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## Chapter 14- Designing Curriculum Collaboratively: A Practice for Learning Alongside Undergraduate Teaching Assistants During Uncertain Times

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# DESIGNING CURRICULUM COLLABORATIVELY: A PRACTICE FOR LEARNING ALONGSIDE UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES

Jessica Rivera-Mueller and Kresten Erickson

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The transition to remote learning during the Spring 2020 semester was abrupt for faculty and students, and it did not allow much time for reflection or purposeful planning, especially as individuals were faced with managing multiple aspects of their lives. Educators had to consider quickly what learning experiences and teaching practices could be preserved or revised, as well as what learning activities could or should be removed. These choices were not easy to make. During this challenging moment, however, we discovered how collaborative partnerships between faculty and undergraduate teaching assistants (UTAs) can contribute to the development of a flexible and responsive pedagogy, as well as professional learning for the faculty member and UTA.

We reached these insights through our participation—as a faculty member and UTA—in Utah State University’s Undergraduate Teaching Fellows program. This program provides an opportunity for undergraduate students to assist faculty members with their day-to-day teaching responsibilities. When the pandemic began, day-to-day teaching responsibilities shifted dramatically. Our partnership, however, was not structured around specific tasks. Instead, we decided to pay attention to how learning unfolded in the class and collaboratively create learning experiences that would further our pedagogical goals. We agreed to approach the partnership organically, determining that it would be best to discover teaching possibilities throughout the semester. When we created this approach in January, we had no idea how well it would serve us in March. Engaging as co-designers created the kind of partnership that allowed us to reimagine our roles and our course in a new and unfamiliar pedagogical context.

As the authors of this chapter, we share and reflect upon our experiences to encourage faculty to establish collaborative partnerships with UTAs. In doing so, we extend scholarship from multiple disciplines that documents the value in creating meaningful work for UTAs (Ahmed & Blankenship, 2019; Karpenko &

Schauz, 2017; Kinkead et al., 2019). Kinkead et al. (2019) argues that providing meaningful work for UTAs is a best practice for undergraduate teaching assistant programs. Further, scholarship illustrates that meaningful work allows UTAs to bring their creativity, problem-solving abilities, and expertise as undergraduate students into the role. Karpenko and Schauz (2017), for example, draw from their own experience in a faculty–UTA partnership to argue that “embracing students as partners in our classrooms [creates a] dynamic space that encourage[s] content-level engagement and professional development” (p. 125). Building from this scholarship, we argue that the practice of designing curriculum collaboratively is meaningful work that is well suited to teaching in uncertain times because it facilitates imaginative thinking—a practice necessary for making challenging pedagogical decisions.

In this chapter, we illustrate how conceptualizing faculty-UTA partnerships as context for learning, rather than a method for accomplishing teaching tasks, creates a context for faculty members and UTAs to learn from and with each other. We begin by offering background information on the formation of our partnership and further defining our practice of collaborative curriculum design. Then, we share a reflective dialogue that we composed to learn from our experience of designing curriculum collaboratively. Drawing from the insights we reach in the dialogue, we ultimately offer recommendations for faculty members who would like to practice designing curriculum collaboratively with UTAs.

## Designing Curriculum Collaboratively

The partnership began when Jessica Rivera-Mueller, an assistant professor of English, invited Kresten Erickson, her former student in her Teaching Young Adult Literature course to become a UTA in that course the following semester. During our first meeting, we reflected upon the prior semester and discussed possible structures for our collaboration. Considering our strengths and interests, as well as ways the course could be improved, we brainstormed a range of possible structures. At the end of our conversation, we agreed to meet for one hour each week to discuss our observations from the class meetings and plan upcoming lessons, as well as discuss and develop the materials that would support these lessons.

