giddens writes that agents and structures are not two separate sets of phenomena, or what he calls a “dualism,” but instead act as a “duality,” which sees social systems as “both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize” (p. 25). The duality of structure means that “the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction” (p. 19). Understanding that duality, and thus the deep involvement of human knowledgeability in the “recursive ordering of practices,” comes about through reflexivity (p. 3). Reflexivity here is not merely self-consciousness, but awareness of “the monitored character of the ongoing now of social life” (p. 3). In this light, there is no binary of the mobile human agent navigating static structures; there is not a set of rules one adopts in order to be local; there is a duality in which the processes that inform the actions of an individual are the same processes by which that individual contributes to the ongoing reconstruction of the very structures through which its movement is traced. In a more practical sense, think here of the ways in which Ellis described her interactions with a staff member who worked to point out the ways in which communicating a “no” was complicated. We can see Ellis as also shaping the consideration of local actors as they worked to understand her. There isn’t so much a static outsider versus local, there are more layers, more interaction, more dynamism, although, I would also argue that transnational experiences demand a move beyond a “duality” to be more of a plurality.

Practice theory, taken broadly, is one workaround to help ease the confusion between local/global binaries and the experiences that interview participants struggle with as they try to understand the instability inherent in their mobile realities. Practice

theory, for our purposes here, helps provide a kind of granularity to flatten the terms by which activities happen and see “outsider” WPAs as connected to their local counterparts through a shared unit of practice. As Schatzki (2001) explains:

Practice accounts are joined in the belief that such phenomena as knowledge, meaning, human activity, science, power, language, social institutions, and historical transformation occur within and are aspects or components of the field of practices. The field of practices is the total nexus of interconnected human practices. p. 11

By focusing on this term of practices, occurring in a field, we can shift the expressed entanglements towards productive understandings that allow us to trace the interaction of those various phenomena at a large nexus in much the same way that Giddens’ theory of structuration shows us the ways in which there is a simultaneous co-construction across aspects:

Practice thinkers usually acknowledge the structuring and coordinating import of agreements, negotiations, and other interactions, as well as the undergirding significance of skills and interpretations. They treat these phenomena, however, as features of or as embedded in practices, hence as subject to or as constitutive of the latter. (Schatzki, 2001, p. 14)

Here actual practices are embedded with an array of relevant skills, interpretations, and negotiations as they play out. Such a model resonates with how I see participants breaking down different aspects of their experience in their lists of potential factors all accumulating.

Schatzki (2002) in his notion of the site of the social, or site ontology, theorizes social life as embedded in a medium, what here I might call a container or context, but “at the same time, it accommodates the individualist insight that individuals and constellations thereof are causally responsible for the progress of social affairs” (p. xi). Through arguing for transformation, diversity of actions and conceptual schemes, he

finds that “everything is ontologically mutable,” so that, “in addition to regularity and irregularity, an adequate conception of social order must encompass stability and instability—now understood as endpoints on a continuum and not as fixed opposites” (p. 17). It is this social world as a “constantly evolving nexus” that I see demonstrated in TWPA work, moving across relative stability and instability of both an individual and a site (p. xi).

Esther’s epigraph to this section pointed out that she felt a “two-way flow” of expertise and knowledge between herself and her surroundings in a state of constant adjustment. Practice theory helps us understand this aspect of what Esther also described as a “tangled mess of things.” What is evident in the descriptions of the multiple potential layers of meaning, of which there is only ever a partial and tentative grasp, is that these fit with theorizations of the relationships between an individual and various social structures. Practice theorists point out that by looking at various practices in a kind of level playing field rather than through hierarchies of authority or local authenticity, we can see the ways in which an individual and a structure (or organization or institution) are co-constitutive; are in various ways responding to and participating in this ongoing flow of practices. This is a powerful way to step outside a binary of local/global and find a place for a mobile scholar, especially if they are trying to act in the interest of their commitments. To do so, they must be able to trace how those commitments transform in new practices in new places—these are the kinds of questions that move our discussion forward. Mobility scholars can help us understand such transformations and the ways in which participants navigate a middle ground between an infinitely mobile world and the particular local tasks they must accomplish.

Relative mobility, relative stability

Cresswell (2002) articulates a mobilities framework that is essential in seeing how participants locate their roles in places that “are never complete, finished or bounded but are always becoming - in process,” (p. 20); being made by “reiterative social practice” (p. 25). Place, in this sense, affects and is affected by this social practice in a co-constitutive, multi-directional flow (p. 26). One central aspect of WPA work as it sits at intersections or entanglements of discourses, disciplines, departments, etc. is how to trace and make sense of how all these some ways distinct and some ways connected forms of knowledge interact. Fenwick and Farrell (2012) describe knowledge mobilization as often “portrayed as a linear and rational matter of designing more-targeted and appealing dissemination, but it is entangled in social processes and contradictory influences” (p. 2). Contradictory influences here resonate with Alison’s image of the trojan horse and her description of transnationality’s paradoxical nature. Fenwick and Farrell explain the transformations inherent in the very processes of mobilization that resist the linear, rational, or more static conceptualizations of mobility:

What is implied by references to knowledge mobilization is that the boundaries of different knowledges are distinct and that they can move about across different domains to (re)organize thought, space and practices. However, knowledge that moves is itself embedded in material practice. Knowledge is inscribed within objects such as texts, tools, technologies and bodies. It emerges in new ways as these objects circulate among different activities, making/ dissolving connections with one another, making/dissolving their own boundaries, and mutating as they themselves are mediated in local practices. p. 3

Fenwick and Farrell bring out the ongoing making/dissolving of connections and boundaries that occurs through knowledge mobilization. In this sense, knowledge mobility is what WPAs encounter in the day-to-day work of understanding and articulating to so many different audiences, not simply because there are different static

disciplines, but because that actual work of communicating to different audiences requires an adaptability to much more particular and entangled factors like personality, epistemology, role, physical location, other people listening, etc. These different elements are constantly making/dissolving relevance to a particular situation, which is where they become “mediated in local practices.” This concept of local practices, also, should not be construed as meaning an identity marker tied to a uniquely geographic or territorial place, i.e. American. Deploying a term like “local” should mean local to a more particular set of conditions like an actual meeting with actual people and a specific purpose, adding a *who, where, when, and why*—hence the focus on practices as part of the construction of place rather than an *a priori* identity for whatever assumed scale the term local is meant to characterize. Location grows beyond space/place and begins to include, for example, time: the *spatiotemporal* location.

