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(Re)framing Uncertainty as Opportunity: A Study of International Teaching Assistants in Writing Classrooms Across the Curriculum

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Across higher education institutions in the US, international teaching assistants (ITAs) have come to play a significant role in teaching undergraduate students across disciplines (Chiang, 2009; Gorsuch, 2012). Legislative and institutional policies to ensure the proficiency and preparedness of ITAs suggest that they encounter more difficulty than domestic TAs in their teaching responsibilities because of their different language and culture backgrounds and presumed unfamiliarity with U.S. educational norms (Chiang, 2009; Gorsuch, 2012). ITAs, as nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), are generally framed in deficit discourses across the literature focusing on the sociocultural, linguistic, and pedagogical challenges they may experience teaching U.S. undergraduate students (Ashavskaya, 2015; Kamhi-Stein, 2018; Kuo, 2002; Ruecker et al., 2018; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). As a result, Xuan Zheng (2017) has stated that ITAs may face substantial difficulty “positioning themselves as legitimate and competent teachers” (p. 30).

Although new instructors commonly face a variety of challenges (e.g., assessment of student learning, command over instructional content, and authority in the classroom) (Costache et al., 2019), some studies suggest that ITAs will face considerably higher uncertainty due to cultural and linguistic dissimilarities between instructors and students (de Oliveira & Lan, 2012;

Nelson, 1992). While this may be true, it does not mean that greater uncertainty will result in more barriers and constraints among ITAs because they can and very often do “value uncertainty as an occasion for growth and reflection” (Dudley-Marling, 1995, p. 257). In fact, uncertainty can prompt reflection and become the basis for exploration as ITAs may turn uncertainties into valuable resources in constructing their pedagogy and teaching authority (e.g., Tseptsura, this volume).

In light of this claim, the purpose of our qualitative study was to problematize common assumptions surrounding the challenges of ITAs and extend the conversation on NNESTs of writing. To this end, our central research question was: What uncertainties do international teaching assistants of writing experience and how do they perceive these and respond to them?

Conceptual Framework

We adopt Michael Agar’s (1994) concept of “rich points” as our approach to understanding how ITAs construct their teaching and student learning. “Rich points” originally refer to moments of frame clash when ethnographers feel something does not go as expected, so they strive to pursue the way insiders view phenomena to better understand what is going on. Because what is taken-for-granted in participating in a particular activity (e.g., cultural expectations and norms for learning in the classroom) is made visible through the clash, Agar (1994) calls this frame clash as a “rich point.” In this sense, we see these uncertain moments as rich points because how ITAs perceive and respond to uncertain moments may illustrate how they construct their teaching practices and classroom authority as they gain more understanding of their students’ perspectives. In this way, we concentrated on times when these international teaching assistants of writing communicated uncertainty in their teaching due to different cultural and linguistic practices that occur in their classroom contexts.

Across the literature, uncertainty is assumed to be an inherent part of the complexity of the teaching profession because it is centered on social interactions and human relationships (e.g., Floden & Buchmann, 1993; Hasinoff & Mandzuk, 2018; Helsing, 2007; McDonald, 1992). Uncertainty is often associated with discomfort and risk as it can complicate teachers’ decision-making and ability to predict, interpret, and assess others’ thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Costache et al., 2019; Hasinoff & Mandzuk, 2018; Helsing, 2007). In reality, “uncertainty is neither intrinsically positive nor inherently negative” (Hasinoff & Mandzuk, 2018, p. 1). Thus, in this study we conceive of uncertainty as a neutral construct and claim that what really matters is how

teachers conceive of and relate to their uncertainties over time. Furthermore, uncertainty has been defined as “an unsolved design problem emerging from either a lack of knowing or a doubt when considering a range of alternatives” (Costache et al., 2019, p. 2) and as the inability “to make sense of, assign value to, or predict outcomes of events” (Kosenko, 2014, p. 1425). Drawing upon these definitions and the findings that emerged in our study, we operationalize uncertainty as moments when international teaching assistants are not sure how to interpret, act, or react to a situation or source (whether it be oral or written text) because of the different linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the instructors and their students.

