Foreword

Fresh Air for Graduate Teaching Assistants

Prof Dilly Fung, London School of Economics and Political Science

In many universities, Graduate Teaching Assistants are as essential as the air on campus. They deliver thousands of hours of core teaching, balancing their own research passions and deadlines with tasks that include teaching, assessment and feedback, and student support. They contribute to vital strategic initiatives such as developing more inclusive curricula, improving online learning resources and enhancing staff-student partnerships. Simultaneously wearing the hats of a staff member and a research student, a teacher and a learner, an adviser and a supervisee, they frequently pull off the most challenging of roles, transforming themselves through sometimes stormy conditions from emergent experts in their field into versatile and effective scholarly educators.

In some university settings, Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are, however, almost as invisible as the air that students breathe. Institutions struggle, even when willing, to give GTAs voice. In recent years an increasing number of institutions have been recognising the high quality work of GTAs through annual teaching awards and through fairer policies and remuneration arrangements. But university structures, funding streams and hierarchies do not lend themselves to the recognition and promotion of GTAs, who

are both teachers and research students and who do not, therefore, find themselves strongly represented either on education-focused or research-focused decision-making bodies. For all the superb work they do, their voices can be lost in the crosscurrents of the sometimes competing research and education 'portfolios' of senior leaders. Are the experiences, conditions and successes of GTAs to be recognised and overseen by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (or equivalent) for Research, or the PVC Education? Some universities have developed sound policies and found supportive oversight structures, while others still struggle to get it right. Meanwhile, GTAs work tirelessly, sometimes at great personal cost, to provide the best possible education for their students. Although some get support, encouragement and opportunities to develop themselves as educators, others can feel overwhelmed, ignored or even abused by individuals or systems that exploit their liminal position.

Yet it is vital that the higher education sector gets this right. It needs to develop a much deeper understanding of GTA roles and opportunities in order to enhance them. It also needs to develop platforms, such as this timely new journal, through which GTAs can showcase their work not only as researchers who educate, but as scholars who investigate and publish on pedagogic practices. Graduate Teaching Assistants are uniquely positioned to design research questions that will peel back the onion of practices relating to teaching, learning, curriculum design, student support, inclusion and exclusion, and so much more. They can also surface issues relating explicitly to GTA roles and their

contributions to our universities' complex educational ecosystems.

The articles in the first edition of this journal demonstrate the range and depth of Graduate Teaching Assistant insights. Elliott and Marie, in 'Advancing student-staff partnership through the unique position of GTAs' and Clark in 'Bridging the Power Gap: GTAs and Student-Staff Partnership' focus on the possibilities and tensions relating to staff-student partnerships that focus on learning, teaching and assessment. This is a theme on which much has been written and said in recent years, but the honesty of these articles is refreshing. The authors recognise the lived tensions of so-called partnerships in which, to be truthful, some partners have much more power than others. They also highlight the potential for authentic partnerships in which the processes of working as partners reflect a fairer distribution of voice and influence.

In 'Class Act – Reflections on a working class academic sense of self as a Graduate Teaching Assistant', Hastie writes about the 'in-betweenness' experienced by those who are situated not only between student and staff identities but also between working-class and middle-class identities. This rang true for me personally, a senior university leader still traversing the identity gap between my own working-class upbringing and the cultural dynamics of my current role with its prestigious opportunities, benefits and trappings. It is vital to recognise the elitisms of academia and address the need for GTAs, students and staff from all backgrounds to see their own cultures and identities fairly represented in the university's organisational and community activities. Jaines

explores related themes in 'Perverse Relationships: The Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Neoliberal University', arguing powerfully that while the liminal position of the GTA is 'a specific form of invisibility; a blind spot within which the logic of the neo-liberal university proliferates as an absence', there is hope: 'the GTA has a specific opportunity in the current moment to reimagine the contracts of reciprocity upon which teaching and research depend'.

Mathers et al. focus in on their teaching roles, reflecting on the value of teaching observations. They draw on work by Stephen Brookfield to present a model for the integration of teaching observations and associated reflective practice into GTA development, highlighting the ways in which these practices together provide 'mutuality of benefit (observer and observee) with opportunities for improvement (of teaching and reflective practice) through constructive feedback'. Kunz and Brill also home in on an area of practice, that of teaching on fieldtrips. Analysing both the benefits and challenges that arise when GTAs are involved with fieldtrips, they conclude with a set of clear and positive recommendations for departments.

The varied, thought-provoking papers in this first edition of *Postgraduate Pedagogies* illustrate both the richness and the tensions in the lived experiences of Graduate Teaching Assistants. In one moment GTAs are negotiating relationships, partnerships and spaces in a complex organisational structure. Elsewhere they are drawing on scholarly insights in their own fields as they critique the underpinning assumptions and structures that surround GTAs and the contexts in which they work. Alongside there

are moments for focusing on the specifics of teaching – ways of learning from one's own experience, developing specialist roles and attributes, and helping to shape departmental and institutional policies and practices. These dynamics, sometimes contradictory and often illuminating and creative, reflect the diversity of the landscapes occupied by GTAs and provide fertile ground for this much needed journal. *Postgraduate Pedagogies* will create spaces in which GTAs can breathe, speak and be heard.

Introduction to Postgraduate Pedagogies: Centring Graduate Teaching Assistants in Higher Education

Lauren Clark[1], Jesper Hansen[1], Alex Hastie[2], Sarah Kunz[3], Alex Standen[1], and Joe Thorogood[4]

[1] University College London, UK; [2] Coventry University, UK; [3] University of Bristol, UK; [4] Multiverse, UK

Across the United Kingdom (UK) and beyond, Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are an integral part of universities and a substantial part of the Higher Education workforce. While there is a growing body of scholarship about the role of the GTA, and texts and materials which seek to support them as they carry out their responsibilities, the voice of GTAs themselves is less often heard and there exists no systematic account of their perspectives, experiences and contributions. This open-access journal aims to help fill this gap by bringing to the fore GTA voices and experiences. Based on the firm belief that GTAs bring important and potentially unique skills, ideas and approaches to lecture halls, labs and seminar rooms, it includes contributions from current or recent GTAs, and those working with them. *Postgraduate Pedagogies* aims to synthesise and analyse, reflect on and assert the unique experiences of GTAs, the contributions they bring to the Higher Education (HE) teaching and learning environment, and the specific challenges they face.

Recent changes in higher education institutions across the UK, including increased student numbers (ONS, 2016) and increased job precarity (UCU 2016, 2021ab), are pushing GTAs into the foreground. Universities have begun to rely more heavily on part-time, fixed-term and hourly paid staff, including postgraduates, to deliver undergraduate and, on occasion, postgraduate teaching (Muzaka, 2009). GTAs are typically doctoral researchers who teach, although within this definition there is great variation in both what duties and responsibilities the GTA may have (for example, lab demonstrating, facilitating seminars, marking) and also what motivates the individual GTA to take on teaching alongside their other duties. Some choose to teach out of interest, for pleasure or to explore a potential academic path; for others, especially unfunded doctoral researchers, it might be a financial necessity to pay fees and make a living; and for some it might be a contractual obligation that ties in with how their research is funded. Nevertheless, what GTAs have in common is that as postgraduates who teach, they occupy a different position to other members of staff who teach and support learning. In all cases, GTAs will have to balance teaching with their own research, and negotiate being teachers while also being in the position of students, and all the myriad difficulties and opportunities this entails.

The journal was initiated by a group of GTAs (at the time) and academic developers working in GTA training and support and grew out of a desire to create a space for autonomy, power and voice that GTAs often feel they lack (Muzaka, 2009). With this journal we aim to provide a valuable opportunity for GTAs to use their voice to draw attention to

important issues related to them. We hope to provide a space that will demonstrate, both academically and professionally, how vital GTAs can be, and how approaching their role from, for instance, a position of radical collegiality (Fielding, 1999) might foreground their professional development.

A strong ethos of partnership between GTAs and staff working with GTAs also underpins all aspects of the journal and this will hopefully ensure that the journal remains relevant to those working as GTAs, as well as provide opportunities for reflection on practice, scholarly development and empowerment. While reflection-on-action (Schön, 1987) is often seen as an individual endeavour for the individual's benefit, reflection on practice and identity construction can also be empowering for readers who might be struggling with similar challenges or experiences, letting them know that they are not alone, and also allowing them to learn through the experiences and suggestions of others. This may be even more empowering and important for those who are positioned in liminal spaces, like GTAs and early career academics, who may be inspired to engage in reflection about their own experience. It is thus our hope that by encouraging GTAs to engage in 'reflection-on-action' (see Schön, 1987; Brockbank, 2007) we can encourage them not only to deepen and situate their learning about teaching and research, but also to engage in scholarly writing to further develop their knowledge of scholarship by learning by doing.

In this introduction to the inaugural issue of *Postgraduate Pedagogies*, we draw out three central themes that all six

contributions to this inaugural issue respond to: the role and identity of GTAs; relationships and partnerships between GTAs, academic staff and taught students; and reflections on implications for GTA practice. These themes highlight the importance of building a community that helps GTAs explore and navigate their liminal role, sharing experiences and suggestions for future practice. We end by introducing the six articles that make up the inaugural issue.

Themes in this inaugural issue: identity, partnership, and practice

1 Role, identity, and liminality

The idea that GTAs occupy liminal roles in-between student and teacher is common in existing scholarship and is also picked up by authors in this issue. Park (2004) explains that GTAs have acted as teachers for a long time in the USA and that their role 'is a recognized position, with its own status and niche within the higher education system' (p. 349). Park sees this as fundamentally different to the role of GTAs in the UK who engage 'in some teaching, often primarily in order to secure financial support and, often secondarily, to gain teaching experience' (p. 349). The lack of a recognised position, and the related tension between roles such as researcher/teacher and staff/student, mean that GTAs' roles are often seen as conflicting. As Park and Ramos (2002) argue, 'they are both student and teacher, but neither fully' (p. 52).

While the two studies above are now a couple of decades old, similar findings have been reported from more recent studies, showing that little has changed in this respect.

Compton and Tran (2017) asked a series of questions about GTA identity that resonate with the one expressed by Park and Ramos above: 'Are they [GTAs] still students? Are they researchers? Are they university staff or "almost staff"?' (p. 1). Their research found that most GTAs have strong researcher identities and that only few see themselves as teachers. The explanation that is offered sees this as a logical consequence of teaching only occupying a limited amount of the GTAs' total time spent in this role. However, they argue further that how doctoral researchers navigate these many, and potentially conflicting, roles, may play an important role in determining whether they 'experience a more positive liminality or the uncertainty of limbo' (p. 13).

If Compton and Tran's research shows how different GTAs perceive their role(s) in different ways, Muzaka (2009) found that this holds true for the ways in which other groups perceive of GTAs too. This research found that both GTAs and students perceive that GTAs' lack of subject knowledge can be a problem, whereas academics generally do not express this view. What most academic staff were more concerned about, on the other hand, was the GTAs' lack of teaching experience which they thought could disadvantage students taught by them. Another area where there was asymmetry in the perceptions was around authority, relating to how modules are organised, with some GTAs perceiving a lack of authority but no staff mentioning this as a possible issue.

While the above examples support an understanding of GTAs' role identity as being liminal and a potential area of tension, a comment such as the following from a student

shows how their complex identity can also be perceived positively. The student explains that they see GTAs as being '"halfway between academic staff and student"' (Muzaka, 2009, p. 5). This is not meant as a critique; rather it means that the GTAs are more approachable and less intimidating and 'more in touch with students and academic demands' (p. 5). This representative comment from the research thus both confirms the idea that GTAs are in a liminal space, and shows how GTAs' role-conceptions are not necessarily problematic but can also be seen as an advantage. This argument is supported in recent research by Winstone and Moore (2017) who conducted two focus groups with a total of nine GTAs from a School of Pharmacy in a UK university. Their findings resonate with those of Muzaka (2009), arguing that

> emphasising those aspects of the GTAs' position that are unique to their status frames the perennial "neither fish nor fowl" issue in a more positive light and comes with the added benefit of encouraging GTAs to reflect on their interactions with both students and faculty members and the most appropriate strategies to deploy in each situation (Winstone & Moore, 2017, p. 500).

2 Relationships and partnerships

Perhaps because of the liminal space that GTAs inhabit as both students and staff, it seems fitting that they often assume roles where they work in collaboration (and occasionally partnership) with staff, as well as simultaneously being seen as better able to communicate with and anticipate the needs of students. As mentioned in the

previous section, Muzaka (2009) comments on the unique ability of GTAs to be less intimidating to students while also being aware of the staff perspective.

Unique to the GTA experience is the maintaining and simultaneous holding of multiple relationships with both students and staff (Oberlander & Barnett, 2005). In terms of their engagement with staff members, GTAs are colleagues, less experienced academics, and sometimes students of those who they report to for their teaching jobs. This brings up an interesting phenomenon in which GTAs are managing different ways of engaging with academic staff at the same time, which can leave room for exploitation and power imbalances, as well as career and personal development that comes from having role models and mentors (Biaggio et al., 1997). The same could be said for GTA relationships with students at other levels of education—while GTAs might attend social events with their students (i.e., seminars, societies, clubs, or university events), they also have the authority to mark their assignments, leading to difficult boundary issues as a result of holding multiple relationships with students (Oberlander & Barnett, 2005). Multiple relationships are quite common in certain disciplines, like psychology, and therefore mental health professionals have adequate training about how to cope with these situations. Nevertheless, Oberland and Barnett (2005) argue that while these situations often occur for GTAs, they have little to no training in managing them. Many GTAs start teaching before being properly trained and are expected to learn from their own experience of being a student or from working with more experienced colleagues, meaning that they are thrown

in at the deep end of managing relationships with students and staff and when navigating the classroom.

Essential in these considerations is the role of power and who has the autonomy and authority to make decisions about teaching practice and research that is carried out collaboratively. Indeed, the organization of the university is complex, and as such the power differences between different levels of staff and students are less clear, potentially leading to issues and misunderstandings. Therefore, being aware of and reflecting on the power that operates at multiple levels within student-GTA-staff relationships is essential to optimise the usefulness of such collaborations. Student-staff partnership work suggests that engaging with challenging power dynamics within the traditional student-staff dynamic can be both challenging and transformative for staff and students, potentially revealing how power operates in other dynamics as well (Cook-Sather, 2014). While power dynamics are often thought of in a linear, hierarchical way, perhaps the unique position of GTAs calls for a more dynamic, nuanced understanding of how power operates in the university where different stakeholders are simultaneously holding different roles and relationships with other stakeholders. By reflecting on the role of power and exploitation in universities, GTAs can begin to consider the kinds of relationships they want to create with students and staff, both as GTAs but also as more established academics.

3 Implications for GTA practice

GTAs are often assumed to be enthusiastic, motivated teachers, who are passionate about the material they teach. And teacher enthusiasm means positive outcomes for

students: their enjoyment, interest, achievement and motivation all increase (König, 2020 and references therein). However, as noted above, early research into the role of the GTA found that, in the UK, GTAs' primary motivation was often financial (this was contrasted with what were assumed to be more intrinsically motivated GTAs in the US, where the role is an established one and a recognised step to becoming an academic) (Park, 2004). Motives for taking on a GTA role are likely no longer so divided; nevertheless, a more recent study by Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko (2020a) looked at motivations of GTAs in a research-intensive institution in Israel and found that the majority were driven by extrinsic motives such as income and convenient work (p. 552).