Yet, there is a kind of need to conceptually bound that mobility if participants are going to act, to perform local practices in actual spaces, because the entangled infinite could easily lead to inaction (as we will later explore a bit more). Adey (2006) frames his discussion on mobility through the dialectic with moorings as a way to describe his view of mobility as an “ontological absolute” (p. 76) and the norm, rather than as defined in contrasted relation to stability of immobile places—like where we live or spend time as the norm from which mobilized concepts and meaning depart. He confronts a bind in his ontological position that everything is mobile when met with an alternate viewpoint shared at a conference that argues aspects of an airport are in another perspective stable: wiring, concrete, policies, relationships, etc. This conflict raises the risk for mobility to become “everything,” and, in failing to examine differences and relations between

mobility and immobility, can lead to “mobilising the world into a transient, yet featureless, homogeneity” (p. 91). Such an approach is an argument for more nuance in conceptualizing mobility.

Adey asserts his view of mobility as he describes developments shifting away from place as an inert container related to location towards seeing it as unbounded in its networks of local and global elements. He focuses on the airport as a concept that, while seemingly static in its location, is mobile. He argues that “Airports may not actually move very much in terms of their location in space...However, if we imagine airports in the context of a human body, just as the cells of the skin continually reproduce and are replaced; the airport too is continually moving and transforming” (81). Taken as a time-lapse photo, an airport over time begins to show peoples’ movements blurred into paths, and small changes like new shops, flooring, paintings would shift the perception of the airport from a static background on which activity takes place into “an active and mobile participant in airport life” (82). Perceiving mobility or immobility is relative, the very nature of that experience and perception of movement is flexible—“Mobility, like power, is a relational thing” (83). Through his many examples of the relative mobility of an aircraft versus a train, or the need to see the airport as a node of stability materially fixed enough to walk through or a tarmac as solid enough to land on, Adey reaches his larger point that there is relative stability and relative mobility always in motion together. He argues that “Space is never still, it can never just be...And yet, while things are always on the move, they can appear in a fixed and stable manner because mobilities are all different, and we relate to them in different ways” (90). This concept of relational mobility approaches the kind of recognition of the nuances coming from participants and

how they rely on temporary, relative binaries to illustrate their sensemaking and adjustment.

I came across a term in my research called “container thinking,” which describes a methodological bias that assumes a particular territorial container can structure one’s research (Amelina and Faist, 2012). Amelina and Faist intend to counter this assumption with their form of methodological transnationalism that decenters concepts of space, the social, and mobility. Nedra Reynolds uses the phrase “binaries and boxes” as she describes limitations on our perspectives; she uses them as abstract representations of either/or depictions and also of categorizing or fitting concepts into (presumably restrictive) containers (boxes). Insert a favorite stereotype here as an example: Americans are loud; men are like x and women are like y , etc. As I pondered what the phrase “container thinking” might offer to transnational writing program administration approaches, I felt uncomfortable with the idea that container thinking, and thus containers and binaries, were only limitations on our seeing. In a certain sense, yes, containers present limitations, and those limitations manifest throughout the interviews and act as a real source of tension and conflict. But, in another sense, participants use binaries and containers *all the time* to express themselves. Seeing them as in process, seeing containment as a practice that contributes to a productive understanding and performance of TWPA work, allows us to resist a false choice of accepting or rejecting all categories, and to see the opportunities for shifting the terms of a discussion, shifting the names of categories, or defining them as contingent and emergent. Relative mobility opens up the possibility for such an approach.

Containers and often their juxtapositions as binaries often *enabled* the sensemaking participants were striving to articulate in their discursive work. Participants reflected on American family structures, on communicative norms among Americans versus locals on the phone or in email, on crossing the streets in different places, on teaching in the U.S. versus abroad, on programs with or without Composition courses, on orientations to language, on languages spoken by students, on different secondary education systems—in all of these cases there were binaries, and limited constructions of each category. As a listener, I felt myself responding to these constructions critically in ways that would complicate their solidity, but the point was not about describing the real truth of a national perspective; it was, in the case of Ellis, about describing the terms by which she felt her own perspective “shifting.” We were talking, we couldn’t take the whole day to unpack whether the term “American” could really be used effectively given such broad diversity of family composition, and that wasn’t even the point.

These interviews were not critiques of containers as much as performances of transnational forms of containment and continuations of the ongoing discursive sensemaking work that depends on relative mobility. As I’ve described before, participants question the capacity and stability of different concepts, but they do not reject them; they use containers but with restraint. Adey (2006) relied on the dialectic from Urry (2003) on mobilities/moorings, which Adey summarized as “Anything mobile, he asserts, must need systems of immobility in order to work” (p. 86). Participants were—to various degrees or sometimes not at all—performing moorings of meaning in their resistance to settle on one particular determiner, and their struggle to articulate was often a depiction of the entanglement and emergence of relative mobility. To enact

transnational forms of meaning- and sense-making is to take the nation as one of many spatial scales that can act as an analytical entry-point to other configurations of meaning. This form of containment is contextualized and somewhat like seeking the right size container for a given situation—it can be progressive, empowering, and flexible. But that nation-sized container is still there, and it isn't necessarily taboo to use it; it is simply not useful to let it take over and therefore try to cram too much into it and thereby treat it as anything other than contingent. This is also what makes its value relative; it depends on the situation. This is a more granular sense of mobility drawn from the knowledge of participants doing this work.