Methodology

Context and Participants

This study reports on a portion of the data collected in a larger ongoing study of writing instructors across the curriculum at a large land-grant Midwestern university, and more specifically, second-year writing (SYW) courses, which are mandatory general education classes often taught by graduate students and offered across thirty different departments within six different colleges. The support, training, and oversight drastically differ across departments—some provide significant resources to instructors teaching SYW courses and others very little to none (Ohio State Writing Across the Curriculum, 2016a). The curriculum also varies widely across and within departments—some instructors follow an established curriculum provided by their supervisors, and others have autonomy to adapt or create their own curriculum (Ohio State Writing Across the Curriculum, 2016b). However, the commonality among the SYW courses is that instructors are asked to address “major topics and writings pertaining to the United States” (College of Arts and Sciences, 1988, p. 7), which potentially complexifies the teaching of these courses for ITAs whose education and experiences may be rooted outside of the US. Furthermore, students in these classes reflect the wider lack of linguistic, racial, and cultural diversity at the institution, with minority enrollment in first-year undergraduate ranging from 18% to 25%, and international enrollment ranging from 5% to 12.5% over the past five years. Only one third of incoming first-year students are identified as coming from outside of the state (Ohio State Office of Student Academic Success, 2019). Overall, ITAs on many levels may see many differences between themselves and their students.

The focus of the current study is on the perspectives and experiences of three international teaching assistants from different countries who were all in

their first year of teaching a SYW course: (1) Yasemin, a second-year doctoral student from Turkey in the Department of Education, (2) Pari, a fifth-year doctoral student from India in the Department of Economics, and (3) Jiayi, a third-year doctoral student from China also in the Department of Economics (references to ITAs are pseudonyms). The participant demographics have been summarized in Table 10.1.

Table 10.1. Participant Demographics

	Yasemin	Pari	Jiayi
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Home Country	Turkey	India	China
Department	Education	Economics	Economics
Year in Ph.D. Program	Second year	Fifth year	Third year
Bachelor's Degree	Turkey	India	China
Master's Degree	Turkey	India	US
Home Country Teaching Experience	2 years at the college level; 2 years at the elementary school level	n/a	n/a
U.S. Teaching Experience	One semester at the elementary school level; Second semester teaching this course	Second semester teaching at the university; First semester teaching this course	First semester teaching in general

Yasemin and Pari both earned their bachelor's and master's degrees in their respective home countries, whereas Jiayi earned her master's degree in the US prior to beginning her doctoral studies. Yasemin had four years of prior teaching experience in her home country: two years teaching English language courses at the college level and two years teaching English as a foreign language within elementary schools. She also had more than a semester of teaching experience as an elementary school ESL teacher in the US. She was in her second semester teaching the SYW course at the time of the study. Yasemin's course supervisor, who was also teaching one section of the SYW course provided her with the course syllabus and other teaching materials. Neither Pari nor Jiayi had prior teaching experience in their home countries. Pari previously had taught one economics course in her discipline, but this

was her first semester teaching the SYW course. Jiayi had been a teaching assistant in content courses in her department in the past, but at the time of data collection, she had no prior experience as an independent instructor of a course. Both Pari and Jiayi adapted the course syllabus from a former TA teaching the course based on their own experience and expertise.

Data Collection and Analysis

The stances teachers take toward uncertainty greatly vary across individuals as “there are fundamental differences in the ways that teachers describe, interpret, and respond to their uncertainties” (Helsing, 2007, p. 1328). Thus, in this study we privilege the international teaching assistants’ individual lived experiences and subjective interpretations of their actions and interactions with their students as the primary evidence of their classroom realities (Smith, 2008). To get access to these insider perspectives, we conducted two semi-structured interviews (approximately 45 minutes each) with each participant, one during the middle and the other at the end of the semester. The interview guide included questions that prompted international teaching assistants to share about the experiences and resources they drew upon in their teaching, the roles the teachers and students took in their classroom, the interactions between teachers and students, and the curricular decisions they made. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the first two authors and independently coded for emergent themes by all three researchers. The codes were then compared and discussed in order to achieve trustworthiness.