For us, the practice of designing curriculum collaboratively is the practice of dialoguing about the ways teachers can create opportunities for a movement of thinking. This conception of designing curriculum collaboratively is rooted in an aesthetic understanding of curriculum. Macintyre Latta (2013) articulates this theoretical perspective in the following way:

Curriculum is understood as genuine inquiry into what is worth knowing, rather than simply a curricular document. It importantly assumes that within the inquiry process lives a worthwhile direction, a medium for teaching and learning that asks teachers and students to participate through adapting, changing, building, and creating meaning together. This is the nature of curriculum as aesthetic inquiry. Curriculum is then restored to its etymological roots of *currere*, invested in prompting, sustaining, and nurturing a movement of thinking. (p. 2)

From this theoretical perspective, curriculum is not a product that teachers can make and deliver to students. Instead, curriculum is a meaning-making process that involves teachers and students. This process attends to how our past, present, and anticipated future experiences shape how we understand course concepts. Macintyre Latta (2013) explains that educators engaging in this process “conceive curriculum as a continuous reconstructing movement of thinking” (p. 47). This movement of thinking is created individually and collectively. Subject matter, therefore, is not “fixed, certain, [nor] separate from students’ experiences” (Macintyre Latta, 2013, p. 47). Accordingly, our goal was to create experiences that would nurture this educative process.

Envisioning curriculum as an experience that creates a movement of thinking is aligned with the nature of teacher education and this course. Teaching Young Adult Literature is a course that aims to help future middle school and high school English teachers understand who they hope to become as literature teachers and participate in the profession’s conversations about teaching young adult literature. The course combines the content knowledge students have gained in their English coursework with pedagogical theory, enabling them to cultivate theoretically robust teaching practices. Through the process of reading and discussing a wide range of diverse young adult literature, students explore trends and issues in the field and various approaches for interpreting, analyzing, and teaching young adult literature. Students also examine scholarship about reading and teaching to contextualize, understand, and problematize their own theories and experiences. Our partnership, then, focused on dialoguing about the ways we could help our students make and remake their understandings of the purposes and practices for teaching young adult literature.

Our collaboration prompted us to create a literature discussion assignment. We created this assignment to complement the co-teaching demonstrations in which teams of students practiced delivering lessons based upon young adult literature. Paired together, the literature discussions and the co-teaching demonstrations invited students to consider young adult literature as readers and teachers. Drawing from Buehler (2016), who argues that “[a] text can be more or less complex based on what a reader brings to it or what a reader discovers or sees” (p. 29), we prompted students to pay attention to how their own engagement with literature shapes their ability to teach literature. Accordingly, we asked students to prepare for our discussion by identifying one aspect of the text that they found thought-provoking as readers, including aspects such as themes, figurative language, and characterization.

When we launched this experience in our face-to-face context, we created distinct roles for ourselves that supported our overall pedagogical goals: Kresten facilitated the discussion and Jessica took notes from the conversation. After class, Jessica used these notes to create “essential learning questions” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), ideas that students could use to create instructional units in the future. Jessica posted these on Canvas, an online learning platform, so students could use these questions as a resource in their future work as teachers. In this process, both roles were integral to the learning experience. Kresten created thought-

provoking questions to prompt and guide students through a discussion of their experiences as readers, and Jessica translated those ideas into a teaching resource.

## Reflecting Upon our Practice

We were pleased with our design of the literature discussion assignment, but the learning experience needed to shift when we transitioned to a remote learning context. While we made quick decisions in the spring, we wanted to learn more about the ways our partnership and our efforts to design curriculum collaboratively supported our goals as teachers and our professional learning. In this section, we share a written dialogue that we composed to reflect upon our experiences of designing curriculum collaboratively. Throughout the dialogue, we focus primarily on our efforts to (re)create the literature discussions, but we also discuss broader questions that we believed were important to explore. We invite readers to read our conversation and reflect upon their own experiences in faculty–UTA partnerships.

We begin our dialogue by reflecting upon the prior knowledge and experiences that shaped how we approached our partnership.