Is there such a thing as a transnational, or relative, container, then? There is a potential material metaphor that can be drawn to help explain transnationality as mobility and containment. Thinking about unpacking, of the baggage we bring with us (both metaphorical and material), and in my experience of working on this project as a mobile exile in the midst of a global pandemic and thus physically packing and carrying my things around—at an airport gate, I saw people traveling with expandable and collapsible luggage. I saw people traveling with packing cubes for their clothes and wheels on their bags. I saw other people with hard-shell suitcases, briefcases, boxes, backpacks that did not have these potential adjustments—I was among them. In my need to be mobile, I needed portable containers that can expand and collapse; thinking of different geographies and climates, I needed items I could layer for different conditions; thinking of the need to exercise and also potentially interview for jobs, I needed clothes that could work across contexts. Each of these actual items, as they approach further flexibility and multiplicity became more effectively *transnational* and thus more useful to me. These

were still containers—traveling without them would be radical and hardly productive—but they were each, in their own way, mobile, too.

Ellis, in her interview, describes her work on an academic integrity committee and how her usual approach to plagiarism changed from learning more about the local conditions, family dynamics, academic pressures by becoming less strict and more flexible. So, her commitment to academic integrity didn't really change (container) but her approach to enacting that commitment expanded (mobility). Relative mobility, or what I call *container mobility*, is one way of describing the relative mobility I see participants *performing* in our discussions and in the work they are articulating, and this I see as affording better transnational success and enacting a symbiosis of supposed opposites. Ellis used limited descriptions of American culture to think through reasons to adapt the plagiarism commitment she brought with her: "In the US we think nuclear families, right? We think independence, you know, this child is of age they are now an adult, therefore they can make their own decisions." In this sense, we can describe plagiarism, or academic integrity as a container, i.e. as a fixed or reified entity. Ellis recognizes that the terms of her commitment she carried with that container needed to be adapted to the local conditions where she has arrived. By evoking a productive juxtaposition of the salient differences between her two locations—not necessarily a complete analysis of all the potential complexities and limitations of such a juxtaposition in an abstract sense but taking what she needs—she could find ways to adjust. She did not reject the very notion of academic integrity (lose the container), nor did she rigidly resist any change in what she packed. Because she had an expandable, collapsible

container, she could absorb the necessary changes without losing the baggage or the past knowledge that it carried.

Relative mobility and relative stability help us conceptually thread a needle that allows for productive navigation of particular contexts. Participants recognize the entanglements that destabilize assumptions or reifications of aspects informing their work, and they partly resist such reifications by articulating their contexts as emerging and layered, their knowledge of it as partial. Practice theory also helps us locate these “outsider” WPAs in the embedded ways that our participants felt, and rather than being dragged along in the flow of becoming, we should see the ways in which an individual and various structures are co-constitutive. The WPAs can mobilize their knowledge to help shift boundaries and trace commitments as they evolve as part of that ongoing flow of institutional becoming and constant re-making of place. Next, by seeing relative mobility as scaling practices, scholars can find other ways to ask new questions about transnational work.

Scaling practices, new questions

“I have done reflective work and tried to make sense of my experiences and I think that has been an ongoing process...where do I begin and where do I cut it off? Where do I draw the boundaries?” —Esther

It is useful to understand the meaningful unpacking demonstrated in the sensemaking work of these interviews by returning to what mobilities scholar Blommaert (2007) describes as “scales.” Along with thinking through the horizontal/geographic trajectories evoked as participants locate themselves and their experiences across different places (e.g. moving from the U.S. to their new countries; their apartments to the campus), Blommaert invites us to think about how “social events and processes move and

develop on a continuum of layered scales, with the strictly local (micro) and the global (macro) as extremes, and with several intermediary scales (e.g., the level of the State) in between” (p. 1). When participants guide us through narration and explication of their experiences, they consider different possibilities and perspectives; they also move between different ways to parse meaning along potential lines of gender, nationality, professional role, academic discipline, institutional hierarchies, language practices, habits, etc. These terms can be described and deployed as scales. Blommaert might describe these moves as “the *jump from one scale to another*: from the individual to the collective, the temporally situated to the trans-temporal, the unique to the common, the token to the type, the specific to the general” (p. 4). Jumping between scales is also “indexical,” in that the metaphors and images in the statements point to norms, traditions, genres, expectations (p. 5). The horizontal trajectories through time and space then get a vertical component thinking of how power is indexed, and meanings are defined and mobilized *across* scales by the sensemaking and unpacking of these narratives.

Similar to how a concept like indexes helps us describe the ways various levels or terms interact, Canagarajah and De Costa (2016) summarize scalar analysis for social sciences as offering “productive conceptual tools” for the “possibility of going beyond the dominance of structuralist paradigms” as “the local can renegotiate the global, as both scales interpenetrate each other in subtle and fluid ways” (p. 2). Looking at the nature of scales and how they have been popularized as nested dolls or ladders should give way to new rhizomatic relationships “where the influences are nonlinear, unpredictable, layered, and multidirectional” (p. 3). This helps us unpack the ways in which Billie navigates her work digitally, how Max describes her caution and wonders whether linear knowledge

accumulation is really what helps her move forward, how Alison describes the paradoxical nature of reality versus expectation in her pedagogical commitments, the tension Esther illuminates in arguing for better representations for incoming student narratives, or the everyday invisible work described by Ellis' campus interactions as she frames her rhetorical choices with various people.

Canagarajah and De Costa also point to the possible use of scalar analysis not merely as a spatio-analytical tool, but as a process; a shift from noun to verb (p. 4). They argue that it is perhaps not the scales themselves that are of interest, but “scaling practices;” understanding how institutions and people scale their relationships, and opening up discussions of “rescaling, scale jumping, and scale differentiation” (p. 4). These are important new terms that shift a conversation from “yes/no” to “how?” or “in what ways?” When looking at scaling as a process, not a product, we can “be sensitive to how scales are renegotiated, co-constructed, and taken up in diverse competing social groups and institutions” (p. 4). *Scaling* helps us understand the interviews of this study not as a guide for how to properly name and calibrate various scales of meaning or identity, but as a description and depiction of what is happening in doing the work—in short, we can see scaling as part of the practice of TWPA work. Informants are both engaging in scaling as they articulate their work, and the thing they are articulating is often the way in which their sensemaking is a form of scaling practices/scaling as process. Scaling helps us understand that the containers evoked, traversed, and or jumped may have a horizontal as well as vertical component; that they serve to demonstrate the ongoing processes by which participants index realities. But, most importantly they remain true to the idea that, *yes*, this work is tangled, and you cannot *untangle* it

permanently, but it is possible to tentatively trace particular patterns. One cannot simply separate, isolate, and inspect a particular element, remove it from its mobile context, and then claim its essential, universal meaning, *but* there are ways in which one must be able to parse the flow. This is an element of scaling put into practice, that it must recognize partial and provisional understanding as inherent to knowledge.