Conceptualizing uncertainty as rich points and applying our operational definition of uncertainty, we identified across the data set three specific components: (1) moments of uncertainty, (2) perceptions of uncertainty, and (3) responses to uncertainty. We restricted our analysis of these moments to when the international teaching assistants voiced uncertainty due to their different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Drawing upon the coding scheme of Oana Costache et al. (2019), we identified these moments by using their linguistic markers, such as “not sure,” “don’t know,” “unfamiliar with,” “couldn’t understand,” etc. Then, by applying Jochen Kleres’ (2011) lexical and structural levels of “linguistic manifestations of emotions” (p. 193), we traced how these ITAs perceived certain types of uncertainty by looking for emotional evidence of their perceptions, such as in the verbal expressions “difficult,” “challenging,” “kind of worried,” “so upset,” “not a really big thing,” “not a problem,” etc. Then we looked for how they responded to these uncertainties through the words and actions they reported about their pedagogical decisions and interactions with their students (e.g., initiating dialogue, prompting reflection, and expanding the curriculum).

Findings

Yasemin: Mutual Learning through Dialogue and Social Interaction

“They’re pushing me; I’m pushing them. So, this is helping us to think and engage more.”

As an international teaching assistant of writing in a second-year writing (SYW) course in education focused on social justice issues, Yasemin talked about the uncertainty she initially felt teaching a new course with an unfamiliar student population in a different cultural context. First of all, she expressed, “I was kind of worried to start working with U.S. students because *I didn’t know* what to expect. *I didn’t know anything* about the undergrad students at [this university] [emphasis added].” Her repetition and word choice here point to her initial worry related to this uncertainty. Moreover, she not only voiced feeling unsure of what to expect of her students but also of what was expected of her as their instructor: “I was kind of nervous because *I wasn’t sure* what was expecting me in terms of working with the undergrad students at [this university], because this is the kind of population that *I wasn’t familiar with*. And *I didn’t really know* what was expecting me.” Her negation and repetition here reinforce her initial nervousness and uncertainty as an ITA working with a new student population in an unfamiliar cultural context.

In her interviews, Yasemin also shared about times when she experienced uncertainties in understanding students’ writing due to the cultural knowledge they incorporated. For example, she recounted a time when she was working with a small group and had not been sure about what her student was trying to say until she had a conversation with the student and noticed that there were cultural aspects embedded in the student’s writing that prevented her from understanding it. Although she recognized that “being a foreigner here” was a possible challenge for her as an international teaching assistant of writing to understand “the cultural things they incorporate in the writing or the things that they discuss in the classroom,” she minimized this challenge, framing it as an opportunity for dialogue and interaction with her students: “It’s not a really big thing because we can talk about it. And it’s also great for me to learn from them. But still it exists.” Moreover, she perceived her students whom she was initially nervous and worried about teaching as approachable individuals she could engage in dialogue to clarify things she did not understand: “So most of my students are really nice people. So, they are really polite . . . I just asked them to tell me.” Yasemin perceived these uncertainties as “not a problem.” Rather, she responded to them as opportunities to learn from her students and grow as

an instructor: “So I’m learning a lot from them . . . They’re enculturating me in various cultures as well.”

In addition to uncertainty regarding students’ cultural aspects in their writing, Yasemin shared how she wrestled with understanding students’ cultural assumptions in a classroom discussion on a reading about “corruption in the justice system.” When confronted with the idea that more African American judges should be appointed to counteract unequal racial sentencing, the students responded negatively, expressing that they thought the judges might “take revenge on White people.” Yasemin struggled to understand her students’ cultural assumptions: “*I couldn’t* think from that perspective . . . *I couldn’t* come up with the answer that ‘but what if they punish white people?’ So, this is one thing that *I couldn’t* come [up with], that *I couldn’t* like understand their perspective in the first place.” Her repetition reinforced the potential challenge this cultural difference presented. However, she responded to this as an opportunity to reflect on her perspective and an opportunity to prompt reflection among students. She went on to say, “But also in the second place, I could come up with an idea that all people should be always thinking about the well-being of all people. . . I think they’re pushing me like this also made me to come up with more inclusive solutions. And coming from a more loving perspective to the issue.” That is, by suspending her evaluation and reflecting on her students’ response over time as indicated by her use of “in the first place” and “in the second place,” Yasemin’s persistence and effort to understand the cultural clash in perspectives allowed her to turn this source of uncertainty into an opportunity to learn from her students, which could, in turn, prompt her students to ultimately learn more from her as well.