*Kresten Erickson (KE):* Before working with you, Dr. Rivera-Mueller, I'd had just one opportunity to be an undergraduate teaching fellow (UTF) at Utah State. In that experience, my role was to take care of the teacher's busywork; I did not play a role in planning or delivering instruction. While I still benefited from the experience overall, it did not provide me with any opportunities to develop my teaching skills. Almost a year later, you approached me to be the UTF for your Teaching Young Adult Literature course, and I accepted, imagining my role would be similar to my previous experience: I would take care of your busywork, answer students' questions, and otherwise be a silent observer of your classroom.

However, in our first meeting before the semester started, you made it clear that our work in the classroom would be collaborative. You said you considered me a co-teacher for the course, and you encouraged me to share my own ideas about how I could contribute to class learning. This idea was tricky for me to wrap my head around; I expected to be told what to do and then stick to that for the entire semester. It took time for me to shift into a collaborative and creative mindset that empowered me to contribute ideas that would benefit the course and the students.

We decided to hold hour-long weekly meetings to discuss the course, my role as a UTF, and our thoughts on the class' progress. Despite my initial discomfort in being asked to fill an unfamiliar role, the experience became increasingly enriching as the semester progressed. Our weekly conversations were especially beneficial for me since I had the chance to discuss classroom practices and pedagogical philosophy with an experienced educator. These meetings helped me mold my own educational philosophy. I became more comfortable with my role as a co-teacher, and I felt more confident in preparing instruction for the class.

*Jessica Rivera-Mueller (JRM):* Kresten, I really appreciate your comments about how it took time for you to feel comfortable in a collaborative role. This idea is really important for me to remember. It reminds me of a lesson that I had to learn early in my teaching career: It takes time to build trust and community. When I began teaching, I expected my students to trust my goodwill and judgment. I expected them to believe automatically that I would be their advocate in learning. But, of course, they needed to get to know me first. I learned quickly that relationship-building needed to become central to my work as a teacher. I realize that this lesson comes from another context, but it feels similar because I am early in my process of learning how to become a faculty mentor in the UTF program. It's good for me to be reminded of the seemingly obvious; we are always bringing our prior experiences into new teaching/learning contexts.

Prior to this experience, I had only mentored one other UTF. In that experience, the student requested an opportunity to work with me. It was a great experience, and it showed me some of the possibilities for designing a UTF experience. Because her goals and ideas contributed to the class design, I approached this experience with an open mind. I wanted your goals for learning and experiences to shape our partnership. In fact, this was the reason why I approached you for the experience. You had demonstrated excellence in my class the prior semester, and I trusted you as a learner. Because I wanted the UTF experience to be co-designed, I hoped you would accept my invitation. I would only invite students that I could trust to engage as a co-designer.

As a learner, I love collaboration and seek it out. While I recognize that faculty members and UTFs have different responsibilities and expertise, I seek to learn from the experiences and perspectives of undergraduate students. I believe my positive experiences with faculty mentors in my own undergraduate and graduate education have been instrumental in shaping my views and approach. As an undergraduate student, I had an unofficial faculty mentor who invited me to participate in summer courses with practicing teachers and other grant-funded experiences. In these moments, my knowledge was taken seriously and contributed to the knowledge of the group. I never forgot what it felt like to be treated as a colleague—even when I had less experience than the practicing teachers. In a similar way, my dissertation chair was an outstanding model of mentorship. It was difficult for me to feel the hierarchy of the academy when I returned to graduate school for my PhD. I had been working as a full-time high school English teacher, and I had been a leader in my district. It didn't take long for me to feel my lack of influence in my new teaching and learning context. In my work with my dissertation advisor, though, I felt completely different. During my first semester, we worked together on a university-wide program to support writing development for faculty members. I was her assistant, but I was a full intellectual partner. She posed questions to draw out my experience, and that knowledge shaped our goals and approaches for the program. I never felt like a second-class member in our two-person team. I know that it is often common for UTFs to complete busywork. As a teacher educator, though, I feel that is an underutilized experience for the faculty member and the UTF. I have so much to learn from students, and I hope that engaging with UTFs as co-teachers supports their development in the ways I have been supported throughout my education.