Thus, scaling is one essential way to view the often-invisible labor that is especially salient to transnational work. Throughout our discussions, when participants were mentioning what is hard to articulate, where the limits of their language hindered their communication of certain concepts, it often came as they wanted to put words to these complex interactions and their embeddedness within these emerging contexts²⁵. These interviews *do* jump across scales, but they also remind us that the implied boundaries demarcating these spatialized containers of meaning are constantly in process—our task is not to isolate or abstract them, nor can we regard them as useless. It should be pointed out that these understandings are not absolute. Billie, for example, more than the other participants used un-problematized binaries (e.g. “Americans” versus “internationals”) much more often in her descriptions yet argued for the limits of negative stereotypes against local ethnic groups. There is a spectrum. What is also abundantly clear, though, is that material boundaries on time and space (and thus differences) do exist for all participants: recall this as Max’s mantra: “differences exist.” There is a tension here between the analytically infinite and indefinite on the one hand, and the

²⁵ Raymond Williams (1977) discusses the difficulties in articulating practical consciousness and the limitations of the language of fixed forms: “If ‘reality’ and ‘speaking about reality’ (the ‘material social process’ and ‘language’) are taken as categorically distinct, concepts such as ‘reflection’ and ‘mediation’ are inevitable. ...The problem is different, from the beginning, if we see language and signification as indissoluble elements of the material social process itself, involved all the time both in production and reproduction” (p. 99).

materially contained/bounded requirement to participate and maintain one's role in the institution in the service of writing support for/with actual people.

Brandt and Clinton (2002) base their critique of social practice theorizations of literacy as formed in response to autonomous and decontextualized views of literacy that preceded them, which have under-theorized and forced an incomplete binary between local and global actors. Brandt and Clinton build their critique on Latour's claim that by incorporating things into conceptions of social interaction, scholars can close the gaps between "macro and micro, agency and social structure, the local and the global" (p. 346). In this conceptualization, the social is all made of local interactions, however, "local events can have globalizing tendencies and globalizing effects" (p. 347). Their critique then is to dial back an over-correction that went all-in on the local at the expense of important globalizing connections. By making this shift, they can examine the ever-important local literacies, they can also "ask what is localizing and what is globalizing in what is going on," because, "what appears to be a local event also can be understood as a far-flung tendril in a much more elaborate vine" (p. 347). I see a similar move emerging from the interviews. By allowing me to ask what is localizing and what is globalizing, our conversations can find new terms, new questions, and new concepts. Relieved of the burden of marking what might be local versus global, or demarcating along lines of discipline, language, epistemology, we can instead begin to ask about the ways in which a particular event or individual might be understood through the practices and activities happening in that space, which do not need singular, nor static, attributes. What this enables is stepping aside the over-arching dynamic of whether these mobile WPAs are local enough, or knowledgeable enough, to make their claims and perform their roles.

Instead, they can analyze practices as having *potential* attributes of locals themselves, in some ways, and also embedded in the ongoing collaborative mobilization of their work.

Participants show us the ongoing work of remaining always-flexible, of questioning assumptions, of the paradoxes of the local, of the power disconnects and the work it takes to make sense of them, of forms of resistance, of opportunities to make new knowledge despite the limitations on what one can truly know or the scope of one's influence. Through these interviews, we—participants and I—aimed to make visible the invisible work of writing program administration, and what we made visible in this international context is a world that is definitely transnational—both local *and* global—and in that way definitely tangled. Participants show us a perspective that moves beyond the idea that they are foreign actors placed in a uniformly foreign context, that is uniformly local to local actors. Through paradoxes, and more complex sets of emerging layers, they describe a place in which in some ways they are more local, let's say to an American-style curriculum, than their local students, or that they, as outsiders, push more a more localized agenda in course materials than some of their more local colleagues.

These newly drawn relations are not simply binaries engaging in conflict, they are more complex interactions of multiple relatively oriented factors influencing and co-constructing a shared context all the time. This dance between theoretically infinite and materially contained—this entanglement—is at the heart of the transnational understanding from the ever-scaling observer-participant in the ever-mangling work of a mobile WPA. A transnational orientation, as described by participants, is restlessly mobile in a certain sense. But in that mobility, as we have learned from Adey, there is also relative and necessary stability in concepts and their construction in order to actually

accomplish tasks. Stability is found in the material sense of actual people, deadlines, job titles, projects, commitments, policies, budgets, meetings around which the sensemaking does its own work from the limitations of its participant observers. So, part of *scaling* means invoking various constructs and thereby contributing to their ongoing sedimentation through rearticulation²⁶; one cannot simply say since all concepts are mobile, which would mean this work requires existing in a formless, directionless chaos. Giddens' structuration helps explain how the mobile world is not absent all structures; recognizing mobility means relating to and articulating structures differently.

Canagarajah and De Costa as well as Brandt and Clinton propose a turn toward this kind of balance demonstrated in the interviews of participants. Coming from a place that assumes mutability in all of the terms and structures, even supposedly stable ones, allows for the richness of relative mobility to be deployed absent the reifying demands for authenticity or locality. From this position, a critique about whether one knows enough shifts to one's ability to trace the flow of these relationships; to see the paradoxes, to map the terrain based on scales, to see these terms, or scales, as in process, and to recognize the ways in which each individual is part of that ongoing flow of becoming. Sedentarist reifications of place would preclude such granular analysis. Drilling down even further, this next section will see these discursive moves from participants as a specific scaling practice that is an integral and often invisible part of their work as TWPAs.