Yasemin’s increased confidence in teaching this writing course was largely due to how she perceived uncertainties and responded to them. By shifting her own perspective to that of her students as a means to better understand their ways of thinking and speaking, Yasemin turned her uncertainties into opportunities to learn as a teacher, which leads the class into a mutual learning relationship. She shared, “So they’re pushing me, I’m pushing them. So, this is also helping us to think and engage more thoroughly with the reading with the social justice issues, and also, it is, like, intellectually stimulating for us.” Throughout Yasemin’s interviews, she continuously framed the uncertainties she faced in her writing classroom as rooted in cultural differences yet responded to them as “occasions for reflection and, ultimately, personal and professional growth” (Dudley-Marling, 1995, p. 253). Moreover, Yasemin’s ability to build rapport with her domestic students, an area of great interest across ITA literature (e.g., Gorsuch, 2012), was seemingly established through

her response to uncertainty—namely, her choice to engage in dialogue and social interaction to seek greater understanding.

Pari: Teaching Through Cultural Resources

“I think that’s where if they have questions I can dig deeper.”

As an international teaching assistant of writing in a second-year writing (SYW) course in economics, Pari talked about the uncertainty she initially felt teaching a course that covered such broad content that was often outside of her specialization and at times culturally unfamiliar to her. In her own words: “I think the primary challenge that I face is that, so the topic, the course that I’m teaching is current economic issues in the US. My main challenge is trying to bring in variety in terms of content because I don’t specialize in or *I don’t know enough* about a lot of these topics, which becomes a little challenging for me.” She emphasized that all of the SYW courses in economics were “based on the U.S. market and the U.S. economy” and contained “lots of stuff which [she] was unfamiliar with.” As an ITA, Pari faced some uncertainty regarding how to cover this course content: “I’m not from the US. I have done, I’ve spent most of my life in India and the structure there. The economy there is very different.” She considered the broad content to be challenging for her because she believed that if she wanted to bring in a variety of topics on economics in the US, she would need to be well-prepared to do so: “I feel that if I am talking about a topic I should know enough, so that, that for me is the biggest challenge in terms of this course.” As a Ph.D. student balancing her own research and writing responsibilities, she felt this would be “very difficult” because it would be very time-intensive: “even preparing one slide on that aspect requires me to read a couple of papers.” Throughout her interviews, she mentioned that it was challenging to gain an “understanding of the different things” and “get a variety of topics to discuss.” Thus, she experienced a clash between the disciplinary expertise she gained in India and the U.S.-centric course content; however, instead of replicating the approach of the former domestic TA who taught the course, she adapted the materials and her course design to establish her own sense of legitimacy in teaching the class.

Even though Pari identified uncertainty rooted in unfamiliarity with the culturally-based course content and referred to this as her “primary challenge,” she did not indicate that this resulted in barriers or limitations in her teaching. In fact, she drew upon her transnational identity and incorporated her own cultural resources into her instructional material. She reported that

she would include cultural comparisons between the US and her home country of India, as well as other Southeast and East Asian economies: “You know, something could be different across the two countries, which will have differences in the impacts. So, that’s something that I talk about because that’s the economy that I know better about. So, yeah, I tried to bring in these comparisons.” Pari explained that although she primarily talked about issues in the US, “some of them were like issues in the US as well as elsewhere.” For example, she explained, “Inequality is something that’s present in the US and is present in other countries . . . So when I was talking about inequality, I spoke about other countries a little, but the focus was primarily on the US and the issues here.”

In this way, she developed her course content around topics connected to her specialization and then expanded this scope by drawing on her knowledge of global perspectives to incorporate a variety of topics that she deemed significant current events in the field:

So, I tried to introduce topics, which I knew better . . . I, first, you know, decided on the topics I wanted to talk about based on what my specialization is. After that I started taking topics, which appealed a little more to me, appeal to general ideas. Like trade was something that was important, something that needed to be addressed in class given the way things are right now with China and so on and so forth. Immigration, you know, these kinds of issues were relevant and for the U.S. context.

In doing so, she extended the boundaries of the course by making connections between what was happening in other parts of the world to the economic issues in the US. Pari’s instructional approach addressed the uncertainty she felt with the U.S.-based course content, and she positively evaluated this: “I think, just in terms of content, I have found that if you provide more variety that helps students; they find it very interesting.” In other words, she believed that “generally students like to hear about what’s happening in other worlds, in the other countries.”