*KE:* Being treated as an equal collaborator, rather than an assistant, made all the difference in developing my confidence to fully contribute to our collaboration. My label as a co-teacher for this UTF experience felt meaningful; you treated me like I was important to the class' success, even after the COVID-19 shutdowns. I felt trusted to contribute ideas to the development of the course, and I felt trusted with the instructional duties I was given. To be honest, this is one of the first times that I have been treated this way in a classroom. During my time as a UTF for this course I feel I made some of my largest strides toward developing my identity as an educator.

*JRM:* I'm so happy to hear those thoughts, Kresten! I obviously care about your growth as a teacher, too. In this conversation, I think it would be good for us to recall how and why we initially created the literature discussions. I'm happy to share my thoughts first.

For me, Teaching Young Adult Literature is a course that always challenges me to balance the work of helping students develop pedagogical beliefs and practices and helping students engage literature as readers. I emphasize the pedagogical pieces of the course most because the class is one of the four required methods courses for our English education majors and minors. I know it's important, though, for students to engage young adult literature as readers, especially for students who have little experience reading young adult literature and/or negative views of young adult literature. When you expressed interest in helping students grow as readers, I was thrilled. I know that this aspect was underdeveloped in the iteration of the course you took the prior semester. Honestly, I have trouble judging what might seem like too much or too little emphasis on engagement with the literature. In this way, I relied heavily on your expertise as a student.

I remember meeting multiple times to discuss the development of this assignment. Through conversation we were able to design the purpose and goals of the assignment, as well as our roles in supporting the assignment. Together we decided that the assignment would be an opportunity to focus on finding the complexity in the texts—a central idea from one of the key scholars that we read in the course. In this way, this assignment offered practice with one of the course's key concepts. For me, this seemed to bridge the split that sometimes emerges in my mind between time spent on teaching discussions and time spent on literature discussions. I'm pretty you pointed us to this concept in the course reading, which underscored the assignment's importance. I was thrilled when we arrived at this moment in the design process. At that point, you created the handout to explain the assignment, which synthesized and expanded upon the ideas we had discussed together.

*KE:* Dr. Rivera-Mueller, like you mentioned, during my experience as a student in the Teaching Young Adult Literature course, we emphasized the pedagogical importance of the texts we studied and focused less on the literary merits of the texts themselves. While this emphasis fit the focus of the course, as a reader I wanted to talk about each of these texts just a little bit more. I wanted to discuss their key characters, unexpected endings, symbolism, and expressive language. However, this type of discussion wasn't built into the course.

I struggled at first when you and I discussed possible teaching responsibilities I could take charge of in the course. I remember that you wanted me to play a role in designing instructional activities, not just leading them. Frankly, I was expecting to be told what to do; that was what I was used to as a UTF and as a student. I struggled to come up with any ideas of how I could contribute to the class. However, as the weeks in the semester went by, I began to feel more confident and comfortable in my new role. As our weekly conversations continued, you and I talked about how I always wished we could spend a little more time discussing the texts we read in class, not just from an educator's perspective, but as readers. We both felt like spending time discussing young adult literature fit well with the overall goals of the course; one of our purposes was to help students appreciate young adult literature as a genre. So, we created the literature discussion assignment, and we decided that I would lead the discussion over each young adult text we studied in class.

You gave me the responsibility to develop and lead the discussion for each text we studied in class, and you gave me a lot of freedom to lead them in whatever way I felt was best. We talked about the discussions in our weekly meetings, both before and after each discussion took place. I appreciated your feedback during the entire process. Your suggestions were helpful in making me feel more confident for the upcoming discussion.