In terms of the implication of this on teaching practice, the study found that an individual's reasons for taking on a GTA position are an important predicator of the benefits that they would gain from it, with those who identified intrinsic motives tending to report having benefitted more from their experience (p. 548). In addition, those GTAs who articulated an interest in teaching were more likely to invest time and effort in their work, leading to improved instructional and interpersonal skills, enhanced subject matter mastery, and greater self-confidence (Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko 2020a, p. 548).

Motivation is evidently an important factor in teaching, but it does not necessarily equate with confidence and self-perceived competency. In a linked piece of research into GTAs which this time explored their concerns, Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko (2020b) found that the majority of GTAs they questioned expressed reservations regarding

pedagogical skills and subject matter mastery (p. 8). Interestingly, GTAs from social sciences and humanities showed more concern for competency as compared to those who taught in the mathematical and life sciences, which the authors of the study equated to the difference in the type of teaching undertaken. GTAs in arts, humanities and social sciences were more likely to be leading discussions than those in the sciences, requiring them to be more flexible and creative to stimulate learning, in turn necessitating – or so the GTAs might believe – a higher degree of pedagogical competence (p. 13).

Across the disciplines, whether lab demonstrating, leading discussion groups, assessing students' work or supporting learning in a different format, most GTAs will be working with relatively limited autonomy over the material they are teaching. The implication of this on their practice can differ: for some GTAs working within a relatively bounded framework may help counter concerns about competency and help increase their confidence, while for others the lack of flexibility may actually decrease motivation for those with an interest in teaching. As noted above, the lack of clarity and perceived liminality of the GTA position is an important factor in their experience and will certainly also have implications for their practice as teachers.

It is also recognised that those new to higher education teaching will tend to rely on their own experiences as learners when it comes to their own practice (Oleson & Hora, 2014). GTAs may base their methods on what worked for them when they were students, or try to model the behaviour of a preferred lecturer or academic; likewise, of

course, they may also be trying to do everything they can *not* to teach in the ways that they experienced as learners! A study undertaken in a large research-intensive university in the Asia-Pacific region sought to explore whether it was possible to shape and mould GTA teaching practices away from reliance on experience through a teacher development programme (Shum, Lau & Fryer, 2020). The study found GTAs' teaching approaches and self-efficacy to be malleable. Disciplinary differences in teaching approach were observed at the outset of the training course, but not at the end, suggesting the importance of training and development opportunities for early career HE teachers (p. 13).

This is supported by research in the UK, which found that when GTAs engage with training, they find it useful in preparing them for their role (NUS, 2013, p. 24). However, in the 2018 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), only 69% of respondents said they had received formal training for their teaching – meaning that 31% had not – and only 59% agreed that they had been given appropriate support and guidance for their teaching (Neves, 2018, p. 15).

Beyond formal training programmes – or where these do not exist – mentoring and professional interpersonal interactions are considered essential to GTAs' development (Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2020a). Peer interactions, whether facilitated through training programmes or emerging more organically, can often provide the most effective location of support and guidance for GTAs. Networks and peer communities in which challenges are shared, best practice ideas exchanged, and professional relationships developed are considered highly beneficial in GTA development (Wise, 2011). One of the aims

of this journal is to offer a space which provides just such a network and community of peers.

Finally, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the input of GTAs has become even more essential to the successful delivery of university teaching (Cornell, 2020). While GTAs are instrumental to supporting online learning, their role should not be instrumentalised to neglect developmental and challenging experiences (Austin, 2002). It is, therefore, more important than ever before that we provide a space for conversations about GTA teaching practices and the role more broadly. It is our hope that *Postgraduate Pedagogies* will contribute to these conversations and provide a platform for GTAs to reflect on and interrogate their experiences and develop their practice as educators.

Introducing the articles in this issue

In the first contribution to this inaugural issue of *Postgraduate Pedagogies*, entitled 'Class Act: Reflections on a working-class academic sense of self as a Graduate Teaching Assistant', Alex Hastie (Coventry University) reflects on his own experiences as a working-class GTA in a Russell Group institution to highlight that what is currently missing from the GTA scholarship is a consideration of what it means to be a working-class GTA. While work on GTAs continues to grow, including that relating to identity, there remains an absence of working-class voices in research on GTAs. He calls for a more central consideration of class in discussions of GTAs and offers suggestions for future research and debate.

The next contribution by Rowan Jaines, at the University of Sheffield, is titled 'Perverse Relationships: The Graduate

Teaching Assistant in the Neoliberal University'. Rowan centres the liminal position of Graduate Teaching Assistants in neoliberal universities, conceptualizing their in-betweenness as 'invisibility', using this to have a broader discussion about the centrality (and yet perversity) of GTA labour and its possibilities as a site of resistance.

Manuela Irarrazabal Elliott (University College London) and Jenny Marie (University of Greenwich) reflect on the role of GTAs in Student-Staff Partnerships in in their contribution 'Advancing student-staff partnership through the unique position of GTAs'. They argue that GTAs' unique liminal position allows them to better bridge the perspectives of staff and students, such that they can play an important role mediating between the two and providing invaluable insight to teaching and learning enhancement.

Lauren Clark (University College London, Institute of Education) follows directly from this by centring power relations in her contribution 'Bridging the Power Gap: GTAs and Student-Staff Partnership'. She argues that the concept of partnership can be challenging for staff and students alike who may be more accustomed to a hierarchical power dynamic but finds that GTAs are uniquely positioned to enable student-staff partnerships to empower both students and staff to learn from each other and produce innovative research and ideas.

Frances Brill (University of Cambridge) and Sarah Kunz (University of Bristol) turn the focus on teaching beyond the classroom with their essay 'Teaching outside the classroom: the contributions and challenges of GTA teaching on

fieldtrips'. They discuss their own experiences as GTAs on fieldtrips, and identify the benefits for students, faculty, and the GTA, whilst also highlighting some of the challenges involved. For the potential benefits of GTA teaching on fieldtrips to be best realised, they offer a number of concrete suggestions for academic departments, the staff leading fieldtrips and GTAs themselves on how to prepare and implement fieldtrips.

Hannah Mathers, Pamela Rattigan, Alice Lacsny, Natalie Marr, and Allan Hollinsworth (all University of Glasgow) conclude this inaugural issue with their reflective essay on 'The value of teaching observations for the development of GTA educator identity'. Their paper presents a model for the integration of teaching observations (TOs) and associated reflective practice into GTA development that will help to build confidence, self-evaluation and the notion of evolving pedagogic practice into GTA teaching methodology. Drawing on experience from the sciences and social sciences, and the perspectives of both the observer and observed, they reflect on a number of ways in which engagement with an observation process can be pivotal in GTA identity formation and participation in the wider teaching community. They end the article with recommendations for GTA-stage relevant training and development by classifying GTA experience under three terms they have defined as: 'hatchling', 'fledgling' and 'on the wing'.

References

Austin, A.E. (2002). Preparing the next generation of faculty. *The Journal of Higher Education, 73*(1), pp. 94-122.

Biaggio, M., Paget, T. L., & Chenoweth, M. S. (1997). A model for ethical management of faculty-student dual relationships. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, *28*, 184–189.

Chadha, D. (2013). Postgraduates as teachers: exploring expectations and highlighting disciplinary differences. *Practice and Evidence of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, *8*(2), SEDA/PESTLHE Special Issue, 93–103.

Cho, Y., Kim, M., Svinicki, M. & Lowry Decker, M. (2011). Exploring teaching concerns and characteristics of graduate teaching assistants. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *16*(3), 267-279, DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2010.524920

Cook-Sather, A. (2014). Student-faculty partnership in explorations of pedagogical practice: A threshold concept in academic development. *International Journal of Academic Development, 19*(3), 186-198.

Compton, M., & Tran, D. (2017). Liminal space or in limbo? Post Graduate Researchers and their personal pie charts of identity. *Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching*, *10*(3), DOI: 10.21100/compass.v10i3.620

Cornell, B. (2020). How best can we use Graduate Teaching Assistants during the COVID-19 pandemic? Available online at https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/06/15/how-can-we-best-use-

graduate-teaching-assistants-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/ [last accessed 22 June 2021]

Fielding, M. (1999). Radical collegiality: Affirming teaching as an inclusive professional practice. *Australian Educational Researcher, 26*(2), pp. 1-34.

König, L. (2020). Podcasts in higher education: teacher enthusiasm increases students' excitement, interest, enjoyment, and learning motivation. *Educational Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/03055698.2019.1706040

Lee, A., Pettigrove, M. & Fuller, M. (eds.) (2010). *Preparing to Teach in Higher Education*. Lichfield: UK Council for Graduate Education.

Lee, H. J., Hong, Y., & Choi, H. (2017). Perceptions of tutoring roles and psychological distance among instructors, tutors and students at a Korean university. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *36*(1), 143–157.

Muzaka, V. (2009). The niche of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs): Perceptions and reflections. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *14*, 1–12.

Nasser-Abu Alhija, F. & Fresko, B. (2020a). Graduate teaching assistants: motives, difficulties and professional interactions and their relationship to perceived benefits. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *39*(3), 546-560, DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2019.1681374

Nasser-Abu Alhija, F. & Fresko, B. (2020b). Challenges of being a graduate teaching assistant. *Higher Education*

Research &
Development, DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2020.1806790

Neves, J. (2018). 2018 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. AdvanceHE. Available online at https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/Advance%20HE%20PRES%202018%20results%20report%20final_3.pdf [last accessed 21 June 2021].

NUS (2013). Postgraduates Who Teach. Available online at https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/postgraduates-who-teach-2013 [last accessed 21 June 2021].

Oberlander, S.E. & Barnett, J.E. (2005). Multiple relationships between graduate assistants and students: Ethical and practical considerations. *Ethics & Behavior*, *15*(1), 49-63.

Oleson, A., & Hora, M. T. (2014). Teaching the way they were taught? Revisiting the sources of teaching knowledge and the role of prior experience in shaping faculty teaching practices. *Higher Education*, *68*(1), 29–45. DOI: 10.1007/s10734-013-9678-9

ONS, 2016. How has the student population changed? Available online at https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/articles/howhasthestudentpopulationchanged/2016-09-20 [last accessed 22 June 2021].

Park, C. (2004). The graduate teaching assistant (GTA): Lessons from North American experience. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *9*(3), 349–361.

Park, C., & Ramos, M. (2002). The donkey in the department? Insights into the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) experience in the UK. *Journal of Graduate Education, 3*, 47–53.

Shum, A., Lau, P. & Fryer, L. (2020). From learner to teacher: (re)training graduate teaching assistants' teaching approaches and developing self-efficacy for and interest in teaching. *Higher Education Research & Development*. DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2020.1818063

University and College Union (UCU) (2016). Workload is an education issue: UCU Workload Survey Report 2016. Available online at https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8195/Workload-is-an-education-issue-UCU-workload-survey-report-2016/pdf/ucu_workloadsurvey_fullreport_jun16.pdf [last accessed 12 June 2021]

University and College Union (UCU) (2020). Second class academic citizens: The dehumanising effects of casualisation in higher education. Available online at https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10681/Second-class-academic-citizens-Jan-20/pdf/2nd_class_citizens_HE_cas_report_Jan20.pdf [last accessed 12 June 2021]

University and College Union (UCUa) (2021). Stamp out casual contracts. Available online at: https://www.ucu.org.uk/stampout [last accessed 12 June 2021]

University and College Union (UCUb) (2021). *It's your time - UCU workload campaign*. Available online at https://www.ucu.org.uk/workloadcampaign [last accessed 12 June 2021]

Winstone, N., & Moore, D. (2017). Sometimes fish, sometimes fowl? Liminality, identity work and identity malleability in graduate teaching assistants. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *54*(5), 494–502.

Wise, A. (2011). Supporting future faculty in developing their teaching practices: An exploration of communication networks among graduate teaching assistants. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, *23*(2), 135–149

Class Act: Reflections on a working-class academic sense of self as a Graduate Teaching Assistant

Alex Hastie, Coventry University, UK

Abstract

This article provides insights into the social class position of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) in UK Higher Education. It does so through reflecting on the author's experiences of teaching undergraduate students as a GTA. Variously described as 'the donkey in the department' and 'peacekeepers' in neoliberalised universities, GTAs perform a crucial teaching role in many academic departments. Currently missing from this scholarship is the consideration of what it means to be a working-class GTA. Whilst work on GTAs continues to grow, there remains an absence of working-class voices in postgraduate pedagogies. This paper then, reflects on what this future research might look like for those straddling these boundaries between student and academic, working-class and middle-class. To do so, it will go beyond the existing GTA scholarship to explore more broadly what it means to be a working-class academic and working-class student. This article will reflect on the tensions involved in tenuously identifying and 'performing' as both an academic and working-class. It will also examine the positive aspects brought to the classroom by the GTA's 'liminal' class position such as so-called 'approachability', and what the impacts of the job are on the production of working-class

academic ‘selfhood’. In doing so, the paper’s main argument is that the GTA role is one through which working-class PhD students can successfully ‘become’ academics and develop a confident academic sense of self.

Keywords: Graduate Teaching Assistants; working-class; identity; liminality

Introduction

> I cannot move among the rich, the condescending, the ones who can turn me into an object of study with a glance or a word, cannot speak like them, learn their ways, and share them with my family without being disloyal to someone (Black, 1995: 25).

Scholars have been writing about Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) for the best part of 25 years. Variously described as 'the donkey in the department' (Park and Ramos, 2002) and 'peacekeepers' in neoliberalised universities (Raaper, 2018), GTAs perform a crucial teaching role in many academic departments. Juggling responsibilities such as running seminars and marking undergraduate exams with their own doctoral research, many authors have identified the 'liminal' (Keefer, 2015; Winstone and Moore, 2017) status of GTAs, who occupy a role between student and teacher. This is a logical interpretation, with GTAs not only managing the logistics of their PhDs and teaching workloads, but their 'emerging professional identity' (Winstone and Moore, 2017) and expectations of 'becoming' an academic. Currently missing from this scholarship is the consideration of what it means to be a working-class GTA. Whilst work on GTAs continues to grow, including work relating to identity (Lusher, Campbell, and Carrell, 2018; Collins, 2019), there remains an absence of working-class voices in postgraduate pedagogies. This paper then, reflects on what this future research might look like for those straddling these boundaries between student and academic, working-class and middle-class.

This paper draws on my own experiences of feeling in-between whilst working as a GTA at a UK university. This 'in-betweenness', as I will go on to explain, is experienced not only between roles as PhD student and teacher, but also between perceived feelings of being working-class and middle-class. To do so, I will go beyond the existing GTA scholarship to explore more broadly what it means to be a working-class academic (Brook and Mitchell, 2012; Crew, 2020) and working-class student (Reay et al, 2009; Ingram, 2011; Lehmann, 2014). Bringing this literature together, alongside my own reflections and experiences, will also provide original insights into the social class position of GTAs in UK Higher Education. This article will reflect on the tensions involved in tenuously identifying and 'performing' as both an academic and working-class. It will also examine the positive aspects brought to the classroom by the GTA's 'liminal' class position such as so-called 'approachability', and what the impacts of the job are on the production of working-class academic 'selfhood'. In doing so, the paper's main argument is that the GTA role is one through which working-class PhD students can successfully 'become' academics and develop a confident academic sense of self.

This article will first briefly introduce GTAs, highlighting some departure points; secondly, it will outline where we can learn from scholarship on working-class academics and students; thirdly, it will reflect on three main issues relating to performativity, approachability, and self-hood; and finally, it will offer opportunities and suggestions for future work in this area.