Discursive Work and Transnational Practice

²⁶ From Pennycook (2010): "We may at times have to choose between paths, but when we ask how the paths got there, we only need to look at iterative human activity: we do them in the doing" (p. 138).

“Saying that there's a right and a wrong is a movement away from the flexibility I'm using every day” –Max

From participant interviews to theorizations of entangled interactions between material and discursive elements and to the field of practice, I want to further describe the particular practice of scaling as a form of discursive work that is described and performed simultaneously by participants in the quoted interview excerpts above. Fenwick (2004) describes discursive work as relative to a complex, co-constituted, relational, communicative partnership among stakeholders with “myriad micro-disconnections and resistances among the logics of different discourses at work” (p. 172). Her study offers a discourse analysis of a multi-stakeholder University partnership negotiation and makes visible discursive work by administrators as they interact. Discursive work in her view is work that involves “translating, rearticulating and spanning boundaries among discursive communities” (173). Fenwick finds that administrators do effective discursive work when they are able to promote and model “critical attunement to language” as their discourses respond to and recognize the enmeshed ways they are connected across difference. But, doing that work does not come easy in practice:

Where different communities must come together as in a partnership, each aligned with distinctive discourses, the communicative work is hard work, and it is never-ending. This case indicates that clear lines of conflict are difficult to discern and conflict ‘management’ technologies somewhat too blunt to deploy amid such complexity. Discursive communities even when apparently distinct actually overlap, mirroring and co-producing one another, and even joining at certain points to produce hybrids. While between them are varying troubled nodes or intersections, these are dynamic, not fixed, roving according to circulations of power and shifting identities. At times these appear to create clear bifurcations between communities, but when we look closer we see masses of small connections and local alliances between the communities as well. And internal to each community, tensions within their discursive movements are always circulating despite our wishes to contain them as a recognizable identity, as when the Seaview principal became utterly exasperated at the lack of unity among ULC parents. Sometimes these tensions within gather sufficient intensity to be

discernible as a 'rift' or resistant discourse, which may then be contained within the boundaries of one community or spin out to form a new, more distinct discursive system. (p. 185)

Fenwick concludes by arguing that administrators as discursive workers need to be "continually self-reflexive," especially in contexts of power asymmetry and different sociocultural or discursive traditions, to their own implication in communication as it unfolds at the micro and macro levels (p. 186). Such discursive considerations illuminate the value of self-reflexivity, attention to language, and the emergent nature of the work of a TWPA and help us to frame the questions of how such work plays out in practice by our participants and the degree to which they take it up in the everyday performance of their roles.

I see this discursive work in some of the descriptions that participants express as part of their everyday experience.

Ellis: Somebody stops me on the sidewalk between here and wherever walking across campus and they're like "oh, you're the person doing the writing center and I teach this course" oh, and then it's sort of like I have to sit there and go, oh, what do I know about this department **and** what do I know about writing in it **and** how do I communicate some of those things to this particular person who is coming from this mindset and so yeah I mean I do think it's [calculations about place/context] happening a lot and I think it's happening very quickly and even though it is conscious, I don't know that it is something that's easy to articulate.

Here Ellis jumps scales from department to writing to a particular person and their mindset. This is given as an example of a common, unpredictable experience as part of the day-to-day life in her role. She articulates what is more or less an immediate set of questions and hard-to-articulate considerations that rely on parsing particular concepts. The scaling that they are practicing is a starting point, a scaffold onto which they can then ask more pertinent questions:

Max: I can figure out why somebody is thinking about, say, nondirective tutoring differently than I'm thinking about nondirective tutoring. That's not just an issue of semantics, which is important, but it's also an issue of how did they arrive at this conclusion? What experiences informed that logic? 'Cause if I can figure out what those experiences are and what those materials are, then it gives me a way better place to look at what the differences are from.

What Max needs then is to ask about that individual's trajectory through a global set of terms—which means that there is recognition of scaling and structuration here working as she understands that she cannot simply give her terms for discussion and assume they will be understood. The real currency in such a discussion are the routes an individual has taken to, the experiences that have informed, their logic. These are some of the terms of TWPA, discursive, work.

In practice, participants did not reject the idea of a national or other spatial scale, but they also did not give geographic scales any preferential place in their assessments. Yes, sometimes a particular scale might be more relevant, and other times less. Sometimes a particular conflict or challenge can be more about gender or age and less about nationality, but even then, all participants hedged frequently, maddeningly even, and pointed out that in the end they rarely feel comfortable isolating particular aspects. So, making sense of a mangled and tangled reality felt more like reverse engineering a recipe or distilling a bit of atmosphere. We came up with a list of possible ingredients, or elements, and then we talked through potential quantities and compositions that might be present. According to participants, these were external manifestations of often internal and semi-conscious processes, and these externalizations are shaped by particulars of time, place, language, and actors. What emerges across these interviews are products of rich sensemaking processes; what emerges is a depiction and instantiation of the work: it

is ongoing, and it is inevitably partial, and it is discursive in both an internal and external sense.

Zenger (2018) called for nuance in our depictions of transnationalism, because she found depictions lacking; both in explaining her experiences doing transnational work and helping to strategize for future actions. My study found that nuance in the ideas that the mobile-scholar-seen-as-an-outsider can subvert local expectations based on monolingual language ideologies (trojan horse), or that a mobile scholar in an international American-based institution can in some ways be more local to the institutional structures while also being foreign to the social structure, and this manifests in different ways when speaking with students, colleagues, or staff. We saw that while being in a different place can be the exigence for adaptation, it does not mean that one's particular rhetorical choices are then shaped by a specifically local factor, which is to say that a person does not become more demonstrably local in their work, they might not sound less American, or less like themselves. As Ellis described, "it was the location that forced me to think through the rearticulation, but the audience that I was thinking about didn't necessarily have to do with location...the way I react doesn't have to do with my particular location here." Local is not a blunt and bounded object, it is tangled in with every other facet of the work. In this sense, nuance allows a shift from seeing containers only as limitation to seeing them as a heuristic.