I decided I wanted our class literature discussions to be conversational and firmly rooted in the text we had just finished reading. I designed questions that would help keep the discussion focused on those goals, but I also planned plenty of flexibility in the discussion to allow it to develop to the class' interest. I wanted these discussions to provide an opportunity for students in the class to talk about the parts of the texts that were most interesting to them. We hoped that these discussions would be fun for the students—after all, we all likely wanted to become English teachers because we enjoyed talking about literature—and that they would also become meaningful resources to the students in their future teaching. Most of all, I hoped these discussions would provide students with a greater appreciation of the young adult literature texts we studied in class.

*JRM:* Yes. I appreciated this emphasis on gaining a greater appreciation of the texts. I also appreciated all the work you did to prepare for each literature discussion. While our assignment prompt provided open-ended questions, you prepared more pointed and detailed questions that were designed for each text. I believe we were able to reach deeper insights into the texts due to a balance between the open-ended nature of our prompt and the more pointed questions that you brought to facilitate the conversation. Your teaching enacted the idea that really good conversation takes deep preparation.

I think we saw the strength of this approach during our first literature discussion. Because I wanted to integrate more student choice into our text selection, students signed up for their teaching demonstrations according to dates. Consequently, the short story co-teaching team signed up to deliver the first teaching demonstration. Normally, the short story group shares their teaching demonstration at the end of the semester because they are the only team also responsible for selecting their text. This group had selected a text



that was provocative for multiple reasons. While I approved the text and coached the team through their planning process, I did not know how the students in our class would respond to the text. Our literature discussion, then, was our opportunity to hear these thoughts. I felt nervous for you and the group that had selected this text. In some ways, I felt guilty that I wasn't leading the first discussion, especially as I anticipated potential conflict. But I trusted you and the approach we had designed together. Because of your balance between open-ended and pointed questions, the class was able to learn from each other and see the text's potential—even as it presented problems for some readers. This discussion was so thought provoking, in fact, that students continued the conversation long after the class ended. It was clear that students needed a space to talk about the texts and the teaching of texts. So how do you feel the assignment was working prior to the transition to online learning?

*KE:* I immediately realized that leading insightful discussions about literature was not quite as straightforward as I thought. Like you mentioned, I was really happy with the class engagement in our first discussion. The students in the class had a lot to say about what we had read, and I was grateful for their willingness to participate. After that first experience, you and I had a great conversation about what went well, and I brought up some of the things I would like to make better for the next one. You were very encouraging about the turnout of the first discussion, and I felt like I had your complete trust and support in trying out my ideas.

After my first discussion facilitation, I was pleased with the students' responses to my questions; I thought my questions were insightful and open-ended enough to prompt a meaningful discussion. However, I felt like the sequence in which I presented my questions somewhat limited the progression of our discussion. With the second literature discussion, I made a specific point to make sure that there was a logical progression in the order I presented my questions. I resisted that approach with the first discussion because I didn't want my expectations of where I thought the discussion would go to hold the class back from what they wanted to talk about. However, I realized the benefit of having a linear outline going into the discussion, and I promised myself that I would give it up quickly if the class drifted to different and more interesting topics.

The second text we read did not prompt the same level of response as the first short story we read. For that reason, I didn't feel like the conversation had the same energy as the first, but I felt like we were still able to have a thought-provoking discussion about the young adult literature we were reading. For our third discussion—which turned out to be our final one in class—I decided to take a more casual approach that focused on students' positive reactions to our reading. I felt like this approach more appropriately fit the text we were reading, and the student response was positive as well.

*JRM:* Wow, Kresten! It's so strange to remember that we only held three face-to-face discussions. It seems like we engaged with that assignment so many more times. Even now, thinking before and after March is a strange experience for me. Anyway, I feel like the questions were working well, and I was easily able to formulate essential learning questions from what I heard students saying. As we continued in this process, I came to a greater appreciation for the collaborative nature of this process. I think that creating the essential learning

questions gave the conversation more purpose; students knew that we were creating something that they could use in the future. Having two teachers in the room allowed us to perform two distinct pedagogical tasks. You were able to listen closely to the students and draw out more experiences and perspectives. I was able to listen closely for a different purpose—connecting students’ ideas to potential teaching possibilities. As we continued to engage in the literature discussions, in other words, I feel like I became more aware of my role in those conversations, thereby listening more deeply to students’ responses.