Graduate Teaching Assistants and their students

Scholarship pertaining to the experiences of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) is well-established. Park and Ramos' (2002) widely cited findings that GTAs feel like the 'donkey in the department' due to heavy workloads have been influential, inspiring others to explore GTAs' role in the 'neoliberal university' (Raaper, 2018), the negotiation of 'malleable' and 'liminal' GTA identities (Winstone and Moore, 2017), GTAs' role in relation to ethnic diversity and transcultural classrooms (Lusher et al, 2018; Collins, 2019), and to make suggestions to improve GTA working conditions (Chadha, 2013; Jordan and Howe, 2018). Underpinning much of this work are theories of liminality and subjectivity, increasingly within the context of the neoliberalisation and marketisation of higher education. For example, Raaper (2018) takes a Foucauldian approach, looking at the production of a GTA 'subjectivity' shaped by the forces of casualisation, resilience, and individual choices. Winstone and Moore (2017) deploy the term 'liminality' to describe the 'multiple identities' that GTAs are able to forge as they occupy roles between student and teacher. I argue that what is missing from this work are the experiences and voices of working-class GTAs, and a consideration of the GTA role as one that facilitates 'becoming', or as Winstone and Moore (2017) put it, the 'emerging self', for specifically working-class PhD students. In order to take this forward, I will draw on wider scholarship about working-class academics and students (Ingram, 2011; Brook and Michell, 2012; Crew,

2020) to better understand and situate the position of working-class GTAs.

I want to start with findings by Roach (1997: 137) that suggest "TAs should dress more professionally when they are in the role of instructor". Roach (1997) finds that there is a positive correlation between what he calls 'professional' attire and student engagement and behaviour. I want to take my contention with this argument as my starting point because, whilst dated, it raises many issues about the class positions of GTAs, and academics more broadly, as well as their students. First, the claim that GTAs not only need to dress professionally, but also are required to 'act' in ways 'appropriate' to the role raises questions of what 'professional' and 'appropriate' look like in academia, and who gets to define them. Second, Roach's observation that 'attire can indicate attitudes, values and personality' is obvious, but the implication here is that 'less professional' clothing represents values that are unwelcome inside the classroom. Roach (1997) ultimately goes on to argue that 'casually' or 'sloppily' dressed TAs promote lower levels of engagement and learning, which in my experience as a working-class student, GTA and now lecturer, who both dresses 'casually' and has been taught by casually dressed GTAs and professors, does not ring true. Underpinning this, then, are assumptions about the class identities of the students we teach, which have changed dramatically in the UK over the last 20 years, with a sharp increase in working-class and first-generation students going to university. According to Universities UK, there was a 7.8% increase between 2010 and 2019 in UK 18-year-olds from low

participation neighbourhoods accepted into full-time undergraduate degree study. How do these increasing numbers of students respond to different GTAs that do not fit the 'professional' model that Roach (1997) presents?

Surprisingly little scholarship exists on the relationship between working-class students and their GTAs, though Kendall and Schussler (2012) do find that students indeed view tenured lecturers/professors and GTAs differently. They found that students view their professors as 'confident', 'knowledgeable', and 'formal', compared to their more 'relaxed', 'engaging' and 'relatable' GTAs. We might also learn something from Lusher, Campbell, and Carrell's (2018) insights into the relationship between student outcomes and the ethnicity of GTAs in the USA. They find that, in the context of a shift in the ethnic and racial composition of students at US universities, students achieve better grades when they are assigned a GTA of similar ethnicity. Furthermore, they suggest that minority ethnic GTAs provide a role model for minority ethnic students who feel out of place. Similarly, Collins (2019) argues that the diversity of graduate teachers' ethnic and national backgrounds, and their diverse values, attitudes, and personalities to use Roach's (1997) terms, fosters 'transcultural and collectivist exchanges in the classroom' (Collins, 2019). They argue that international GTAs bring positive resources, including language, and different perspectives and approaches to teaching that work to highlight identity, reduce power asymmetries in the classroom, and develop practices that challenge the hegemony of Western systems of education and institutional expectations. To use Kendall and Schussler's

(2012) words then, instructor type *does* matter. In short, we need to pay attention to the identities of our GTAs, and think about how this might impact on our students.

Working-Class Students and Academics

What have scholars said about working-class students at university? And how might this help us to understand and centre the experiences of working-class GTAs? At the heart of work in this area, using the work of Pierre Bourdieu, is a sense that working-class students in 'elite' educational settings are, perhaps, like the working-class GTA, conflicted, in-between, and disconnected. Upon entering a new and unfamiliar education 'field', one that is in perceived conflict with the working-class 'field of origin' (reasons for which will become clear), working-class students are likely to find difficulties in reconciling, as Ingram (2011) puts it in the context of school-level students, being 'working-class' and 'educationally successful'. Others similarly describe working-class student experiences of 'elite' universities as difficult, with challenges in maintaining connections to their working-class backgrounds (Reay et al, 2009), and that unlike for middle-class students this involves a 'fundamental breaking away' from their home communities (Lehmann, 2013). Langhout et al. (2009) echo this, identifying that lower levels of belonging are a direct result of being subjected to classism, which included discriminatory remarks but also institutional policies and procedures, at university.

Whilst the majority of this scholarship focuses on 'elite' settings, Read, Archer and Leathwood (2003) write about similar feelings of '(not) belonging' and 'isolation' at Post-

1992 institutions (polytechnic institutions that became universities in 1992, and are often distinguished from older and Russell Group universities due to their offering of vocational subjects like nursing). Interestingly, they argue that working-class students negotiate belonging and isolation by choosing a university where they expect they might feel more at home because of a greater number of other 'non-traditional' university students. Other scholars point to some working-class students who are able to successfully negotiate two (maybe more) fields of working-class community and middle-class education, building up a self-awareness and resilience (Reay et al, 2009), growing new cultural capital, tastes and dispositions in order to 'fit in' (Lehmann, 2013), and 'modifying' their identity in order to succeed (Ingram, 2011). There is thus a focus within this literature on 'successful' working-class students. What about those who struggle to negotiate these complex and challenging differences in educational fields? Should they/we have to conform in order to fit in?

Imposter syndrome is a term that gets used a lot in academia, to describe feelings of inferiority or of feeling 'out of place' amongst both undergraduate and postgraduate students, and academics, often along lines of class but also gender, ethnicity (Peteet et al, 2014), sexuality, disability and amid an increasingly competitive environment for jobs, security, recognition and grants. Whilst often defined as an individual or private problem characterised by feelings of 'fraud' and 'inauthenticity', Breeze (2018) argues that imposter syndrome must be rethought as a 'public feeling' in the socio-political context of the neoliberal landscape of HE,

and mobilised as a catalyst for political change. In the context of this paper, and this scholarship, Mallman (2017) interestingly uses the legal term 'inherent vice' as a metaphor for the feelings of 'natural inferiority' amongst working-class university students. Responsibility, Mallman argues, for educational success is placed on the individual student, rather than on the structural disadvantage and lack of 'inheritable, symbolic resources' and access to the necessary 'techniques of selfhood' in the elite educational field. Similarly, Jack (2016) discusses the lack of confidence and understanding in working-class students to engage with their lecturers as authority figures, something which middle-class students do more effectively, resulting in potentially better grades, career prospects, and opportunities for personal and intellectual development. But what does this have to do with working-class GTAs?

Representation matters, for both students and (early career) academics. As Lusher et al (2018) argue, and as outlined above, students are more likely to engage successfully if being taught by someone 'like them'. This issue has also been a key area of contention for scholars writing about 'working-class' academics. Archer (2008), for example, argues that academic identity is wrapped up with notions of 'authenticity' and 'success', with both being regulated and structured by race, class, and gender. Drawing on Bourdieu (2001), she argues that the academic 'field' is constantly being negotiated as both individuals and groups battle for recognition, with those who identify as working-class, and/or as minority ethnic finding it most challenging to 'inhabit identities of success or authenticity' associated with

academics, in a permanent or legitimate way (Archer, 2008). This ongoing negotiation for working-class academics is also the focus of Crew's (2020) recent book, in which she examines common working-class experiences of academia such as imposter syndrome and alienation. These experiences, whilst common, are not universal and Crew (2020) reminds us, as does Archer (2008), that they need to be carefully examined at the intersections of ethnicity, gender, and dis/ability.

There are both positive and negative aspects of being a 'working-class academic', as many have pointed out, with scholars speaking not just of feelings of inferiority, but also, for example, approachability. This comes back to Kendall and Schussler's (2012) findings, one of which was that students found their GTAs to be more 'relatable' and 'understanding'. This may be because GTAs are often younger and closer to the student experience than more senior members of academic staff. But it might also be because they are working-class. Shepard et al (1998) in their influential edited collection *Coming to Class*, importantly argue that pedagogy can be positively impacted by the working-class background of the teacher. Background shapes how GTAs approach teaching and interact with their students, bringing attention to issues of language, power and inequality in access to education (Brook and Mitchell, 2012). There remains a gap in these literatures, however. Whilst there is plenty of scholarship exploring the experiences of working-class academics and students, this research has so far neglected the importance of the GTA role in the working-class academic story. Likewise, whilst work on GTAs continues to grow,

including relating to identity (Lusher, Campbell, and Carrell, 2018; Collins, 2019), there remains an absence of working-class voices in postgraduate pedagogies.

The remainder of this paper then, reflects on what this future research might look like for those straddling these boundaries between student and academic, working-class and middle-class.

Reflections: Performativity, approachability, and self-hood for working-class GTAs

Taking inspiration from these different strands of scholarship, we can ask questions about what might be specific about the working-class GTA experience, focusing on three main points that I think could shape future research and discussions: the notion of performance or performativity; the idea of an 'approachable' working-class academic; and the production of working-class academic self-hood via the GTA role.

What might it mean for a working-class PhD student, undertaking work as a GTA, to 'perform' an academic role? As a working-class former GTA, I felt the pressure to 'pass' as an academic with my students in the classroom. This pressure, for me at least, was not as heavy as it was and remains in research settings such as conferences, with their requirements of asking the 'right' questions, and perhaps most unsettling, 'networking'. Archer (2008) identifies the pressure to publish and win grants as one of the main things that regulate the ways early career academics see themselves as 'successful', 'legitimate', or 'authentic' academics. Studying for a PhD and working as a GTA at a 'Russell Group' university in the UK, on modules that were

led by well-respected academics (who(m) I perceived as mostly middle-class – meaning they were 'well-spoken', well educated, and had what I saw as middle-class cultural tastes), came with its own pressures. There was a standard, or a reputation, to maintain, and expectations from academics and students to be met. Aside from this, a big pressure and point at which 'performing' was most important to me, was as a GTA in front of mostly white middle-class students. Despite being older than them, and studying for a PhD, it was hard at first to shake off the feeling that it would be my students, not the professors or my peers, that would 'find me out'. Only a few years before, as a student myself studying for both undergraduate and Masters Degrees, it had been middle-class students who made me feel out of place, who mocked my accent and childhood experiences. My response to this as a new GTA was to do what Roach (1997) suggested: I dressed smart, I conveyed what I thought were the 'proper' attitudes, I even pronounced my Ts and softened my vowels (as a working-class Mancunian, I drop my Ts and flatten or harshen my vowels). Did I convince them? Is this what they wanted to hear?

I don't think so. As I became more experienced in the classroom, working mainly with first years, I began to drop the charade. I noticed that despite their 'ideal' class backgrounds, many students were struggling with some of the more difficult concepts on their modules, with reading academic papers and with developing relationships with their professors and each other. Rather than being another obstacle, I decided I would try to be more approachable. Whether right or wrong, I interpreted this to mean speaking

in my normal accent, perhaps even exaggerating it at times (another kind of performance?), dressing more casually, drawing their attention to the barriers in/to academia such as classism and racism, to the often inaccessible and complex ways some academic papers were written. This brings us back to Jack's (2016) argument, as they highlight student anxiety around asking for help, and the disparity between working-class and middle-class students in doing so. My 'liminal' class position, in-between my Manchester council estate upbringing and (potentially) middle-class future, was useful in building a bridge not just for the students into a more successful and welcoming student life (whether they were working-class or not), but for myself, into a more 'authentic' academic life.

What does authentic mean in this context? For me, I knew that I was OK at teaching – or at least more comfortable in this setting than in spaces concerning research, despite being there to complete a PhD. Conferences and research seminars fill(ed) me with dread. The expectation to network with people who I perceive(d) to be smarter than me, who had a wider vocabulary than me, had the 'right' cultural capital, backgrounds, experiences, and stories, was and is something that makes me feel very unwelcome in academia. What teaching as a GTA gave me was some confidence. It gave me the opportunity to express myself as an academic beyond what I perceive(d) as bourgeois social events where academics would make connections, jostle for influence, know how to behave, talk, gain advantages and ultimately 'play the game'.

Teaching remains undervalued in academia. Though we now have the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), the Research Excellence Framework (REF) remains the most 'important' tool for measuring academic impact and success. Whilst academics at 'Russell Group' and other 'elite' institutions fight for research time, grants to buy them out of teaching, and pass many seminar and marking responsibilities onto GTAs due to the pressure to deliver impactful research, posts at post-92 institutions are predominantly teaching-focused. The prestige remains with the former, with post-92 or 'new' universities looked down upon by some (not all) employers, students and academics. GTAs are used less in post-1992 institutions, with less research pressure on permanent academics who have more time in their workload to teach their students. These differences raise some questions for what kinds of spaces there are for working-class academics, given my own reflections on the potential for teaching, specifically GTA work, for the production of working-class identity in the academy. How do working-class doctoral students 'become' 'successful' academics and how might this differ? Can they conform and fit in at research seminars and conference wine receptions? Or are they relying on the space of the classroom to find a more 'authentic' academic self? And if so, is it about time we recognised not just the value of our GTAs, but of teaching as a pillar of academic success?

Conclusion: Routes for further research and for working-class GTAs

The GTA role is an important one for working-class doctoral students. Whilst critics are right to point out the many flaws that exist within the system, largely owing to the neoliberal

machine that drives our sector, the role of GTAs is vital not only to academic departments but also to doctoral students who undertake the work. Not only does it provide often much needed financial support for those without the economic capital, but also a vital opportunity for the production of academic self-hood. Amidst increasing competition for secure jobs and grants, and the associated increasing pressure to publish, the GTA experience is one that has the potential to help develop important pedagogical skills.

This article did not set out to provide answers to the question of how working-class students can transition into working-class academics. Instead, the article is intended as a starting point for a much-needed conversation about, and among, working-class doctoral students. This is particularly important at a time when universities and academic departments are facing increasing financial pressures, potentially cutting diversity and inclusion measures (to the limited extent they even exist), cutting GTA jobs and reducing support available to GTAs, or in some cases making more expensive permanent staff redundant and relying increasingly on GTA teaching. This article has begun to carve out space for further research into the experiences of working-class Graduate Teaching Assistants, insisting that working-class voices (and other disadvantaged groups in HE) be heard at the Postgraduate level. It has also sought to give other working-class GTAs some insight into my own experiences and a potential opportunity for self-recognition. I do not expect these experiences to be universal, but in sharing them I hope to encourage other working-class GTAs and doctoral students to

articulate and improve their academic experiences. The GTA role can improve to provide opportunities for academic self-hood that may anchor working-class doctoral students in a stormy middle-class world.

References

Archer, L., 2008. Younger academics' constructions of 'authenticity', 'success' and professional identity. *Studies in higher education*, *33*(4), pp.385-403.