By taking this tour through theory, the descriptions and depictions of events by mobile scholar participants demonstrate the discursive work of scaling practices to understand and act in tangled transnational contexts. This is an everyday, ongoing aspect of the work being done by WPAs—one could easily argue not only internationally

mobile WPAs do such work. Transnational contexts, in this light, are an exigence for developing new knowledge of the work. Taking up a transnational lens allows us to parse the aspects that may or may not transfer. Taking it one step further, a transnational approach can move beyond a yes/no list of what's relevant and not to allow for discussions of how or why certain aspects might mobilize across certain contexts. A concept like language ideology, plagiarism, accessibility, process-theory or even attributes like gender or nationality can be traced and then unpacked to find paradoxes, translations, scale jumps, recursive co-constructions, or further reconfigurations yet to be articulated. In the next section, I want to show how these understandings are not only analytically instructive, but how they can help inform strategies and actions by WPAs, especially mobile WPAs in transnational contexts.

Mobilizing Transnational Nuance

To see potential actions in a scenario, I want to focus on some aspects of Max's interviews. First, recall how Max traveled to her previous writing center in the U.S. and took some knowledge from her American writing center colleagues in terms of how to talk about writing across different stakeholders and complemented that with local knowledge from her current supervisor about communicating with particular people in her new location. That is transnational strategy; that is nuance in action: taking what is needed from various places, never assuming one-size-fits-all for the source of knowledge. Max seemed still tied to the idea that as a mobile scholar there was much more knowledge for her to acquire—of the local language, institutional structures, writing studies scholarship, social norms, etc.—before she could be confident in making assertions in meetings or in staff trainings. I resist that idea. While I agree that acquiring

more local knowledge will help in supporting successful interactions, I also think that her transnational consideration taking from diverse contexts and applying knowledge where it is most useful is a strong foundation for making claims. Claims grounded by the theorizations of interdependent and relative mobility in the foundation of concepts and positions side-steps part of the need to wait years, let's say, to develop local expertise. The ways claims are mobilized in particular places for particular people will shape their effects, but the transnational processes of distillation she uses to inform her actions are sound. To not assert transnationally oriented arguments or descriptions means that potentially limited structures, received or not, will continue their processes of reification.

Max describes her outsider status in a meeting of a national organization of writing support professionals among whom she is the only foreigner. As an American, she feels like a particularly fraught kind of outsider given that as a group they are “interested in the fact that I have American writing center experience, but there's also been some rumblings in the last year over this idea of: why are we treating American writing center practice as best practice when we're not American?” Max faces a situation where she feels new to her institution, new to her nation, new to the local language (though quite competent), and also grapples with the fact that her identity as an American may inform various perceptions of her voicing of her opinions given the conflicted relationship members of the committee have with the influence of American writing center practices. Another thread in this event are the local power dynamics, here is her description of the event and its outcome:

M: There was a meeting I attended I think it was in March maybe February, the meeting I attended early in the year where one member's organization had been working on creating a standardized feedback form for the students—so this (project) was before I joined the organization. Someone had the idea the all of the

writing centers should use the same feedback form for their students so we could compare data between institutions. She's been working on this for a very long time it was apparently a very frustrating and difficult process because every time she presented something to the larger group everybody was saying "no, I don't like that," and fighting about how it should be done and things like that, but she spent a very long time on it and she thought it was done. She was presenting the final product and this other member, um, the very well respected one in the field, she just was not happy with how it was and finally she said, "well my University is not going to use this because I don't like it." From what I understand she was part of the team to work on that and she was also one of the people who originally said, hey, let's do this. So, the fact that all of that work then turned into her saying "I don't like it so I'm not going to use it..." And I was a little uncomfortable sharing my opinions about this as a relatively new member and as a non-(local) person as I thought, okay, there's obviously something happening that I'm not aware of because I'm new here, um, but I also do have opinions about what's happening so where is the balance between sort of letting those things happen and just observing them.

J: So, what did you do?

M: I did end up saying what I thought about it and then I just kind of let it be. It was taken down in the minutes along with everybody else's thoughts. Yeah, I don't think it influenced the outcome so...

Max here, as she is participating in this event, she is also processing huge amounts of information and taking on substantial discursive work in all she considers as she forms her perceptions and communications. She clearly feels disempowered as an outsider and also, along with others in the group, is in the position of responding to an exercise of power from an individual with more professional cachet.

Max's dilemma is in her own feeling of complicity, or perhaps passivity, and whether she is just letting things happen and observing them. She also articulates a similar caution in other interactions with writers, stating: "I don't want to accidentally impose an incorrect perspective or an unwelcome perspective on the way that I'm working with them and their writing," and colleagues: "I'm still discovering new layers so that gives me the sense that I'm still very much learning and I don't know if that

feeling will ever go away so this idea of when is expertise enough, I'm not sure." Her embrace of the more tentative, complex realities of the work as part of a reflective practice resonates with her embrace of the non-directive tutoring approach in which she was trained, forms an ethos of caution that is *on the one hand* wise given the realities of her outsider status and the ways in which she wants to be a member of the academic community. *On the other hand*, she has opinions and commitments that she also feels might need to be shared more directly. The outcomes of these various choices, like all aspects of this work, are hard to predict or pin down. Increasing an awareness and articulation of these complexities as the preceding chapters have done does not necessarily mean that the outcome of such nuanced theorizations will lead to new actions. While it is not within the purview of this project to express when to act, speak, or stay silent in meetings; I would hope that this work could also address how to mobilize nuance and leverage transnational critique in ways that could help support WPAs doing similar work.

While transnationality can frame an abundance of cautions and reflection, it can also be leveraged to speak back to power. In these situations, Max might be able to play the role of complicating the conversations by introducing *and not or*, by arguing for the plurality and contingency of these terms. What often happens is that these concerns are responses to terms set by others. When I asked Max whether anyone ever asked her opinion in meetings, she responded that:

They do sometimes but a lot of times the questions that they are asking are so broad that to give them a good answer I have to narrow it down and by narrowing it down I'm already curating my response to their context.