Even though Pari was initially concerned about the differences between her disciplinary expertise gained in India and the U.S.-centric course content, she ultimately responded to this as a pedagogical opportunity to draw upon her transnational experiences to incorporate her own cultural knowledge into her teaching. She explained, “The way I approached this particular course was try and speak about what issues I am most familiar with because, you know, I think that’s where if they have questions I can dig deeper and go deeper

into, so that's the way I was trying to, you know, sort of build the course." Thus, by extending the boundaries of the course content and incorporating her own cultural resources, she agentively responds to the uncertainties she encountered with what content to cover in the course, a common source of uncertainty discussed across the literature (Costache et al., 2019; Floden & Buchmann, 1993). Of greater significance is how Pari perceived this uncertainty not as a liability, but instead, turned it into an asset (Helsing, 2007).

Jiayi: Navigating the Unexpected on the Path to Establishing Teaching Authority

"There are a lot of unexpected situations and a lot of unexpected questions, but I managed to do that."

As an international teaching assistant of writing in a second-year writing (SYW) course in economics, Jiayi talked about uncertainties as rooted in the "unexpected," times when students' words and actions puzzled her and made her unsure of how to both interpret and appropriately respond to them. The "unexpected situations" were attributed to cultural differences and often framed as difficulties as she strove to establish her authority in the classroom. Across both of her interviews she voiced that the most difficult challenge she encountered was responding to the "unexpected situations," which were most often related to classroom practices and procedures. In fact, the word "unexpected" surfaced seven times in reference to times when her students had what she considered "exceptional" cases that she had not experienced before. She explained, "Some people say how they have a surgery, or they have a car accident, or they have this, they have that." Elaborating on one such unexpected situation, Jiayi explained that when a student who had only shown up once or twice in the semester emailed her a week later that she had been involved in a motorcycle accident, she was not sure if she could trust the students' excuse: "She took a picture of like a [medical] exam sheet, on which I can see which kind of exam she has, but there's no date on it, you know what I mean? It's only a half of a paper. And then I asked her to show me the full page so I can see what if it is accident exam you did last year, right? And then I rescheduled her for like for a presentation two weeks later, which I think is pretty much enough time for her to prepare. She never replied until now." In this situation, Jiayi was uncertain of both what was going on, as well as how she should respond to it. She perceived these student interactions as "unexpected" situations that led to difficulties in classroom management as she tried to maintain course policies (e.g., participation and assessment), while

still being understanding of students' personal lives. Jiayi's initial uncertainty with classroom management was tied to her new role as an instructor, "a social authority" in an unfamiliar instructional context (Costache et al., 2019, p. 9), a prevalent uncertainty discussed across the ITA literature (Ashavskaya, 2015; Floden & Buchmann, 1993).

In particular, Jiayi spoke at length about a specific situation in which she faced considerable uncertainty over how to handle a student's "unexpected situation," especially because it affected other students in the class. She shared, "I have one student, he, like after one month of that semester, he said he has some anxiety. I don't know I have mentioned to you, anxiety for speaking." She was unsure how to accommodate the student's needs because a core component of the course was debates and presentations. Jiayi explained, "He said he has been contacting the disability center, but only until the end of semester did I receive like documents." Again, in this situation, she wrestled with how to both interpret and respond to a student's situation, particularly because of his delay in providing evidence and how it affected his group members: "I was having a hard time trying to protect his privacy and dealing with the communication with his group members 'cause he does not want their group members to know, but they should know something. What's going on? Why is the person missing?" How the situation unfolded became a source of tension in her relationship with the student and was a confusing and upsetting experience for her. She explained that when the student found out that she had shared his situation he was quite unhappy about it. She reported, "He said, 'This makes me more embarrassed and more anxious. I'm not going to come to class for a long time, very long time.'" Jiayi shared that "actually, he never showed up after that." She was quite emotionally expressive in recounting this experience indicated by her words, "I feel so upset about that." She also repeated in her interview a couple of times, "I apologized," reflecting her effort to make amends in this situation, and stating, "I know it is my fault, but I didn't mean to do that." Thus, she articulated a clash between her intentions and her student's perception of her actions. This underscores that ITAs from home countries where students are typically compliant may report frustrations and struggles with the attitudes and behavior of domestic students (Kuo, 2002). As Jiayi communicated, her uncertainty with classroom discipline created dilemmas for her and were expressed at times through as a sense of guilt, frustration, confusion, self-blame, and discomfort (Helsing, 2007)