Black, L.J. 1995. "Stupid rich bastards". In *This fine place so far from home*, Edited by: Dews, C.L.B. and Law, C.L. 13–25. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Breeze, M. 2018. Imposter syndrome as public feeling. In Y. Taylor, & K. Lahad (Eds.) *Feeling aca-demic in the neoliberal university: Feminist flights, fights, and failures* (pp. 191–219). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan

Brook, H. and Michell, D., 2012. Learners, learning, learned: Class, higher education, and autobiographical essays from working-class academics. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, *34*(6), pp.587-599.

Bourdieu, P. 2004. "The forms of capital" in S. Ball (Ed.), *Reader in sociology of education* (pp.15–29). London: Routledge Falmer.

Chadha, D., 2013. Reconceptualising and reframing graduate teaching assistant (GTA) provision for a research-intensive institution. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *18*(2), pp.205-217.

Collins, J., 2019. Towards postcolonial pedagogies: How graduate teaching assistants foster collectivism and

transcultural classrooms. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, pp.1-11.

Crew, T. 2020 *Higher Education and Working-Class Academics: Precarity and Diversity in Academia*. Palgrave Pivot.

Dews, C. L 1995 *This Fine Place So Far from Home: Voices of Academics from the Working Class*

Ingram, N., 2011. Within school and beyond the gate: The complexities of being educationally successful and working class. *Sociology*, *45*(2), pp.287-302.

Jack, A.A., 2016. (No) harm in asking: Class, acquired cultural capital, and academic engagement at an elite university. *Sociology of Education*, *89*(1), pp.1-19.

Jordan, K. and Howe, C., 2018. The perceived benefits and problems associated with teaching activities undertaken by doctoral students. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *23*(4), pp.504-521.

Keefer, J. M. 2015. Experiencing doctoral liminality as a conceptual threshold and how supervisors can use it. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 52,* 17-28.

Kendall, K.D. and Schussler, E.E., 2012. Does instructor type matter? Undergraduate student perception of graduate teaching assistants and professors. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 11(2), pp.187-199.

Langhout, R. D., Drake, P., & Rosselli, F. 2009. Classism in the university setting: Examining student antecedents and outcomes. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 2(3), 166–181.

Lehmann, W., 2014. Habitus transformation and hidden injuries: Successful working-class university students. *Sociology of education*, *87*(1), pp.1-15.

Lusher, L., Campbell, D. and Carrell, S., 2018. TAs like me: Racial interactions between graduate teaching assistants and undergraduates. *Journal of Public Economics*, *159*, pp.203-224.

Mallman, M., 2017. The perceived inherent vice of working-class university students. *The Sociological Review*, *65*(2), pp.235-250.

Park, C. and Ramos, M., 2002. The donkey in the department? Insights into the graduate teaching assistant (GTA) experience in the UK. *Journal of Graduate Education*, *3*(2), pp.47-53.

Peteet, B. J., Brown, C. M., Lige, Q. M., & Lanaway, D. A. 2014. Impostorism is associated with greater psychological distress and lower self-esteem for African American students. *Current Psychology*, 34(1), 154–163

Raaper, R., 2018. 'Peacekeepers' and 'machine factories': tracing Graduate Teaching Assistant subjectivity in a neoliberalised university. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *39*(4), pp.421-435.

Read, B., Archer, L., & Leathwood, C. 2003. Challenging cultures? Student conceptions of belonging and isolation at a post-1992 university. *Studies in Higher Education*, 28(3), 261–277.

Reay, D., Crozier, G. and Clayton, J., 2009. 'Strangers in paradise'? Working-class students in elite universities. *Sociology*, *43*(6), pp.1103-1121.

Reay, D., Crozier, G. and Clayton, J., 2010. 'Fitting in' or 'standing out': Working-class students in UK higher education. *British educational research journal*, *36*(1), pp.107-124.

Roach, K.D., 1997. Effects of graduate teaching assistant attire on student learning, misbehaviors, and ratings of instruction. *Communication Quarterly*, *45*(3), pp.125-141.

Shepard, A., McMillan, J. and Tate, G., 1998. Coming to class: Pedagogy and the social class of teachers, (pp. 231-251). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton.

Winstone, N. and Moore, D., 2017. Sometimes fish, sometimes fowl? Liminality, identity work and identity malleability in graduate teaching assistants. *Innovations in education and teaching international*, *54*(5), pp.494-502.

Perverse Relationships: The Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Neoliberal University

Rowan Jaines, University of Sheffield, UK

Abstract

The ambiguous nature of the role of the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) has been the focus of much of the – albeit limited – research regarding these higher education labourers. Previous analyses of the GTA have made use of Foucault's theories of subject formation within the neoliberal university. Walter Benjamin's metaphysics of transcendence offer a complementary theoretical framing: a space to glimpse the possibility of radical alterity within the GTA role. It is in phenomena such as the GTA role – rendered ambiguous by its synonymous importance and invisibility – that hope for change resides. The disconnections between these phenomena materialise in the perverse site of the neoliberal university: a site where relationships are twisted beyond recognition. The GTA role, when read against the myth of a progressive academic career, contains the possibility of change. This possibility is to be found within labour relationships within the neoliberal academy. GTAs' liminal status presents the opportunity to reimagine the contracts of reciprocity upon which pedagogy and research depend.

Introducing the Invisible

Perhaps the most vivid metaphors have been supplied by Chris Park who frames GTAs as 'neither fish nor fowl' (2002, p. 60) within the organisational and imaginative structure of UK universities. This liminality, the 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1964) state of the GTA role does not only characterise those uncertainties attributable to all transitional roles. Rather, this article considers the liminal position of the GTA as a specific form of invisibility; a blind spot which the logic of the neoliberal university proliferates as an absence.

I focus here on a myth of the doctorate as an apprenticeship. Within this evolutionary model of an academic career, low-paid teaching work appears as an 'opportunity for development' (Weidert et al., 2012). In this piece I read this progressive narrative against the grain. What shadows are cast on this myth by the material of the current moment?

Following changes to UK higher education funding in 2012, the GTA role has become increasingly important within academic departments. Undergraduate courses have exponentially inflated both cohort numbers and tuition fees since 2012. Departments have used casually-employed doctoral researchers in order to respond flexibly to heightened demands for undergraduate teaching hours. However, both the wider context and detail regarding the specific way that GTA employment operates is obscured by a failure to consider this role as separate to the more widespread use of casual and precarious academic staff. In this paper, this blind spot is read through the COVID-19 crisis

as a force that renders GTA workers invisible to wider systems of support.

Previous analyses of the GTA have made use of Foucault's theories of subject formation within the neoliberal university (see Gill, 2014; Gill & Donaghue, 2016; Raaper, 2018; Rao, Hosein & Raaper, 2021). Focusing on ideas of power and agency within the culture of UK higher education, this body of work has introduced important discussions regarding the interrelated nature of GTAs' self-perceptions and the structural context of the university. This article aims to contribute to these debates through implementing an alternative understanding of change within UK universities.

In Foucault's neo-Kantian metaphysics, material is immanent and time is teleological (see Gordon, 1986; Miller, 1994; Dupré, 1998). Put another way, in the world as described by Foucault everything that might happen is already present within experience. Progress occurs through the increased agency granted to the subject, as multiple phenomena are identified within things that appear as singular objects. This is a world where things – multiple though they may be – follow on from each other. In short, Foucault's model of progress can be seen as an iteration of Kant's: a theology of human development which is directly correlated with the growth of taxonomic systems. These "knowledges" (Foucault, 1980) offer little in the way of hope, being as they are documents of the order of things *as they are*.

This paper proposes that Walter Benjamin's (1921) metaphysics of transcendence offers a complementary theoretical framing: a space to glimpse the possibility of

radical alterity within the GTA role. For Benjamin, the chance for the world to be different is present in every moment. These chances are held in things that have slipped out of view, concealed by myths that make the world as it is seem inevitable (see Leslie, 2000; Weber, 2008). It is in phenomena such as the GTA role – which I explore in this article as both central to the current business model of higher education, and invisible within its documented structures – that hope for change resides.

My aim is not to illuminate something previously unseen or to convince the reader of a position through a neat narrative. The intention is rather to place the image of an academic apprenticeship next to two other images. The first, as mentioned above, appears as an increased reliance on GTAs in the provision of undergraduate teaching. The second is the concomitant decrease in secure roles for doctoral researchers in the postdoctoral period.

I discuss the disconnections between these phenomena materialising in the perverse site of the neoliberal university: a site where relationships are twisted beyond recognition. Far from being a hopeless commentary on the state of contemporary academia, the work of this article is to rupture the constraints of the empty myth of the academic apprentice. This splinter appears as a site of possibility. In the devastation of the myth of the academic apprenticeship, a chance glimmers. I propose here that the GTA has a specific opportunity in the current moment to reimagine relationships within the academy, and in doing so provide hope for new possibilities in pedagogy and research.

The Invisible Academy

When I first began the research for this paper, I asked numerous friends and family if they could think of any representations of GTAs in literature or media. Nobody could think of one. Internet searches also proved fruitless. This absence in popular media of a role that over the past decade has become integral to the undergraduate learning experience, raises the question of whether undergraduate students make a distinction between lecturers and GTAs. Research suggests that whilst undergraduate students perceive GTAs as responsive and broadminded, they are also perceived to be less knowledgeable, confident, and skilful tutors than lecturers (Park, 2002; Dudley, 2009; Muzaka, 2009; Kendall and Schussler, 2012). These studies seem to suggest that when pulled into focus, the GTA appears to undergraduate students as a distinct category of tutor. However, when they are not distinguished as a separate category they disappear, exceeded as they are by the cultural capital of their regularly-employed colleagues.

The myth of the GTA as an academic apprentice positions them as tutors who are not *yet* good enough. The cultural and symbolic capital acquired by the lecturer through the status of their title and occupational security gives their communications a greater legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1991). This myth cultivates a larger field of *not-quite* lecturers whose seemingly second-rate cultural capital is made and perpetuated by precarious working conditions. This cultivation occurs through the naturalised progress narrative in which the GTA moves into a lectureship after passing their doctorate and enjoys the bounty of their accrued cultural

capital. When a stable academic role is aimed for and does not occur in the postdoctoral period, it appears to be due to a deficit in the individual.

Over the past decade, however, there has been an increase in the use of casualised academic staff in UK universities. Vitae's Careers in Research Online Surveys (2015-2019) estimate that although across Europe around three quarters of early career researchers aspire to an academic career, only a small minority will attain this goal. Even if an academic job is attained, it is unlikely to be secure. Vitae gather the views of research staff in UK universities about their career experiences. In recent surveys, 72% reported being employed on a fixed-term contract (although this has declined from 82% in 2009). The proportion in Russell Group institutions was almost 80% across all major disciplinary groups, while at other institutions this varied from 71% in physical and engineering sciences, to 41% in social sciences, and 37% in the arts and humanities. Among those who had completed their doctorate in the previous five years, 86% were employed on a fixed-term contract.

A survey of postdoctoral researchers in the humanities and social sciences found that respondents reported negative personal and professional implications of being employed on a fixed-term basis, including the anxieties and distractions of needing to regularly apply for competitive positions and relocate (University and Colleges Union, 2016). This emotional labour and its subsequent costs performed by these casualised academic teaching staff are laid out in Read and Leathwood's (2020) discussion regarding the implications of casualised academic labour:

> […] key pedagogical difficulties brought up by participants concerned a lack of ability to build longer-term knowledge of/relationship with the students they taught; a lack of involvement in planning or constructing courses on which they taught, and delays in being given course content or information, compounded by the emotional labour of attempting to hide such difficulties from students. Hiding these difficulties can ultimately work to support a conception that the success or failure of a course is primarily down to the qualities and abilities of the individual lecturer, measured and audited through technologies such as student course evaluations and satisfaction surveys. (p. 550)

If the GTA is obscured in research and popular discourse, this is intimately bound up in the shame and stigma of precariously employed postdoctoral colleagues' feelings of shame and illegitimacy. Precariously employed academics in Leathwood's (2013) study expressed valid concerns that students may question their legitimacy due to their contractual status. This led to secrecy regarding their labour conditions, further intensifying the lack of context for students regarding their tutor's position.

The absence of GTA representations in popular media appears within this context as a symptom of a wider obscuration of labour conditions within the higher education sector. There is an unclear boundary regarding what constitutes work: the outer limits of which academia inhabits. The UK university sector is marked by what Bourdieu might call a denied or paradoxical economy. I am

referring here to a system in and through which the prestige and perceived exceptionality of academic work tends to vanish the precarious and often unpaid labour required to sustain the academic institution. Put another way, academic success is often ascribed to 'qualities and abilities of the individual' (Read & Leathwood, 2020, p. 550). The naturalised image of an aptitude, gift, or endowment for scholarly work disavows the socioeconomic context of academic labour, shrouding the whole field in a myth. To be clear, I am describing a mythical university: in which the narrative of a progressive academic apprenticeship, leading to full time employment, forms over another myth. That of the gifted scholar.

The work that GTAs perform for the university sector is obscured not only through their exclusion from popular representation. This work is also eclipsed through its *in*clusion within these wider semi-visible structures of degraded and precarious employment in UK higher education. Although the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects academic labour force statistics, all precarious workers within the university are recorded under one category. This means that the specifics of the GTA context cannot be discerned. HESA does not collect information on the length or type of contracts, nor on the use of hourly-paid staff. It does not compel institutions to report their data on atypical staff in a consistent way.

At this moment, the teaching that PhD students provide is couched as an opportunity for development, and a chance to add experience of higher education teaching to a CV in a competitive job market. Through framing GTA workers as

academic apprentices rather than workers, their labour is imagined as a noneconomic pursuit: in this case as a form of cultural investment. Being neither student nor worker, GTAs cannot protest as students through the normal channels of the consumer. Their future career depends on them acting as good citizens in their home department, providing labour as and when it is needed. But they are not supported and cushioned by the employment laws that protect even their most precarious colleagues. Doctoral researchers in general are placed in a 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1964) state; they are borderline/faultline academic subjects, who cannot claim institutional citizenship and its protections from their employer or the state. Nevertheless, they are subject to demands and judgements from students, academics, university administration and wider social structures in pursuit of a future career.

The structural difference between precariously employed academics and their GTA counterparts became apparent during the COVID-19 epidemic. Many funding bodies such as the ESRC and AHRC provide three years of stipend for doctoral researchers, despite the fact that the deadline for submission of a thesis comes after four years. There is, therefore, an expectation that in the fourth year of a doctorate, a doctoral researcher will be writing up their thesis whilst teaching and marking to support themselves. This is framed as a kind of apprenticeship into scholarly life where papers are produced and research is tied up, whilst working and gaining experience to add to competitive CVs. However, when the 2020 pandemic hit, some GTAs were placed in one of two situations: 1) at universities such as St

Andrews, GTAs were used for the bulk of face-to-face teaching whilst secure staff taught from the safety of home; 2) at many Russell Group universities all GTA work was cancelled in order to attempt to "balance the books" in expectation of dwindling student numbers in the following academic year. What both of these unhappy outcomes revealed was a structural issue. Full-time students are not eligible for Universal Credit unless they meet criteria other than being out of work, such as being ill, disabled or a parent. In short, in and of themselves, GTAs are not seen by wider governmental structures as workers. This vulnerable position renders GTA workers more likely to quietly accept unfavourable working conditions.