*KE:* I did appreciate being able to focus all my energy on the class’ conversations. I think if I had also had to create essential learning questions while I was facilitating the discussion, I would have been less effective at both tasks. I appreciate you trusting me with the role that put me in front of the class, directly working with the students. It probably would have been a lot simpler for you to lead the discussions and then put me in charge of developing the essential learning questions. However, I am grateful that you placed me in a position that allowed me more personal growth as a teacher. Because of how we changed responsibilities following the university’s COVID-19 shutdowns, I had plenty of time to practice developing essential learning questions, just in a context none of us could have anticipated.

*JRM:* Yes! We ended up flopping roles, sort of. My overall goal in our transition was to preserve as much of the course’s work toward our initial learning goals and let go of anything that could be removed, making the course manageable for students. This was a hard shift, one that I had to grieve. I felt like I had to let go of many expectations. I clearly remember chatting with several colleagues on our last day on campus to brainstorm ideas for reconfiguring the course. Early in the day, I planned small changes that I thought could preserve most of the course. By the end of the day and after multiple conversations, I became convinced that I needed to make the class an asynchronous online course. I realized that I wanted to make the class manageable and accessible, considering all the different circumstances our students were facing (e.g., moving, loss of employment, health concerns, etc.).

Along these lines, I wanted to respect your needs as a learner during this uncertain time. I was pleased when you said that you wanted to continue your role in the course. With this knowledge, I proposed that we move the literature discussion conversation online through Canvas’s discussion board feature. In doing so, the questions were narrowed to the following questions: What’s worthy of study in this text? Where is the complexity? Identify what you found interesting or compelling. I missed the more pointed questions you brought to class, and our assignment needed to shift in an asynchronous context. During this transition, though, I was thankful that we had co-designed two initial teaching roles: prompting conversation and listening to conversation. I think doing so allowed us to understand the relationship between these two tasks and switch our roles in the middle of the semester. With the transition to an online context, I spent ample time reaching out to students individually to learn about their specific situations and create alternative assignments when necessary. Reimagining our roles allowed me to meet the new demands I faced as a teacher and person experiencing the uncertain time.

*KE:* The last class I attended on campus for the Spring 2020 semester was Teaching Young Adult Literature, on Thursday, March 12th. That same day, when Utah State announced their transition to online learning, everything became uncertain for me. I didn't know what my own coursework would look like. I didn't know if we would be back on campus at some point during the semester or not, and I was no longer able to work my on-campus job. In all this uncertainty, your communication with me made all the difference. I knew multiple other UTFs at USU who, after the transition to online learning, never heard from their cooperating professor again. I enjoyed our collaboration, and I worried that my opportunity to work with both you and the class was lost because of the pandemic. I wanted to continue in my co-teacher role, but I was worried that I would become a burden rather than a help. However, you supported me in choosing to continue my contribution to the course. My confidence that I could still add meaning to the class' experience was bolstered by you treating me as an important part of the class' learning.

Like you mentioned earlier, it was crucial that we had created this assignment in collaboration. Because of that, I think we both understood what needed to happen in every step to make it most effective. That prepared us well for a reversal of roles as we moved online. You and I discussed ways that I could contribute, and then we decided that my role would still be closely tied to the literature discussion assignments. Instead of initiating the class conversations, I created essential learning questions based on the class' discussion, much like you did before we started online learning. My responsibilities shifted from being a conversation facilitator to being a listener. After the transition to online learning, I read students' discussion posts on Canvas, then created essential learning questions based on my synthesis of all their responses; instead of creating questions in preparation for a discussion, I was creating questions to conclude the discussions students were already having on their own. Because we worked closely in this part of the assignment already, I felt very comfortable switching into this role, and I was grateful that role still felt meaningful.