More specifically, Jiayi attributed these "unexpected situations" to disparate value systems of the US and China regarding teacher-student roles and expectations. She explained, "Uh, I think we probably have kind of similar disability center, but the students hardly ever challenge their instructors. The

Chinese students in class like follow the rules and respect their instructors much more than here.” Even though she primarily viewed this situation from her own cultural perspective and did not seem to shift her point of view to that of her students, she does exhibit awareness of the clash of classroom norms: “I will say it’s [due] to cultural difference in United States. Everyone is important, like individual rights are very important, but in China it’s less accentuated.” Thus, she primarily voiced uncertainties as rooted in unexpected situations related to cultural differences that, at times, led to confusion and conflict.

However, as Jiayi grew accustomed to the social practices and expectations of her students, the very thing that was the source of her uncertainty and challenge—the “unexpected”—became the greatest source of her sense of growth and pride. At the end of the semester, when asked if there was anything she especially enjoyed about teaching the course, she replied: “The feeling of teaching other people which I think is the most important in my career and also the feeling of being in control, the feeling of being in control of what I’m doing. Yeah, I feel proud of that.” She brought up again the uncertainty she faced during the semester but reframed it as beneficial to her personal and professional growth: “Yeah, so it’s like, as I mentioned, there are a lot of, a lot of unexpected situations and a lot of unexpected questions, but I managed to do that and I feel like it’s important to handle with some unexpected experience so I can learn from it. And then, I mean, whatever situation is either in teaching or even in life, so I enjoyed it.” As this final quotation illustrates, even though Jiayi perceived the uncertainties she faced in teaching this SYW course as difficult for her to navigate, they ultimately became sources of strength for her as she felt empowered by the very situations that had challenged her.

Discussion and Conclusion

Across the literature and our dataset, it is apparent that “teaching is evidently and inevitably uncertain” (Floden & Buchmann, 1993, p. 374). Yet, across teachers in general, and for this chapter’s purposes, across ITAs as well, the source of these uncertainties differs and so does their perception and response to them. Findings from interviews conducted with these three ITAs of writing across two different departments over the course of a semester suggest that they each identified different uncertainties in their classrooms. Yasemin’s uncertainty was rooted in teaching in an unfamiliar context with students who often used local cultural references and held cultural assumptions different from her own. On the other hand, Pari’s uncertainty stemmed from

her own internal questions about how to address the broad economic course topics rooted in the U.S. cultural context. Jiayi's uncertainties came from unexpected situations that created dilemmas for her as she struggled to find culturally appropriate ways to respond to students' exceptional cases. Despite the uncertainties ITAs voiced, which they generally attributed to cultural differences, they were not constrained by them and each ultimately articulated them as opportunities for growth; indeed, their responses to these uncertainties often were central to how they framed their teaching of these second-year writing (SYW) courses.

Findings from this study suggest that "uncertainty is not a hindrance or something to be embarrassed of. Rather, it may open up learning opportunities that can be translated into positive learning outcomes" (Costache et al., 2019, p. 13). When students respond to teachers in ways that are not anticipated (e.g., with different cultural references, assumptions, behavioral norms, and communication patterns), it can be surprising to teachers and lead to confusion or puzzlement; yet, at the same time, it can also cultivate deeper listening and new understanding (Helsing, 2007). Framing uncertainties as rich points (Agar, 1994) in this study provided a way to challenge deficit-oriented discourses about ITAs. Far from feeling limited by the uncertainties they identify, the instructors in our study constructed more empowering perceptions of themselves and their roles (Zacharias, 2018). As they engaged in dialogue with their students and reflected on their own teaching and learning, this allowed them to draw upon their lived experience and expertise (Choi et al., 2022) to construct their classroom authority and pedagogy (Motha et al., 2012; Wolff & De Costa, 2017).

What's striking is that these instructors referenced little formal training and support that prepared them to specifically address the particular challenges they faced. Pari, for instance, shared,

We have the liberty to structure the course the way we want to. Um, I was not given specific rules that I have to follow in order to teach it the way I would want to . . . I'm not sure what kind of workshop or what kind of training would have helped me otherwise.