Precariously employed postdoctoral academics may hide their contract status due to stigma and shame. They are, however, recognised in the wider social context as workers. They have access to state support if their contract is suddenly terminated, as was the case in universities including Bristol, Newcastle and Sussex in March 2020. On the other hand, GTAs are obscured by forces outside of their control. As I explore in the next sections of this paper, this occurs in a manner that permeates their subject status. UK universities' extensive use of GTAs – who are not eligible for state support – allows them to respond to a flexible academic economy. This has created a new labour market that places disadvantaged doctoral researchers at particular risk. The omitted category of the GTA – who is so close to the centre of the structure that they vanish – is simultaneously a site of both intensified danger *and* possibility.

Exploitation or multiscale precarity?

The myth of the GTA as an academic apprentice is explored under different terminology in Bosquet's (2008) *How the University Works.* By conceptualizing doctoral researchers in research universities as apprentice scholars, the university feels ethically justified in keeping their working circumstances substandard. If GTAs are workers, then they need to be treated as other labourers. The lack of academic jobs available after graduation, Bosquet asserts, means that GTAs are being recruited for their contingent labour as teaching faculty. Once awarded the PhD, they must either leave the university or find work on a short-term and unstable contract.

The situation that Bosquet describes is one of intentional exploitation by universities. In the next section, I provide an alternative reading of this myth of the academic apprentice. The invisibility of the GTA across multiple fields of research, the popular imagination of the university, and government benefits is deceptive. These workers are key instruments of a neoliberal logic which enacts perverse punishment on the humans required to keep its systems in operation. GTAs are constrained by the myth of an academic apprenticeship into acting as pliable components of a rational, marketised system. The figure of the GTA then not only exposes the human cost of processes of neoliberal restructuring: they also hold the potential to resist these systems through exercising a non-pliable subjectivity. Once the myth of an academic apprenticeship leading to a secure academic role is viewed as a fiction, new opportunities for resistance emerge.

In 2012, the structure of UK higher education funding was changed by David Cameron's Conservative government. Central government cut direct funding to universities and instead increased the cap on tuition fees to £9000 for home students. Long-term government loans were introduced to fund tuition and student recruitment caps were lifted shortly after. The opening up of the UK higher education market introduced new financial power structures into the university. These new structures and the rules that accompany them have been obscured through the blossoming of myriad administrative departments, each with individual objectives. Responsibility for large-scale disinvestments such as staff budgets cascade 'down the pipeline to small, weak units wholly unable to cope with them technically, politically, or financially' (Brown, 2015, p. 132).

Department and faculty leads have found themselves in a Kafkaesque frieze. The power that has been granted them turns out to be illusory; the laws that govern their role are obscured through a proliferation of bureaucratic procedures. Earlier in this paper, invisibility gestured through the figure of the GTA. It also appeared in the shame and secrecy of precarious academics regarding their contractual status. At the scale of the academic department, this invisibility occurs through a dematerialisation of the department's connection to the resources and information required to exercise choice. The GTA, the casualised academic, and the university department all appear here as bound by the same invisible force. It twists Bourdieu's (1991) notion of a paradoxical economy into a site of perversity.

The precarity of the GTA can also be glimpsed at the scale of the university in the first months of the COVID-19 crisis. When face-to-face teaching ceased due to lockdown restrictions, many universities feared that students would not return. The Institute for Fiscal Studies warned of losses of up to £4.3bn from reduced international student numbers, and up to £7.6bn from deficits in pension schemes, as well as falls in the conference, catering and student accommodation income: streams that are now crucial for universities' funding. Despite calls for a £2bn bailout, the government offered only limited financial support for struggling universities. Even that was offered in terms of a 'restructuring package' that placed stringent conditions on universities (Staton, 2020).

Perverse Machinations

The figure of the GTA embodies the invisibility and precarity that can be found at many scales within the university. They are what in psychoanalytic terms might be referred to as *disavowed subjects*, a figure that exposes deceit and simultaneously re-covers it through mythological self-deception.

The post-2012 UK university is a site where disjunctures of neoliberalism have metastasised into a perverse rejection of the truths of dependence, interdependence, and vulnerability. Taken to the scale of the university, this appears as a system which requires highly educated people to teach undergraduate students and conduct research. Excellent pedagogy and gold standard research is required from academic staff, not only for their own success but also

for the success of the university. However, the very thing that is demanded is rendered impossible.

Indeed, David Graeber (2013) was right when he stated that the more obviously your job benefits other people, the less you get paid. He failed, however, to mention that the more value a person's *human* labour has for the system that employs it, the more that subject finds itself the subject of perverse machinations. A key element of this is in the disavowal of one's very subject status, which places a shroud of invisibility around the role (consider for instance the way that cleaners and refuse collectors appear before dawn like a dream). Similarly, GTA staff are meant to invest in their own future by providing teaching labour within a system that disavows its own need for human teaching staff. By vanishing the future body of its academics, the university perpetuates a perverse fantasy of moving ever towards functioning as a capital-generating neoliberal machine that does not require human labour. In short, neoliberal structures have a perverse relationship to the human labour that sustains them.

What is particularly striking in the case of the GTA is the manner through which the role subjectifies the individual through its disavowal. This process occurs most markedly in the humanities and social sciences where, paradoxically, GTAs' specialisms in the critiques of neoliberal structures are most likely to be central to their work *and* whose future stability and safety are most jeopardised by the neoliberal university. Compared to science and engineering students, arts and humanities and social sciences students are both more likely to aim to stay in the higher education sector and also significantly less likely to gain permanent employment

following their doctorates. Critical analysis of political and organisational structures is required from social sciences and humanities GTAs. It is simultaneously devalued, so that the very act of criticism is the perverse relationship that emanates from this disavowal. This relationship can be understood as the psychic act of the university's discourse penetrating its future body of labour without being penetrated (Parsons, 2000). The GTA must understand the cost of neoliberal life and accrue capital for the university – through teaching about its discontents – whilst also suffering at its hands. The critique taught and researched neither penetrates the organisation nor its functioning.

The GTA position can therefore be conceptualised as sitting at the crux of not only the university's split narcissism and delusions of omnipotence, but also those of society at large. There is an undergraduate student (consumer) demand for decolonial, anti-neoliberal critique. In short, this is a very neat way in which left-wing critique is devalued: it is a required in a body of people who are made insecure by the very act of their specialism.

GTA teaching takes a similar path. The GTA's role of facilitating undergraduate seminars fosters these students' abilities to critique structures of oppression regarding issues such as low-paid, or zero-contract work. These self-same GTAs are, however, also subject to these very conditions themselves. What occurs here is twofold. The symbolic rules of the university, in which the tutor operates as an impartial observer, is destroyed. It is not openly mocked or ridiculed, but rather disavowed through the labour relationship between the student and the GTA, rendering the act of

criticism meaningless. Undergraduate students have been clear in numerous studies that they feel 'ripped off' being taught by junior members of staff (Park, 2002). They have stated many times that they feel that doctoral researchers are not legitimate academics, and this induces scepticism regarding what they are taught.

Whilst it would be easy to blame senior academics for these issues, what is actually at stake is that the GTA – in its very invisibility – functions as a cipher for perverse relations within the wider university system, to which all academic staff are subject. This is precisely a system operating as a site in which academics critique neoliberal practices whilst also being subject to those very same conditions. The treatment of the GTA functions to protect a crumbling relic of the pre-psychotic subjectivity of the university.

On finding itself subject to neoliberal conditions, the university has attempted to hallucinate itself out of a painful situation (a process that can be creative). Sadly, this capacity instead takes on a machinic life of its own – a regular and repetitive disavowal of the truth of dependence, interdependence and vulnerability. In short it becomes a site of perversity: a place whose own existential logic has twisted. This hidden agenda is not available in the same way as a conscious act. The myth of the academic apprentice normalises and naturalises exploitative labour practices. The real source of authority in the neoliberal university is obscured by this myth and many others like it. There is no depth to the myth of the academic apprentice, its perversions and paradoxes are easy to grasp. However, there is nothing to be found underneath this myth. As discussed, in

the neoliberal university all connections to a wider context dematerialise. When it is impossible to go beyond the surface, resistance appears in the material of the myth itself.

Disavowing Myth

As ever, the question that emerges is: what can be done? I suggest, in conclusion, that neoliberalism's strength is perversely also its failing. In its inability to reflect, to be human and to understand, neoliberalism demands the impossible. In acknowledging this impossibility, instead of allowing hope to shroud it in invisibility, it is possible to resist. Opportunity glimmers in new forms of solidarity with workers that have previously appeared as disconnected from academic life.

The notion of early career academia as a middle-class occupation is a relic of a previous time. It is directly related to the invisibility of the GTA, as well as the opportunity for resistance inherent to this role. Whilst academics retain cultural capital, it is subject to a perverse subjectivity: simultaneously fetishized and disavowed.

The use of Foucauldian analyses in studies of governance, power, and organisation have much to offer when understanding the neoliberal university and its discontents. However, under Kant's inimitable influence these deconstructions have a tendency to accrete into the image of an inescapable prison. I put forward here that Benjamin's thought contributes an important metabolism of theory into action. If we consider that the neoliberal university and its perverse machinations cannot be destroyed, and that what came before is not something we want back, then the myth

of a coming revolution ceases to hold much appeal. However, when this lure of something in the distance is removed, we find ourselves in a moment riven with possibilities.

These possibilities sit in the precise spot that the perverse myth of the academic apprentice obscures. I refer here to the power in fostering and nurturing relationships that work against the grain of the myth of the current academic structure. In experiential terms, the GTA's position is closely aligned with those other precarious workers on whose invisibility the university relies: the cleaners, kitchen staff, gardeners, and technicians. When the myth of the academic apprentice is read against the grain, the GTA role appears as an iteration of these other lowly paid, casualised, and invisible roles.

It is in this site – the connection to which is obscured by the myth of the academic apprentice – that invisibility can be transmuted into accountability, and perversity into reciprocity. One way of approaching this is using the cultural capital of the GTA to campaign for and leverage the working conditions of the other invisible workers, who sustain the material reality of the working university. By using the GTA's cultural capital in the rubble of the myth of the academic apprentice, it might be possible to disavow perversity: to animate new kinds of dependence, interdependence, and vulnerability in the academy.

References

Benjamin, W., 1921. *Deconstruction: A Reader.* New York: Routledge.

Bosquet, M. 2008. *How the University Works: Higher education and the low wage nation.* New York: New York University Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity.

Brown, W. 2015. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution.* New York: Zone Books.

Dudley, M. 2009. Jumping out of an airplane: a TA's perspective on teaching effectiveness. *Eastern Education Journal* 38, 1–10.

Dupré, L. 1998. Kant's Theory of History and Progress. *Review of Metaphysics,* vol. 51, no. 4, 813-828.

Foucault, M. 1980. Two lectures. In C. Gordon (Ed.) *Michel Foucault power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977 by Michel Foucault*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Gill, R. 2014. Academics, Cultural Workers and Critical Labour Studies. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 7:1, 12-30.

Gill, R. & Donaghue, N. 2016. Resilience, apps and reluctant individualism: Technologies of self in the neoliberal academy. *Women's Studies International Forum*; 54, 91-99.

Gordon, G. 1986. Question, ethos, event: Foucault on Kant and Enlightenment. *Economy and Society*, 15:1, 71-87.

Graeber, D. 2013. On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant. *Strike! Magazine.* https://www.strike.coop/bullshit-jobs/

Jameson, F. 1983. Postmodernism and Consumer Society. In H. Foster (Ed.) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Washington: Bay Press.

Kendall, K.D. & Schussler, E.E. 2012. Does instructor type matter? Undergraduate student perception of graduate teaching assistants and professors. *CBE Life Sciences Education* 11, 187–199.

Leathwood, C. 2013. Re/Presenting Intellectual Subjectivity: Gender and Visual Imagery in the Field of Higher Education. *Gender and Education* 25 (2), 133–154.

Leslie, E. 2000. *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*. London: Pluto Press.

Miller, J. 1994. *The passion of Michel Foucault*. New York: Anchor Books.

Muzaka, V. 2009. The niche of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs): perceptions and reflections. *Teaching in Higher Education* 14, 1–12.

Park, C. 2002. Neither fish nor fowl? The perceived benefits and problems of using Graduate Teaching Assistants to teach undergraduate students. *Higher Education Review* 35 (1), 50-62.

Parsons, M. 2000. Sexuality and perversion a hundred years on: discovering what Freud discovered. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 81, 37-51. doi: 10.1516/0020757001599519.

Raaper, R. 2018. 'Peacekeepers' and 'machine factories': tracing Graduate Teaching Assistant subjectivity in a neoliberalised university. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39:4, 421-435.

Rao, N, Hosein, A & Raaper, R. 2021. Doctoral students navigating the borderlands of academic teaching in an era of precarity. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 26:3, 454-470.

Read, B & Leathwood, C. 2020. Casualised academic staff and the lecturer-student relationship: Shame, (Im)permanence and (Il)legitimacy. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 41:4, 539-554, DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2020.1748570.

Staton, B. 2020. **'**Locked down and locked in': the pandemic plight of UK university students. *The Financial Times*. 25TH November. https://www.ft.com/content/1bbf4bdc-c80b-4220-ba23-34d1cbce813d

Turner, V. 1964. Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage. *The Proceedings of the Ethnological Society*. Washington: University of Washington Press.

University and College Union. 2016. *Precarious work in higher education: A snapshot of insecure contracts and institutional attitudes*. London: University and College Union.

Vitae. 2015 -2019. *Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) 2015: analysis of aggregated UK results*. Cambridge: Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC).

Weber, S. 2008. *Benjamin's -abilities*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Weidert, J., Wendorf, A., Gurung, R. & Filz, T. 2012. A Survey of Graduate and Undergraduate Teaching Assistants. *College Teaching*, 60:3, 95-
103, DOI: 10.1080/87567555.2011.637250

Advancing student-staff partnership through the unique position of GTAs

Manuela Irarrázabal Elliott[1] and Jenny Marie[2]

[1] University College London, UK; [2] University of Greenwich, UK

Abstract

In this paper we argue that Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are in a liminal position between taught students and fully fledged academic staff. This unique position provides the context for their knowledge about learning and teaching, which is situated in the particularity of their perspective. This singular perspective can be broadened through the kind of scholarly activity involved in student-staff partnership to better reflect the multiplicity of student experiences. GTAs' unique position allows them to better bridge the perspectives of staff and students, such that they can play an important role mediating between the two and providing invaluable insight to teaching and learning enhancement. Furthermore, GTAs have much to gain from working in partnership, in particular gaining a sense of being valued in a role that often feels dismissed. Nevertheless, there are particular dangers of the relationship falling into a familiar apprenticeship pattern and not fulfilling GTAs' expectations if staff fail to buy-into the ethos of partnership.

Keywords: liminality, situated knowledge, vulnerability, learning and teaching, power.

Introduction

This paper takes a reflective approach to consider how Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) fit into the concept of student-staff partnership. We argue that GTAs occupy a unique place, as neither students nor fully fledged academic staff. When they work in partnership with staff, the term student-staff partnership is therefore not fully apt: however, we argue that such partnerships form part of the family of student-staff partnership practices, and we explore how they can be extremely valuable to GTAs, staff and the outcomes of partnership work to enhance learning and teaching practices. We argue that some of the values and ethos behind student-staff partnership need to be kept at the forefront of staff minds when they work with GTAs in partnership because staff familiarity of discussing and working with GTAs on teaching may result in lapses back into an apprenticeship relationship. The significance of this paper resides in opening up discussions about the similarities and differences between staff partnering with taught students and partnering with graduate teaching assistants, and the applicability of concepts and concerns from the field of student partnership to this new context.