Finding ways to attach another side of the coin or complicating the ways in which a certain perspective or approach is located and later reified could be very valuable. Being in the position to respond to an assertion, or to meet a particular need, as Max described is an act of curating. Our earlier theorizations might also call it scaling, but as Max is describing it here it is seen, in a sense, as coming to the context. The response to that request could be a space in which to resist reifications and find power in nuance.

If someone in Max's meeting voices opposition to "the American model" and its influence, Max doesn't need to argue the point of whether its influence is undue, but she can share more complex and granular depictions of the "American model." She can provide nuance by saying which aspects she has seen as similar or different in an attempt to make the conversation productive in offering transnational understandings. She can also respond with questions as to how others are understanding the "American model" and call for unpacking of the term. By scale jumping, she can demonstrate the mobility of such a term. She is aware of such shifts in terms:

I think that sometimes people don't understand why a lot of American's couch their explanations in this sort of regional or state context that it's not when I say OK my experiences in Michigan were... I'm not saying that because I'm really proud that in Michigan or anything I mean I sure it's a good state that's fine. But it's also to acknowledge the fact that I am talking about Midwestern context in the state of Michigan and that it could be different in Ohio and it probably is in places. And I think that when I say that to people that they don't always connect that that's why I am saying that. That they think it's still generally applicable. But it's not.

The next step in mobilizing a transnational approach would be to articulate that such broad conceptions of the term "American" are not generally applicable. She does not need to keep this to herself, and she can mobilize this knowledge to effective ends in

many ways. To shift the chosen terms is a power move that might be necessary, but the power is in opening new avenues of discussion.

I think the more that WPAs can assert the move of articulating entanglement and nuance, the more they can feel confident in acting out their commitments. I also think that asserting tangled realities, unpredictable outcomes, and complex layers allows nuance to be a form of power that ultimately leads to better policies and practices as people can grapple more meaningfully with the realities they face as both local and globally connected and dispersed. Using entanglement and mobility as a starting point leads to a discussion that looks at the kinds or terms of particular entangled things, tracing their mobilization across contexts, and understanding the practices that express it rather than assumptions or expectations.

So, when Max goes to a hypothetical meeting, let's say, with other writing professionals who are all local and she is the only outsider, and they describe their feelings about the efficacy of the "American" approach, she knows that this term is itself diverse and responsive to mobilizations of its opposite of "non-American," and she can take steps to articulate her own position beyond merely accepting or defending the terms as she believes they are being deployed. This scaling practice makes space for questions about how others have arrived at these terms, because a conversation couched in whether an approach is American or not will be limited in its productivity in comparison with unearthing new potential terms by which to engage in the question of how best to develop their approach. Being a transnationally informed scholar, Max has at the ready her own views on whether they are aptly describing their approach, whether they are applying its tenets in a sound way for the local context, whether these arguments are veering towards

reductive nationalist constructions or if their juxtapositions can find other transnational threads by which to make nuanced comparisons. Scaling would enable her to ask the kinds of questions that might unearth limitations in a description, which is a valuable tool especially to an outsider. These potential moves are supported by her own process of making knowledge and could propel the conversation forward without as much need for complete expertise in *all* of the local and global concepts and without falling into a trap about whether one limited construction of a particular place is worth a kind of reductive tribalist discourse. This is the power of a transnational approach: by assuming partiality and complexity, or diversity and fluidity, the conversation becomes about nuance and intention at least as much as some other forms of expertise. To not speak up in favor of nuanced trans-oriented depictions is in some ways to cede power to other constructions of place.

Mobilizing transnational sensemaking to address power—to address potentially overpowering sedentarist constructions of place, identity, or discourse that attempt to solidify regressive or restrictive binaries rather than use them to explore new relationships—really is crucial to WPA futures everywhere. As Jeanne Gunner (2012) argues, “those in WPA work are best served by open-minded, boundary-pushing, and actively resistant forms of scholarly inquiry” (p. 120). Boundaries can be pushed in terms of how they are constructed and mobilized through a mangled reality. Finding power begins in the parsing, in the nuanced way of learning what one context needs and what it does not, of recognizing scaling practices as ways to mobilize theories on entanglement, and on creating a space for a shift in terms that enable new questions about the

trajectories others have taken to their positions and the space for change enabled through collaborative, relative, reciprocal context co-creation.

Take-aways and future steps

I see TWPA work as tangled and by looking through the eyes of those doing the work, on the ground, every day, I can bring us closer to the nuanced and contingent world they navigate. This brings forth a number of implications. First, that though I am looking at intensely mobile contexts, the entanglements are universal *and* particular (this is *the* transnational view I take up). Second, that WPA is an exigence for scholarly, intellectual work—not just because it can be published, but because of the nature of the knowledge being made in order to do the work. Third, that WPAs, especially mobile WPAs, will experience the challenges of doing their work when considered, in various potential ways, as an outsider (discipline, department, ideology, pedagogy, etc.). But, moving beyond a binary of insider/outsider shows us a world in which each participant is, in their own ways, co-constructing institutional and, therefore, social space. This point is not to say that there are no more categories, hierarchies, or places, but that these concepts are potentially much more flexible and contingent than our senses or peers might let on. In taking up the role of co-constructor, there is room to speak.

To articulate this co-constitutive space means to challenge sedentarist constructions (of language, epistemology, identity, space) that resist mobile realities, that restrict meeting the needs of writers, that relegate and obfuscate the commitments of a WPA. One strategy this study has shown is to see oneself as a trojan horse; recognizing that those doing the hiring may rely on expectations of what an “American” set of commitments might be (and the authority of certain older constructs like being a “Native

Speaker” or prescriptivist grammarian or teacher-centered lecturer) only to then leverage that power to challenge those constructs and show more progressive commitments. Other ways might mean raising questions or counter-constructions that point out the instability of certain concepts in meetings, emails, and instruction. By painting a more complicated and contingent context one begins to also make the case for change; to claim a role in shaping those contexts, and articulating commitments for various stakeholders. One moves beyond simply responding to stated needs of those in the institution and begins shaping programming collaboratively, and, dare I say, leading. More voices from more contexts can and should be studied as more messy, layered narratives can help understand the tools used to do this work. A transnational perspective leaves a space for relatively stable constructs set against relentlessly mobile ones—without such relativity, navigation would be chaos. TWPA work foregrounds mobility, but WPA work as a larger scale is also mobile, only perhaps internationally mobile WPAs face a more intense form of that mobility.