*JRM:* Kresten, you also contributed to the class by creating a handout with teaching resources for our young adult texts. You found interviews, TED Talks, and more resources that are great materials for lesson planning. I was eager to share your handouts with our students, and I saved them for my own files, too. In this activity, you contributed wonderful materials that I hope enhanced students' experience in the course. It's difficult to assess all of our choices—the situation was so complex. I know that my use of Canvas was a little clunky, and that's something I've had to really address this year. The students' course evaluation comments, though, expressed regret that we were not able to finish the class as it was initially designed and gratitude for the choices we made in the transition to online learning.

*KE:* I'm also wondering what we could have done better during this transition. It's difficult to say. From my perspective, the nature of Utah State's initial closure was unclear. For the first couple of weeks, I wasn't sure if we would be returning to in-person classes or not. Since it was during those first couple weeks that we planned my responsibilities for the rest of the semester, I think we did the best that we could with the knowledge that we had. Of all my courses in Spring 2020, I felt that this course handled the transition most

effectively. From my perspective as a UTF, students still received an educational experience that covered all the key concepts that the course was focused on.

## Learning From our Dialogue

We believe collaborative partnerships between faculty and UTAs are a valuable way to support student and teacher learning in uncertain times and beyond. By its nature, the practice of designing curriculum collaboratively prompts ongoing dialogue between a faculty member and UTA, and that conversation creates a context for (re)imagining pedagogical roles and practices. Our dialogue demonstrates that our ample and frequent discussions provided a thorough understanding of our assignment's design, and we used that knowledge to redesign our assignment and course in a new and unanticipated teaching context.

To support the practice of designing curriculum collaboratively, we offer two specific recommendations. First, we encourage faculty–UTA partners to engage in ongoing, open-ended conversations about their observations from the classroom, rather than focusing solely on specific pedagogical tasks to complete. While it is important to discuss specific details involved in teaching a course, broad conversations about classroom learning create a context for unexpected surprises. In an open-ended conversation, for example, we brainstormed a way to connect one of our course's key concepts—text complexity—with our goals for the literature discussion assignment. Movement between open-ended and specific teaching conversations creates a context for UTAs to share their perspectives and expertise. Purposefully making time to learn from each other, in other words, can produce wonderful insights.

Second, we recommend that faculty members and UTAs remain flexible when negotiating their pedagogical roles and responsibilities. We have learned that it is acceptable (and even beneficial) to discover these roles and responsibilities throughout the partnership, rather than defining them firmly at the outset of the partnership. Discovering these roles and responsibilities throughout the partnership allows faculty members and UTAs to apply their strengths, passion, and expertise to learning experiences that are created in response to the students in the course. In doing so, though, communication is essential. As our dialogue illustrates, open communication is important for helping UTAs feel confident in contributing to the course. Engaging in explicit and recursive conversations about roles and expectations can help UTAs grow into a co-designer role. Additionally, establishing a pattern of ongoing discussion of roles and responsibilities enables faculty–UTA partnerships to adjust for unexpected circumstances.

Our experiences during the Spring 2020 semester taught us that it is important for faculty members and UTAs to critically examine their notions of what a UTA can bring to their role. Collaboration requires partners to negotiate their understanding of what is possible through the partnership. UTAs may need to stretch themselves to fulfill a collaborative role, and faculty mentors may need to support this growth by remaining mindful of the fact that undergraduate students may have different levels of comfort with moving

into a collaborative role. Faculty mentors may need to critically reflect upon the values, beliefs, and assumptions underlying their conception of a UTA role and offer support to help UTAs reach these expectations and/or negotiate the roles and responsibilities. Our collaboration was shaped by our willingness to (re)imagine a collaborative partnership, and we are grateful to have learned so much from each other as a result. Though UTA programs vary across institutions, we encourage faculty members to find ways to form collaborative partnerships with UTAs. We believe that doing so expands the learning opportunities for students in the course, the UTA, and the faculty mentor.

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