Theoretical background

Student Engagement in Higher Education has been revolutionised by student-staff partnership, in which students are considered as co-researchers, creators, evaluators (Nachatar Singh, 2019). The literature on student partnership has grown rapidly in recent years (Bovill et al., 2016), covering areas such as curriculum design (Peseta et al., 2016), assessment (Deeley &Bovill, 2017), and research (Bell & Mulrooney, 2016). However, there is very little literature on partnership between staff and GTAs, beyond a

case study which considered such partnership in the context of a collaborative writing project (Clark et al., 2019). In this piece, we focus on student partnership between GTAs and academic staff in order to enhance learning, teaching, and assessment. Such partnership can occur in many ways already familiar from the literature, for example, through the reviewing of teaching practice or enhancement projects. Our paper considers the extent to which the literature on student-staff partnership applies directly to staff partnership with GTAs and highlights differences that we have found from our experiences of such work.

Due to the variety of forms student-staff partnership can take, we understand it to encompass "a multiplicity of practices predicated on power-sharing and reflectivity from all involved" (Matthews, 2017, p.6). What these practices have in common is that all are "a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis" (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014, pp.6-7). Student partnership goes beyond student voice in giving students the opportunity to contribute equally to the work/decision-making, but nevertheless builds on the student voice belief that students have unique perspectives on their learning experience and should have the opportunity to shape their education (Cook-Sather, 2006).

We believe that GTAs can also have a good understanding of student needs from their recent experience as learners (Bovill et al, 2016). Furthermore, their individual experience can be shaped into a broader understanding of the plurality

of student experiences through the scholarly activity that accompanies student-staff partnership work, such as undertaking enquiries into the student experience, or reflecting and discussing learning and teaching.

The fact that GTAs' experiences are situated in a particular context enables them to counteract the idea that there is a single student perspective or a coherent set of student needs (Peseta et al, 2016; Sabri, 2011). This relates to the arguments Donna Haraway (1988) has advanced about *situated knowledge*. She contends that *situated knowledge*, where context matters, is the way to counteract "totalization and single vision" (Haraway, 1988, p.584) as it opposes claims of objectivity that take the various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims. Here, she advances two arguments that are relevant to our discussion. Firstly, totalization is only possible because of existing hierarchical structures that allow the construction of the "single", "objective", "impersonal" viewpoint. Secondly, it is precisely the acknowledgement that our knowledge is situated, that makes us answerable for what we learn.[1] The first argument is important because if we are seeking ways to build up effective partnerships, which by definition are based on equality and mutual respect (Cook Sather, Bovill & Felten, 2014), we also need to be aware of how hierarchies operate at different levels, sometimes ingrained in our own epistemology. The second argument is relevant to student engagement and partnership. One of the issues that usually emerges in the discussions on this topic is how to generate

[1] Her point is that the perspective of the subjugated (women, in her discussion) is not exempt from critical re-examination, and that they are not "innocent" positions. Similarly, we believe that students do not hold "innocent", "impartial", or "unbiased" positions.

an environment in which the student's voice is heard without the lack of responsibility that characterises the consumer's voice. Partnership is based on mutual responsibility (HEA, 2014).

In a similar vein, Cook-Sather and Felten (2017) argue for a type of academic leadership that does not aspire for universally shared values but allows the development of practices that can acknowledge the contributions of people with different positions –what they call "embodied" or "rooted" leadership that does not aspire to be "abstract", "inhuman", "institutional" (Cook-Sather & Felten, p.184). One of these practices is the creation of liminal "as-if" spaces, in which "we behave the way we want to live in the wider world of the academy" (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017, p.180). To be in a liminal space is to be in-between two stages, which for that reason has a unique potential. They argue that student partnership is a powerful way to create liminal spaces, where neither students nor staff inhabit their traditional roles.

Furthermore, Cook-Sather and Felten (2017, p.179) assert that "teaching and learning require the creation of liminal spaces that foster uncertainty and openness". The creation of these spaces of liminality present a way out of the dichotomy between, roughly put, a model in which the all-knowing teacher delivers content to an empty-vessel learner, and a model in which the teacher offers "human capital training", and the student consumes it. The focus of this approach is to generate the appropriate environment (*i.e.*, of mutual trust, respect, inclusivity, responsibility) where students can build up their knowledge, creating, resisting, and imagining alternatives. The liminal space is conceived as

one in which “one can linger, from which one can depart and to which one can return” (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017, p.181). One important characteristic of the liminal space is that it brings together people with different experiences and perspectives, and those differences are acknowledged and valued.

GTAs can also be considered as being in a state of liminality (Compton & Tran, 2017). They inhabit an in-between space, between being students and academics. This liminality is different from that described by Cook-Sather and Felten (2017) in that few re-enter the role of GTA and it is recognised as the transitional space between student and academic, rather than a transitional space shared by students and academics to an undetermined point. Nevertheless, there are links between the two, with GTAs going “in and out” of the role of teacher, and both forms of liminality are spaces of uncertainty, vulnerability, and possibility. GTAs could be viewed as academics with a deficit, needing to complete the apprenticeship of the doctoral degree in order to become fully fledged academics. However, we offer a different, more positive, view of them as inhabiting a liminal space that is beneficial to learning and teaching. GTAs’ liminality helps them to understand the difficulties of students, while also sharing some of the understandings and positionality of more experienced academics. As such, we argue that they can play an important role mediating between the two.

Methodology

This paper draws on our experiences as a means to discuss, exemplify, and problematise the role of GTAs and their potential as partners. We have worked together on a number of student-partnership ventures and discussed student partnership together over a number of years in the context of Manuela's role as a GTA and Jenny's role as a member of staff. The early conceptualisation of this paper was led by Jenny, who suggested theoretical lenses in light of our ongoing discussions. Our roles swapped when we came to writing, with Manuela taking the lead in documenting how the theory related to our discussions and drawing together our thoughts in an online, shared document. The discussions between us were unstructured throughout. During the writing stage we each asked the other questions, to gather thoughts and experiences, as we wrote and read each other's writing. Our experiences and reflections are set in our particular contexts and influenced by our positionality. As such, we provide an introduction to ourselves below.

Manuela was recently a PhD student and GTA at University College London (UCL). She undertook numerous partnership roles during her time at UCL, including that of Annual Student Experience Review (ASER) facilitator and Student Reviewer. ASER facilitators work in partnership with the Arena Centre at UCL to support departments with poor student satisfaction as measured by the UK National Student Survey (NSS). They meet with staff from a department and their students to discuss and investigate issues that are negatively affecting student satisfaction, and identify possible solutions. Particularly because departments are selected on the basis of poor satisfaction results, such work can be sensitive. Departments can feel that they are being treated as being in

deficit, with outsiders encroaching into areas of practice that are traditionally solely the preserve of academic staff. The Student Reviewers scheme differs from the ASER facilitator work, in that students work in partnership with a single member of teaching staff to review the staff member's teaching practice and is entered into voluntarily by all parties.

Manuela was also a Student Representative both for her department and her Faculty. Her experience illustrates the way in which a student can get important insights into education by conducting 'informal' queries as a part of her role as a student representative. From her experiences she realised that the deeper the involvement, the higher the level of awareness about education students get. The role of student representative differs from partnership (at least in most cases) in that while they get involved with members of staff attending meetings and reporting on students' issues, they do not normally work in collaboration with members of staff either to address those issues or to give advice on how to do that. In other words, we cannot say that student representatives actively participate with staff members collegially at the same level, as for example student ambassadors do (Nachatar Singh, 2019). Student representatives may have a role in decision-making, however this does not necessarily mean that collaboration involves the equality implied in partnership (Bovill et al. 2016, 197).

Until recently, Jenny led UCL's student partnership scheme and taught on both UCL's gateway-to-teaching workshop for GTAs and a short learning and teaching programme for GTAs. Her experiences leading UCL's partnership scheme brought her into contact with GTAs both through partnering with

them on enhancement projects and through their feedback on partnership work in general. However, it should be noted that her role as an academic developer is distinct from that of most academics in that most of her teaching was to staff and her contact with undergraduate students came through the partnership scheme.

Discussion

Liminality can be a vulnerable position

Liminality is a stage of transition. As Turner (1995) points out, a transition period includes a phase of separation, in which the subject can feel detached both from the previous stage and the following one. The 'necessary ambiguity' this brings can be both a source of anxiety and of creativity. My (Manuela's) experience as a GTA and working with GTAs reflects that situation. One of the main sources of discontent among GTAs was the feeling of unpreparedness for this new phase. They felt they had lost some of the 'protections' they had as students, and they were not given enough support and training to be teachers. As a Student Representative for the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, I conducted one survey that was built upon the insights I had gained from my experience as a student representative for my department (four surveys). This showed that there was a sense of a loss among GTAs regarding the protection they perceived they had as students. For example, until then they might have felt that the workload they had as students was challenging, but they ultimately understood it as being "for their own benefit". As a GTA they had to comply with the workload of the PhD, while at the same time respond to the expectations of a "boss" (the course leader), often feeling unprotected. GTAs' issues were largely about payment, but this only aggravated the feeling that their work was not appreciated -

one GTA involved in the campaign for better recompense said she was driven by having experienced depression after her first term teaching. Her payment for the whole term had not arrived making it impossible for her to travel to see her family over Christmas time. It was widely perceived that departments had a dismissive attitude towards GTAs. These challenges around time and payment for GTAs have also been found at other institutions (Muzaka, 2009).

The perception of not being appreciated particularly affected GTAs because, while they felt that they had a central role in teaching undergraduates (UGs), they often also felt insecure about their own performance. Although GTAs often hold robust ideas of what makes a good teacher (*e.g.,* how to interact with students) they felt they had not had the appropriate training for their job –this could range from how to deal with academic issues or, for example, a UG having a breakdown in the classroom and not knowing how to act and report it. These concerns were related to their liminal position. As a student representative and a GTA, I also felt that my work was not valued and that expectations were not clearly defined, which led to the feeling of being overstretched.

Manuela's reflections on the challenges of GTAs relate to my (Jenny's) experiences of working with GTAs. When I taught GTAs on UCL's gateway-to-teaching workshop I observed that many of them were concerned about their authority with undergraduate students. Some were concerned that their youth (or youthful appearance) would mean that they were not taken seriously by undergraduate students. The top question that we were asked by GTAs was how to deal with questions to which they did not know the answer. There was

a real sense that the GTAs felt they had not 'made it' yet. Although imposter syndrome is prevalent in both staff and students in Higher Education (Parkman, 2016), for these GTAs the sense of being an imposter as a teacher seemed to me to be arising from them inhabiting the liminal space between student and staff. My experiences are reflected in the research of Cho et al (2011) which found that the top concerns of GTAs were related to their dual role as students and staff, as well as communication and time.

Benefits of partnership work for GTAs

The space of liminality is a place where equal individuals experience something together, even though they might not be coming from the same place (Turner 1995). This reflects my (Manuela's) experience as an ASER facilitator, working with members of the Arena Centre to improve student satisfaction in academic departments. There was a shared understanding that we were all part of a hierarchical institution, but those hierarchies were left aside when working together. It is worth stressing, in relation to the discussion of vulnerability above, that this sense of partnership also involved a mutual recognition of the different stages we were at, with staff being supportive and receptive to potential issues. For example, as an ASER facilitator, I once had a meeting with a senior member of staff in a department I had been helping to tackle poor NSS results that ended in an unpleasant way - they complained that student-staff partnership looked nice in theory, but it actually resulted in heavier workload for the staff in senior positions who had to coordinate things. My main discomfort after the meeting was not so much about receiving that opinion, but the feeling that I had failed the ASER facilitator programme. The first thing I did was text the coordinators of

the programme (the people I was working with in partnership), and they immediately invited me to their office to chat about what had happened. Crucially, they showed me how, despite the meeting, I had helped that department by bridging them with their students and continuing with student-staff partnership projects. This experience of my work being valued, of looking at outcomes beyond the immediate ones, was hugely educational in the sense that it gave me a perspective I could apply to my work as a GTA and make better sense of the issues that as a student representative I had been hearing from other GTAs, such as insecurity about our roles and acknowledgment, even if not explicit, of our liminal position.

The benefits of GTAs' liminality for partnership work

Not only do GTAs benefit from working in partnership; they also have much to contribute to partnership work on learning and teaching. I (Jenny) experienced the benefits of GTAs' liminality for partnership work when I worked with a GTA to develop student guides to assessment and feedback. The intention was to produce accessible guides to assessment and feedback issues in language that students would relate to. The GTA had a better insight into the issues around assessment and feedback that taught students struggled with and was able to communicate more engagingly with them. Nevertheless, the GTAs' own experiences were expanded and enriched by conducting focus groups and working with staff members who had academic expertise in this area.

One of the interesting things about the guides is that they are scattered with student voices from the focus groups, but these have been curated and sit alongside advice from the GTA, which she developed in partnership with the staff

working on the project. As such, the GTA traversed a space between the staff and taught students. She related her recent experiences of assessment as a student to those emerging from the focus groups in order to identify concerns and good practice. She also drew on her experiences as a teacher to translate the advice being given by the staff project members into text that students could relate to.

Her recent experiences as both a taught student and a teacher allowed her to gaze in two different directions, towards studenthood and towards teacherhood. As Haraway (1988) argued, objective knowledge depends on partial perspectives and her perspective of both was partial, situated in her GTA-ness. Nevertheless, she embodied their coming together in the way that partnership work attempts through students and staff working together honestly, respectfully and with joint responsibility. Her gaze was not "innocent" or encompassing part of a single student or staff perspective, as argued earlier. Instead, she broadened this through the focus groups she conducted with students and her partnership with staff and a taught postgraduate student.

Challenges of GTAs working in partnership

Student-staff partnership is seen as a radical practice, "an act of resistance to the traditional, often implicit, but accepted, hierarchical structure where staff have power over students" (Matthews, 2017). Working with undergraduate students on learning and teaching can feel troublesome for staff (Cook-Sather, 2014) and lead to either transformative practice or a failure to act in true partnership. Trowler (2018) found "the pretence of equal partnership often hid the real disparities of power". We suggest that this issue could be even more pressing for GTAs. While the power relationship between GTAs and academic staff is profoundly unequal (Grant, 1999,

as cited in Deuchar, 2008), staff are more used to discussing both learning and teaching and their research practices with GTAs. This familiarity could potentially make it easier for staff to slide back into a supervisory, apprentice model rather than one of partnership. To some extent this is true of the example of the assessment and feedback guides, where the relationship was one more of supervision than partnership. However, Manuela's experience of this occurring is even more striking. When she participated as a student reviewer of teaching, she partnered with a member of staff to review his teaching practice. However, he saw this as an opportunity to teach Manuela, a GTA in the department, about teaching. This situation had the additional problem that the member of staff was in charge of appointing GTAs in the department, so Manuela felt she could not really say anything without risking a future job there. Their apprenticeship relationship as GTA/teaching staff thus overrode the relationship they should have been establishing as equal partners, and prevented them from honestly exploring and reviewing the staff member's own practice.

Conclusion

GTAs are in a liminal place between studenthood and teacherhood (Compton & Tran, 2017). This can put them in a vulnerable position, having lost the protection of their time to focus on their own studies and not yet being established as valued members of staff (Muzaka, 2009). This can lead to a loss of confidence and sense of not being appreciated, both of which partnership work can restore.