The more we can articulate the ways in which everyday actions are informed by and located within such commitments, the more we can make such academic mobility and TWPA work understood in these terms along with other forms of difference, the better we can build a transnational discourse connecting this work across contexts. Here, in this study, are attempts at developing a language to connect these commitments with day to day perceptions, strategies, and experiences. Further tracings of policy mobility, language ideology, ethical commitments to concepts like privacy and accessibility, and the epistemological commitments inherent in a process-based approach to student writing and knowledge production will resonate strongly with assessments of the global

geographies of knowledge production as part of the global turn in composition. A transnational approach opens up these other terms of analysis and offers concepts like *and not or* to articulate indexing, scaling, distilling the trans-oriented realities in which all work is embedded.

Since a transnational critique begins with the limitations of the spatial nation-container as a foundation for analysis, what becomes visible are other terms by which to structure our perceptions and analyses—terms that traverse territorial boundaries. In the case of TWPA work, I have found the terms of ideological, epistemological, and ethical commitments brought by mobile scholar participants to their roles and how these interact with the commitments expressed by various people, policies, and institutional spaces to be the most interesting places in which to develop further terms and relationships. The ways Alison engaged with disagreement over course texts or pedagogies, Ellis's work mobilizing plagiarism and privacy practices and policies, or all participants working with various institutional faculty and aiming to shift towards process-based, student-centered approaches all demonstrate the role of such commitments. How these commitments are mobilized across contexts and the processes by which participants take on the labor of translating, re-interpreting, reflecting, and communicating them allows for structuring a strong transnational analysis that examines not what gets transported but what it gets translated/transformed into and tracing why and how.

While certainly salient, factors like age, race, religion, gender, language, personality, and discipline do not seem to be the enduring organizing factors in how participants are navigating their sensemaking when taken as a whole—perhaps because to the individual these aspects are not as transformed in the eyes of participants in this

limited study. When a particular goal or task resulted in some form of conflict or confusion for participants, and thus an exigence for sensemaking, it was often a barrier of sorts along ideological lines at its “root,” let’s say, being expressed through, or clothed in, other forms of difference—for example the disagreements about selections in the student textbook from Alison or the resistance to the “American” approach in Max’s meetings. Of course, a particular context would adjust the salience of any of these features—as in a different room, different participants in a conversation, different campuses or countries—but what is really enduring and defining is how these participants are able to make sense of and navigate their work as ideological, epistemological, and ethical terrain. My study demonstrates the efficacy of resisting moves to isolate and stabilize what are entangling and emerging phenomena, but it does not reject moves that might focus on particulars or containers. I have a few thoughts on the places to continue pushing this area of study further.

Power

One intention I had was to take up the call by Dingo, Reidner, and Wingard (2013) to connect with power structures, but almost none of the interviews did this. Perhaps this is owing to the realities of interviewing on campus in offices for some, perhaps this is due to currently being employed in a role and not wanting to be overly critical and jeopardizing one’s position. Some places where more criticism has emerged for actions taken against writing program survival have been left out specifically for reasons of privacy. More than one participant had experienced choices from above them in the institutional power structure that seriously hindered and diminished the role of writing support in the institutions they served. What I take from this aspect of the

interviews is that part of the struggle in articulating and sensemaking that is inherent to this work also makes it harder to recognize and resist power moves that act as barriers. Finding ways to connect these dizzyingly complex roles with larger power structures and their ideological, epistemological, ontological facets was partly done with this study. But, articulating, circulating actual strategies for co-constructing better forms of resistance should be taken up by writing studies scholars.

American-style or local style

One other more global take-away from the data is a very clear divide between how American-style University curricula treat writing and how more locally-styled curricula treat writing; it may be one of the salient differences establishing one of the more enduring binaries of this research. Max and I have done our TWPA work at institutions that do not have an American-informed curriculum and as a result, there is not really a disciplinary/administrative space that takes writing seriously. Taking writing as an actual discipline in terms of offering professorships for instructors and scholars or offering an interdisciplinary first year composition course for students does not guarantee better writers or better teachers *per se*. But, the descriptions of the work from the other participants, the ways arguments could be made, and the official levers from which to make changes were very different. This is a valuable area of research that can, and should, investigate the ways these disciplinary and administrative structures can be adapted to new places in connection with ideological, pedagogical traditions that must exist in local terms through philosophies of education, psychology, sociology, etc. Tracing power as it moves across these institutions and their relationships, particular an instance like Soka University that has a home institution in Japan and a branch campus in

the U.S.—a reversal of the usual West to East relationship—will be a great way to see how different roots can structure institutions.

To build on these concepts, I suggest we continue to find new ways to represent the rich sensemaking work being done in institutional spaces in service to the very mobile concept of writing as it threads its way through contexts around the world. Continuing with the grounded epistemology of institutional ethnography through interviews with WPAs of all backgrounds is efficacious because as this study makes clear, all contexts are mobile in their own ways. The goal of such ethnographic collaborations would unearth new terms and new voices—and there is a need for those voices to speak back to what are powerful forces working in diffuse but effective ways to assert ideologies that reduce the richness and material effectiveness of our work. Scholars should especially make efforts to find ways to include the voices of those who do this work and are marginalized due to the geopolitics of knowledge production that excludes them. Making that space begins with *and*: interacting and intra-acting, indexing and entangling, mobilizing and containing, global and local. We write the spaces between these with our work. In the absence of articulations of difference that are rich, entangled, and co-constructed are views of received authority, mythical identity categories, and limited knowledge production.

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“It's more random and bizarre and stupid and nice and fun than any what I've read,” International Writing Centers Association, Columbus, OH, November, 2019.

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“Cultivating Coherent Writers in the Southampton Writing Centre,” St. Andrews English for Academic Purposes, St. Andrews, Scotland, February 2017.

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