Overall, the ITAs had difficulty identifying any training or support that they would find helpful. Instead, they each seemed to greatly value the autonomy they had in adapting their courses to their experiences and knowledge and expressed pride in their ability to respond to the challenges they faced in their teaching. Thus, instead of relying on formal training and support, we believe that writing program administrators (WPAs) and department super-

visors can focus on creating spaces for both ITAs and TAs to reflect and share their lived experiences of teaching with one another (Choi et al., 2022; Wolff & De Costa, 2017), which can reinforce their agency and help them build a diverse repertoire of instructional strategies. For instance, WPAs might incorporate reflective opportunities into ongoing professional development that asks instructors to consider uncertainties they face and share strategies they use over time to address those uncertainties. WPAs can also track and collect common uncertainties and supply resources that might help address them—such as resources for supporting accessibility in the classroom that might have helped Jiayi. Collected reflections on uncertainty and the range of creative strategies responding to them can help decenter predominately monolingual, domestic U.S., and White perspectives in writing programs. In doing so, departments can position diversity as a framework that allows for seeing all instructors as resourceful not in spite of, but because of, their diverse linguistic and cultural identities (Motha et al., 2012).

As expressed by Robert E. Floden and Margret Buchmann (1993), “uncertainty is an essential driving force in teaching, not merely a deficiency and worry” (p. 380). In other words, it is not something that should be avoided as “uncertainty is an indispensable step toward genuine questioning,” which can lead individual teachers to grow and change (McDonald, 1992, p. 41) and departments to advocate for diversity as an asset. Global perspectives can be powerful resources for student learning because they encourage multiple perspectives in the classroom, broadening students’ knowledge beyond their own experience, challenging dominant ways of thinking, and leading to personal growth and learning (Hijazi, this volume; Zhou, 2009). It is important to note the fact that Pari and Jiayi who taught the same course experienced different types of uncertainty and perceived and responded to them in different ways. What this difference may bring to the department may be diverse opportunities for students to learn the content. Thus, WPAs and department supervisors should advocate for global perspectives invoked by policies and practices that promote diversity. In terms of curriculum, the content can be deliberately expanded to include scholars of color and perspectives beyond the US (as Pari demonstrated).

Pedagogically, ITAs ought to be encouraged to use personal examples from their language and culture backgrounds to illustrate points in their teaching (Motha et al., 2012). In fact, Gayle L. Nelson (1992) found in a study of ITAs that use of personal examples led to more positive student attitudes and better recall of the class content. Furthermore, it can help ITAs of writing to anticipate and think through how they might deal with the inevitable uncertainties they will experience in their classroom (as Jiayi exemplified). For example,

department supervisors could provide individual or group meetings in which ITAs might share the challenges they face with classroom management and receive more support for navigating unexpected situations. Ultimately, WPAs and department supervisors should support ITAs to be reflective learners of their students (as Yasemin exhibited), while at the same time draw upon their own cultural resources. This can facilitate the development of their teaching authority and pedagogy by providing ongoing occasions for ITAs to reflect on the challenges and uncertainties they face in light of the valuable insight and agency they bring to their teaching (Khor et al., this volume; Reichelt, this volume; Wolff & De Costa, 2017).

Lastly, further research on ITAs' experience of and response to uncertainty from this perspective might reveal a range of strategies that might be of use to their fellow instructors and further solidify understanding of the assets they make use of in the classroom. One particularly important area we unfortunately did not address, and our participants did not discuss (apart from Yasmin's recall of her students' discussion of race and the judicial system)—an area of uncertainty that often asserts itself on non-White ITAs—is how ITAs position themselves and see themselves positioned by U.S. racial and linguistic ideologies. What is their understanding of U.S. racial politics and ideology, and how does it evolve as they work and live in U.S. contexts? How do they situate themselves racially, ethnically, and linguistically in their home countries and regions? How do they negotiate and situate themselves within these cultural formations and systems? While ITAs, particularly non-White ones, likely face hostile uncertainties related to race, they bring their own complex lived experiences and understandings to bear to address or even disrupt their racial positioning (cf. Roundtree's study of Black women GTAs teaching writing, 2019). In doing so, these experiences and understandings can inform how they respond to other uncertainties they encounter in their work and life.

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