The feeling that GTAs are insufficiently supported in their teaching is an area of work that would greatly benefit from GTAs and staff working in partnership to explore and seek a

way forward. In such a project, it would be important to recognise the liminality of GTAs: the partnership would not be between students and staff, but staff and GTAs in their embodiment of the space "in-between". The terms "student partnership'" and "student-staff partnership" are probably unhelpful here, because they emphasise only one aspect of GTAs' identity. We argue that such partnerships are clearly part of the family of student partnership practices: challenging and repositioning the power, which normally resides with the staff; and drawing upon the situated knowledge that GTAs have of the problems that they experience. Such work has the potential to be beneficial both in its outputs but also in developing a culture whereby GTAs and staff work productively together.

We believe that GTAs offer something of particular value to partnership work for the enhancement of learning and teaching. The liminality of their position is an advantage for the outputs of such a partnership because of their proximity to both roles (staff and student) –being both while not fully being either of them. They embody a position that can gaze productively in both directions.

Nevertheless, while there is significant potential value in such partnerships, the process of partnership between the two is potentially more challenging: there is a real danger that staff will continue to treat GTAs as apprentices and fail to challenge the power dynamic between them, because they already have established ways of working with them on learning and teaching matters. Where this occurs the potential benefits from such a partnership will not be fully realised. Therefore, this is an issue that we believe requires greater awareness to prevent such partnerships from

perpetuating existing disparities in power rather than fulfilling their potential of dissipating them.

References

Barrineau, S., & Anderson, L. (2018). 'Learning "Betwixt and Between": Opportunities and challenges for student-driven partnership'. *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 2 (1) https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v2i1.3224

Bell, J., & Mulrooney, H. (2016). 'Perspectives on motivation and engagement in an extracurricular project'. *New Directions in the Teaching of Physical Sciences*, 11 (1).

Bovill, C., Cook-Sather, A., Felten, P., Millard, L., & Moore-Cherry, N. (2016). 'Addressing potential challenges in co-creating learning and teaching: Overcoming resistance, navigating institutional norms and ensuring inclusivity in student–staff partnerships'. *Higher Education*, 71 (2), pp. 195–208.

Bryson, C. & Hand, L. (2007). 'The role of engagement in inspiring teaching and learning'. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International,* 44 (4), pp. 349-362. doi: 10.1080/14703290701602748.

Cho, Y., Kim, M., Svinicki, M.D. & Decker, M.L. (2011). 'Exploring teaching concerns and characteristics of graduate teaching assistants.' *Teaching in Higher Education*, 16 (3), pp. 267-279. doi: 10.1080/13562517.2010.524920.

Clark, L., Ribéreau-Gayon, A., Sotiriou, M., Standen, A., Thorogood, J., & Tong, V.C.H. (2019). 'Developing a collaborative book project on higher education pedagogy:

The institutional, organizational, and community identity dimensions of student-staff partnerships.' *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 3 (2). doi: 10.15173/ijsap.v3i2.3714

Compton, M., & Tran, D. (2017). 'Liminal space or in limbo? Post Graduate Researchers and their personal pie charts of identity.' *Compass*, 10 (3). doi: 10.21100/compass.v10i3.620

Cook-Sather, A. (2006). 'Sound, Presence, and Power: "Student Voice"'. *Educational Research and Reform, Curriculum Inquiry*, 36 (4), pp. 359-390. doi: 10.1111/ j.1467-873X.2006.00363.x.

Cook-Sather, A. (2014). 'Student-faculty partnership in explorations of pedagogical practice: a threshold concept in academic development'. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 19 (3), pp. 186-198. doi: 10.1080/1360144X.2013.805694.

Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: A guide for faculty*. John Wiley & Sons.

Cook-Sather, A., & Felten, P. (2017). 'Ethics of academic leadership: Guiding learning and teaching', in Su, F., & Wood, M. (eds.) *Cosmopolitan perspectives on academic leadership in higher education*. London: Bloomsbury Press, pp. 175-191.

Deuchar, R. (2008). 'Facilitator, director or critical friend?: Contradiction and congruence in doctoral supervision styles'. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 13**,** pp. 489-500.

Deeley, S. J.,& Bovill, C. (2017). 'Staff student partnership in assessment: Enhancing assessment literacy through democratic practices'. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 42 (3), pp. 463–477.

Haraway, D. (1988). 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective'. *Feminist Studies* 14 (3), pp. 575-599.

Higher Education Academy (2014). *Framework for Partnership in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*. York: The Higher Education Academy. https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/HEA_Framework_for_partnership_in_learning_and_teaching.pdf

Matthews, K. E. (2017). 'Five Propositions for Genuine Students as Partners Practice'. *International Journal for Students as Partners,* 1 (2), pp. 1-9. https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v1i2.3315

Muzaka, V. (2009) 'The niche of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs): perceptions and reflections'. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 14 (1), pp. 1-12, https://doi/10.1080/13562510802602400

Nachatar Singh, J.K. (2019). 'Evidence and benefits of postgraduate international students-staff members partnership in extra-curricular activities: a Malaysian perspective'. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 38 (7), pp. 1475-1488. doi: 10.1080/07294360.2018.1436527.

Parkman, A. (2019). 'The Imposter Phenomenon in Higher Education: Incidence and Impact'. *Journal of Higher*

Education Theory and Practice, *16* (1). https://articlegateway.com/index.php/JHETP/article/view/1936

Peseta, T., Bell, A., Clifford, A., English, A., Janarthana, J., Jones, C., Zhang, J. (2016). 'Students as ambassadors and researchers of assessment renewal: Puzzling over the practices of university and academic life'. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 21 (1), pp. 54–66.

Sabri, D. (2011). 'What's wrong with 'the student experience'?', Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 32 (5), pp. 657-667, https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2011.620750

Trowler, V. (2018). *Responding to Student Voice: Insights into international practice*. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. https://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/ethemes/evidence-for-enhancement/insights-into-international-practice.pdf?sfvrsn=7be9c181_5

Turner, V. (1995). 'Liminality and Communitas', in Turner, V., Abrahams, R. D., & Harris, A (eds.) *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. London: Routledge, pp. 94-130.

Bridging the Power Gap: GTAs and Student-Staff Partnership

Lauren Clark, University College London, UK

Abstract

Drawing on previous work done on student-staff partnership (SSP), this paper will consider how involving GTAs in SSP could help bridge the gap between students and staff, with GTAs bringing a unique perspective to their teaching since they are simultaneously students and teachers (Standen, 2018). To do so, this article will build on and contribute to existing literature on SSP and how engaging in SSP can be a transformative learning experience for staff and students at different levels (Healey & Jenkins 2009; Cook-Sather 2014). While SSP has been shown to improve student engagement and outcomes and bridge the gap between research and teaching, it is not without challenges (Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard & Moore-Cherry 2016). One key issue around SSP is naturally the concept of partnership, which can be challenging for staff and students alike who may be more accustomed to a hierarchical power dynamic (Cook-Sather 2014). Some forms of research collaboration that are typical in HE can involve SSP, but they often focus more on collaboration between students and staff, perhaps relying more on an apprenticeship model of teaching, which is intrinsically more hierarchical. This paper will consider the relationship between power and participation through the work of Arnstein (1968), arguing that it is important to place GTAs in this liminal space to bridge the power gap. Reflecting on my own experience across two SSP projects as both

student and GTA, I argue that being both a student and teacher made me more aware of how I learned and how I could bring that knowledge to my teaching practice and collaboration with other students. As research students, GTAs can also engage in a kind of praxis (cycle of theory, action and reflection) when using SSP in their teaching. In this way, they are uniquely positioned to demonstrate how SSP empowers both students and staff to learn from each other and produce innovative research and ideas (Cook-Sather 2014).

Keywords: student-staff partnership, postgraduate teaching assistants, praxis, power

Introduction

Student-staff partnership has often been discussed in terms of the transformation it can encourage for both staff and students (Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten 2014; Cook-Sather 2014; Healey, Flint & Harrington 2014). Essential in this process of transformation is the challenging of traditional power dynamics within the partnership, which can lead us to fundamentally interrogate our understandings of working and thinking. Instead of focusing on the threatening aspects of partnership work with students, Cook-Sather (2014: 191) draws attention to the 'paradigm shift' that can occur when staff "recognise students as differently positioned knowers with insights to share as partners in exploration but not ultimate authorities". Reshaping teaching and learning in a more collaborative sense can lead to a situation where staff and students can co-construct different roles and identities together.

While more traditional methods of involving students in staff research are inherently collaborative, and therefore create opportunities for transformation and for challenging the traditional dynamic between students and academic staff, simply working together is not likely to involve the same transformation that occurs when students are positioned as partners (Marie, 2018). Indeed, Allin (2014) questions whether the nature of collaboration between students and staff in HE can ever escape the power dynamics that seem to be inherent in the power/knowledge nexus within universities. By exploring the power dynamics between staff and students, we can find spaces in which these hierarchies can be disrupted, and GTAs may be uniquely positioned to do this work as they simultaneously hold both positions.

This article will begin by briefly introducing SSP theory, followed by a more in-depth exploration of the role of power in SSP through the work of Arnstein (1968). It will then present two case studies that exemplify my own experience engaging in SSP from two different perspectives, student and GTA, to illuminate the role of power from two different positions, as well as looking more specifically at the role of GTAs within SSPs. I will then outline some implications and suggestions for staff and GTAs engaging in SSP.

Student-Staff Partnership as Productively Disruptive

In order to engage in partnership, more traditional roles of staff and students must be challenged, reconceptualising traditional dynamics that position academics and researchers as experts while students are seen as inexperienced and unknowledgeable (Allin, 2014; Healey, Flint & Harrington, 2014). Historically, students have often been assigned the 'grunt work' that was needed to support staff research, such as transcribing videos or recruiting participants. While these tasks are necessary for the completion of the project, they tend to assign students with work that does not require advanced skills or knowledge, while academics and researchers have the privilege of designing the research and coding and analysing data (Austin, 2002). However, if the aim of SSP is for students to acquire skills and knowledge of the research process, as well as being engaged authentically as partners, then they need to also be involved in the higher order tasks associated with conducting research.

Challenging the traditional dynamic between staff and students can be troubling for both staff and students (Cook-Sather, 2014). For staff, changing how they relate to and

work with students can threaten their power and authority, which may explain why they often cast students in less significant roles. For students, there can be an anxiety when they are given more responsibility since they have been socialised to see the educator as an expert, while they are an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge (Freire, 1970; Allin, 2014; Dickerson, Jarvis & Stockwell, 2016). However, challenging this power dynamic can be a transformative experience for students and staff and open them up to thinking and working in different ways (Cook-Sather, 2014).

Due to the disruptive nature of SSP and the difficulty of challenging the norms of the university, those engaging in partnership would benefit from praxis, which is a cycle that encourages continual critique and interrogation of their practice. By engaging with theory, putting that theory into practice, and then reflecting on how it went, staff can check that their strategy is fit-for-purpose and fulfilling the aims of the project. Due to the dynamic nature of collaboration (Allin, 2014) and SSP, it is necessary to regularly reflect on theory and action at different phases of the project, as roles and power continue to shift. One could argue that GTAs might be hyperaware of these shifts in power as they engage in ongoing negotiations of expertise and practice through their dual role as students and staff. In this sense, they may find it easier to adapt to and enact power shifts within SSP, which is especially important because there is no one-size-fits-all approach to SSP—staff need to think about how SSP can be applied in their context, considering the discipline, level of study and purpose of the project or course.

Exploring Power: Apprenticeship versus Partnership

While there are definite overlaps between collaboration and SSP, there are some subtle but important differences in the roles of students and academics and how these are related to the power they hold. In research collaboration, the student is often perceived as an apprentice or a less knowledgeable other, while academics are portrayed as the lead of the project or the expert (Healey, Flint & Harrington, 2014). These roles have been engrained in academia for centuries and are unsurprisingly difficult to change despite the recent move toward a more student-centred approach. In SSP, students are positioned as partners and while in reality that doesn't always mean an equal power dynamic, an SSP approach can open up novel ways in which students can be engaged and valued for their contributions.

Drawing on the work of Arnstein (1969: 216), it is possible to see how different kinds of engagement with students can be more or less authentic, highlighting the difference between "going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process". When power is redistributed to all those involved in the project, everyone benefits (Arnstein, 1969). Different levels of participation are conceptualised as a ladder, which ranges from 'manipulation' to 'citizen control'. Arnstein (1969) considers the two bottom rungs of the ladder, 'manipulation' and 'therapy', to describe levels of inauthentic participation where those involved are being 'educated' by more experienced participants. Fielding (2001) echoes this in his work, stating that although teachers might have good intentions, interest in student voice and input can often take on more sinister connotations of control or accountability.

The next two levels involve 'informing' and 'consultation', whereby students might be given a voice in order to inform policies or changes, but they have no power to make these changes themselves. This is again where issues of misrepresentation and misunderstanding come in, as staff may take student voice and transform it to meet their own purposes or agenda (Fielding, 2001). 'Partnership' is further up the ladder and, according to Arnstein (1969: 221), power is redistributed here. In addition to a negotiation of power between the citizens and those in charge (students and staff, respectively) "they agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities". Here we can see that in an authentic partnership, students should be more wholly engaged in the planning of the initiatives, possibly even identifying the problem and figuring out how to solve it themselves with the support of staff. Partnership, therefore, is actively engaging students as experts and co-producers in the project (Dunne et al., 2011) rather than just consulting them on their experience or using them to do the undesirable work of the project. Looking at Arnstein's (1969) typology, apprenticeship might fall on the lower rungs of the ladder, where students are enticed to participate in the project in order to gain experience or to benefit from the expertise of those with more power. This is not to say that students cannot benefit from this kind of work, but they would likely get more from a more equitable dynamic with staff who involve them in decision-making and planning of the work.

This relates to Fielding's (1999, 2001) concept of radical collegiality, which explains the reciprocal dynamic of partnership and how it involves learning from and with students and is more than just collaborating with them. Fielding (1999, 2001) makes a distinction between

collaboration and collegiality, arguing that "since the driving motive of collaboration is fundamentally instrumental and focused strongly on intended gains, those operating in this mode are typically intolerant of time spent on anything other than the task in hand" (Fielding, 1999: 17). Collegiality, on the other hand, allows room for work that benefits those involved, which transforms collaboration into "a joint undertaking informed by the ideals and aspirations of a collective practice infused by value rationality and the commitment to valued social ends" (Fielding, 1999: 17). Inherent in this concept is the idea that students (and GTAs) have something unique and valuable to bring to the partnership, thus challenging the idea that the staff member has more expertise and thus more power.

By acknowledging the contribution that students and GTAs can make based on their own knowledge and experience, staff can move toward a more reciprocal approach to knowledge. Although this might be difficult because it is reinforced by practices and interactions within the university (Allin, 2014), partnership work has the potential to challenge this dynamic, especially when involving GTAs that may act as a bridge between different levels of expertise and different kinds of experience. However, according to Austin (2002), universities may be avoiding radical collegiality when it comes to the experience of GTAs, tending to instead focus on instrumental outcomes rather than GTA development when including them in teaching and research opportunities. Austin (2002) suggests that the professional development of GTAs is often sacrificed in the name of student satisfaction, with more time spent teaching on undergraduate modules that do not challenge GTAs professionally or encourage the development of new teaching approaches or content. To some extent, GTAs might be seen as a source of cheap labour

rather than future academics that are in need of professional development and support from future colleagues. SSP could offer a way to more authentically develop GTAs as members of the academic community while simultaneously fostering a more inclusive environment for students at varying levels who are involved in projects. However, care needs to be taken to ensure that SSP isn't another unpaid and underappreciated mode of engagement delegated to GTAs.

GTAs: Bridging the gap between teachers and students in SSP?

Due to the rising number of students undertaking undergraduate degrees in the UK, universities are increasingly relying on GTAs to carry some of the teaching load. Despite the long-held place of GTAs in teaching in universities in the United States, the role GTAs play in the university is not well-researched. However, there have been recent contributions in this area (Park & Ramos, 2002; Muzuka, 2009; Winter et al., 2015; Standen, 2018). There has been some suggestion that GTAs can act as a bridge between staff and students, helping to narrow the power differential that students experience on their courses (Standen, 2018). In addition to their liminal position in the traditional student-staff dynamic, GTAs are also currently students themselves, and have engaged in undergraduate education more recently than more senior staff members, giving them "additional awareness and knowledge of what might work best for students in this setting" (Muzaka, 2009: 4), which could make their teaching more relevant and engaging.

Therefore, GTAs are in a unique position, especially when it comes to pedagogy. While some research (Austin, 2002) suggests that GTAs in certain disciplines are more likely to

hold positions that involve little autonomy and room for decision-making, for example, leading a seminar after a lecture delivered by staff, other work has shown that GTAs are more likely to be open to innovative teaching approaches and technologies. Research by Austin (2002) revealed the influence of the GTA's locus of control, self-efficacy and ability to connect with others on their development as members of the academic community. This tension between constraint and autonomy highlights the precarious position of GTAs, who may be aware of engaging and useful approaches, but might feel powerless to implement them. It also highlights the transformative potential of working with GTAs to improve courses and programmes—having a fresh perspective can often be instrumental in pedagogical development and would also help to foster self-efficacy and a sense of belonging in the academic community.

Case Studies: SSP from two different positions

Over the course of my doctoral study, I participated in three SSP projects, two of which I will describe here to exemplify the contrast in the power dynamics in different kinds of collaboration and from different positions within the partnership. The first case was the development of a peer mentoring scheme for doctoral students that I originally co-developed with another PhD student. While we had a staff partner, they played a minor role in our project and let us take the lead to consult, pilot and design a truly student-led mentor programme. We had institutional funding for the project, which I applied for based on my own experience of the lack of support and community amongst doctoral students in my department. After conducting research on mentor programmes at other universities, as well as collecting data through focus groups with more experienced

PhD students as well as students who were new to the programme, my project partner and I designed a pilot programme consisting of small-group coffee dates to enable students to make social connections and share their experience and knowledge of being a new doctoral student with their peers, one of whom was at least in their second year of the PhD or EdD. Feedback from students after the pilot fed into our design of the programme that was then embedded within the doctoral support provision in our department. I continued to run the Doctoral Community (as we later called ourselves) over the next couple of years, tweaking the design and adding workshops and networking events to address student feedback, which involved working closely with the programme leader for doctoral provision.

In this case, my project partner and I had almost complete control over the design and management of the project in its early phases, which is relatively rare in most SSP projects. This may have been because we were PhD students, and were therefore expected to have some level of expertise when it came to the design of research. Our staff partner was the department graduate tutor, and therefore had a fair amount of knowledge about the experiences and needs of doctoral students. While she approved of the project, she felt it was important that it was truly student-led, and therefore took a backseat in the project. As more experienced doctoral students, we were able to build upon our own experience of transitioning into doctoral study to help inform the design of the project and what might be needed to support those who were just starting out. This involved a level of praxis as we applied theory such as Lave & Wenger's (1991) communities of practice to our actions within the Doctoral Community, which then helped to inform changes made.

In the second year of the Doctoral Community, I started teaching on an MA Education programme at my institution, which also impacted my approach to supporting fellow doctoral students and vice versa. In my tutorials with masters level students I was able to facilitate and cultivate a sense of community and solidarity based on my work with mentees in the Doctoral Community, as well as my own experience of being an international masters student in the UK. I had also gained experience discussing and interrogating different research approaches through dialogues with mentees, which proved useful when helping MA students design research projects. The student-led approach of the Doctoral Community also inspired me to solicit feedback and engage in reflection about my practice to improve my supervision and teaching on the MA.

The second SSP project that I was a part of was a multileveled project that built on a previous book project done within my institution on research-based education (RBE) (see Tong, Standen and Sotiriou, 2018). The three tiers consisted of (1) staff members who ran the original project, (2) GTAs that also participated in the original project and (3) a group of postgraduate and undergraduate students who were new to the project. My role was in the second tier, as a GTA facilitating and supporting a small group of students as they learned more about RBE. Building on a book that showcased RBE at our institution, we invited students to participate in the second phase of the project which involved reading the introductory chapters of the book, identifying a theme of interest and conducting a focus group exploring this theme at the book launch. This focus group data was then used to draw up online resources aimed at a multi-disciplinary audience who might want to implement a RBE approach in their teaching. This project was much more

complex as it involved three levels of partners, spanned across disciplines and tried to connect two phases of the project. Due to this complexity, the project struggled to completion. In my group, one of the students didn't show up to the event and then dropped out of the project, which meant that I took on more responsibility within the group, potentially undermining the SSP dynamic. Other groups had similar problems, and although some of the students produced work that could be adapted later, we only produced one resource that was suitable for disseminating. It could also be that because the student partners were not involved in shaping the project design and purpose, they were not fully invested in it and therefore it was not a priority for them.

The role of GTAs within this project was also complex because there were parts of the project where I felt like we were engaged as partners, while at other times I felt we were engaged in 'therapy' or even 'manipulation' (Arnstein, 1968). Because we were working within a larger project, the design, content and output of the project were relatively fixed—although student partners were encouraged to pick themes that were of interest to them, we still had to work within the frame of the book launch to collect 'data' to inform our resource. This felt like an example of 'therapy', wherein students who knew about RBE (the GTAs) were educating those who were lacking understanding in this area. However, other aspects of the project felt closer to a partnership. For instance, when the students led the focus groups based on their own questions and interests, creating an opportunity for them to guide the project and also participate in data collection and analysis. Reflecting on the project I realise that I found this tension between autonomy and constraint to be particularly challenging. Because I had been a student in a

SSP before, I was keen to give the students as much autonomy and power as possible, especially considering the constraints that were already built into the project. Yet this laissez-faire attitude may have contributed to the lack of engagement, as perhaps I didn't support or guide students as much as they needed. Perhaps working with students as a student myself might have been a better way forward, instead of positioning myself as the leader of our group.

My own experience as a GTA engaging in SSP demonstrates the tension between autonomy and constraint. In the Doctoral Community, we had almost complete autonomy to design the project the way we thought was best, with minimal input from the staff partner, meaning that my role in this project exemplified what Arnstein (1969) referred to as citizen control. In contrast, my role on the RBE project was relatively constrained by the parameters of the project, which were set out by the staff leads. In this sense, the project typified Arnstein's (1969: 220) 'placation', wherein GTAs have some influence over the project, letting them "advise or plan ad infinitum but retain for powerholders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice". This tension between autonomy and constraint was echoed in my GTA teaching experience on a large general education master's programme that had been running for several years when I joined the team. While this was an amazing experience and offered the opportunity to learn more about HE pedagogy within the structure of an existing programme, it also left very little room for innovation and change on an individual level. This is another element that makes the liminal space that the GTA occupies challenging—while you are still gaining experience and pedagogical knowledge, you are sometimes not respected by more experienced staff

members or by students (Allin, 2014). This can influence your confidence which also impacts teaching (Cho et al. 2011).

Recommendations

In terms of working with GTAs in partnership, a particular focus on power might be needed as staff may take it for granted that the power dynamic between staff and GTAs is already more equitable, which doesn't seem to be the case (Austin, 2002). Based on the literature around radical collegiality and GTA professional development, a focus on the process rather than the product is another important recommendation that can perhaps help to ensure that GTAs are benefitting from the project rather than being 'placated' or 'manipulated' (Arnstein, 1969). Learning from my own experiences with partnership, this can be fostered by engaging student partners (whether GTAs or not) in the project at all stages, through design, implementation and dissemination. Not only is this characteristic of a true partnership, but it is also important for the academic development of students. Being a part of the project from start to finish also allows students to truly feel like they are a part of a community working toward a shared goal, which is instrumental in fostering a sense of community and self-efficacy in students and GTAs.

When GTAs are engaged in partnership work with other students, power is still a key consideration, and should not simply be ignored since both participants are students. While closer to other students in terms of their identity and experience, GTAs still have more power due to their expertise and should interrogate how they use this in the partnership. In my own experience working with other students in partnership, I found that while I was hyperaware of trying to share responsibility, this was often met with

confusion or resistance from students who felt I was a more knowledgeable and experienced partner. Healey, Flint & Harrington (2014: 15) assert that "as a concept and a practice, partnership works to counter a deficit model where staff take on the role of enablers of disempowered students… aiming instead to acknowledge differentials of power while valuing individual contributions from students and staff in a shared process of reciprocal learning and working". GTAs may be uniquely positioned to value contributions from fellow students, but they should also not ignore the importance of reciprocity and challenging traditional power hierarchies.

References

Allin, L. (2014). Collaboration between staff and students in the scholarship of teaching and learning: the potential and the problems. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry, 2*(1), pp. 95-102.

Arnstein, S. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35*(4), pp. 216-224.

Austin, A.E. (2002). Preparing the next generation of faculty. *The Journal of Higher Education, 73*(1), pp. 94-122.

Bovill, C., Cook-Sather, A., Felten, P., Millard, L. and Moore-Cherry, N., (2016). Addressing potential challenges in co-creating learning and teaching: Overcoming resistance, navigating institutional norms and ensuring inclusivity in student–staff partnerships. *Higher Education*, *71*(2), pp.195-208.

Cho, Y., Kim, M., Svinicki, M.D. & Lowry Decker, M., (2011). Exploring teaching concerns and characteristics of graduate teaching assistants. *Teaching in Higher Education, 16*(3), pp. 267-279.

Cook-Sather, A., (2014). Student-faculty partnership in explorations of pedagogical practice: A threshold concept in academic development. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *19*(3), pp.186-198.

Dickerson, C., Jarvis, J. & Stockwell, L. (2016). Staff-student collaboration: student learning from working together to enhance educational practice in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education,* pp. 1-17.

Fielding, M. (1999). Radical collegiality: Affirming teaching as an inclusive professional practice. *Australian Educational Researcher, 26*(2), pp. 1-34.

Fielding, M. (2001). Students as radical agents of change. *Journal of Educational Change, 2*(2), pp. 123-141.

Healey, M. and Jenkins, A. (2009) Developing undergraduate research and inquiry. Higher Education Academy: York.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK.

Marie, J. (2018). 'The relationship between research-based education and student-staff partnerships', in Tong, V.C.H., Standen, A., Sotiriou, M. (ed.) *Shaping Higher Education with Students: Connecting research and teaching.* UCL Press: London, pp. 30-40.

Standen, A. (2018). 'Where teaching meets research: Engaging postgraduate teaching assistants with research-based education', in Tong, V.C.H., Standen, A, Sotiriou, M. (ed.) *Shaping Higher Education with Students: Connecting research and teaching.* UCL Press: London, pp. 41-52.

Tong, V.C.H., Standen, A., Sotiriou, M. (2018) Shaping Higher Education with Students: Connecting Research and Teaching. UCL Press: London.

A case study-based essay: Teaching outside the classroom: the contributions and challenges of Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) teaching on fieldtrips

Sarah Kunz[1] and Frances Brill[2]

[1] University of Bristol, UK; [2] University of Cambridge, UK

Abstract

Fieldtrips are an essential, and much loved, part of many university courses. For Geographers in particular, they form a core part of the curriculum. This paper focuses on the GTA experience of fieldtrips, synthesizing the benefits for students, faculty, and GTAs, whilst also highlighting some of the challenges involved. We argue that, on the one hand, fieldtrips are sites where GTAs can learn how to teach, develop as researchers and can be leveraged as opportunities to get to know more senior members of staff and receive mentoring. Further, GTAs also have valuable and unique contributions to make to fieldtrips, such as acting as a 'middle person' breaking down the student-teacher boundary and enhancing teaching by drawing on their own relatively recent experience of being taught as well as their current status as active researchers-in-training. Throughout, we reflect on how GTAs' involvement in fieldtrips extends their ambiguous position within the academy (Muzaka, 2009), which might require some additional boundary-defining work on fieldtrips to use this potential without

giving in to its pitfalls. For the potential benefits of GTA teaching on fieldtrips to be best realised, we end the article with a number of concrete suggestions for academic departments, staff leading fieldtrips and GTAs themselves on how to prepare and implement fieldtrips so as to make the most out of GTAs working on fieldtrips.

Keywords: Fieldtrips, Geography, 'middle person', boundary-defining work, recommendations

Introduction

Fieldtrips are an essential, and much loved, part of many university courses. For Geographers in particular (see Krakowka, 2012; Kent et al., 1997; Pawson and Tether, 2002), they form a core part of the curriculum and are sites through which students experience 'place-based learning' (Sherfinski et al., 2016); learn new research methods (Brill, 2017); and get a generally much-valued understanding of 'how theory works in practice' (Short and Lloyd, 2017).

In this article, we draw on our own experiences as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) on five undergraduate geography fieldtrips undertaken between 2016 and 2019. We argue that, on the one hand, fieldtrips are sites where GTAs can learn how to teach, develop as researchers and get to know more senior members of staff and receive mentoring. Further, we argue, GTAs also have valuable and unique contributions to make to fieldtrips, such as acting as a more approachable 'middle person' breaking down the student-teacher boundary and enhancing teaching by drawing on their own relatively recent experience of being taught as well as their current status as active researchers-in-training. For these potential benefits to be best realised, we end the article with a number of suggestions on how to prepare and implement fieldtrips. Specifically, we reflect on how GTAs' involvement in fieldtrips extends their ambiguous position within the academy (Muzaka, 2009), which might require some additional boundary-defining work on fieldtrips to use this potential without giving in to its pitfalls.

We specifically reflect on our combined experience of teaching on five fieldtrips across three European locations, all of which were around one week. The first two trips, both to the same European capital, were whole cohort trips for second year undergraduates (100+ students) which focused on developing their understanding of how key themes in human geography manifest in practice. Based at different field sites within the city, the trip featured a particular research activity at each site and various lectures at local universities. Students were placed in small groups and were asked to complete a research booklet over the trip as part of the summative assessment. Staff included senior members of faculty, lecturers, teaching fellows, recent PhD graduates who had worked in the city, staff from local universities, and two GTAs. Each member of staff was assigned a small group of six to eight students to work more closely with throughout the trip. The third trip was an optional political geography module to a Southern European city with approximately 20 third-year undergraduate students. It was accompanied by a senior member of faculty and a GTA, with guest lectures and site visits lead by local academics and other local stakeholders. The course included a significant research element with students engaged in carrying out a survey with the local population. Students further completed a fieldtrip diary and wrote a reflective essay, which together formed the summative assessment. Finally, there were two fieldtrips to a major UK city that formed part of a second-year optional Social and Cultural Geography module. The fieldtrips had approximately 20 to 30 students and were accompanied by two senior members of faculty and two GTAs. Course content was further delivered by local academics and professionals.

The course assessment included a research field diary report and an independent research essay based on historical or qualitative field research carried out during the trip. The fieldtrip was followed by several seminars led by senior staff and GTAs, in which students presented their on-going research.

In the remainder of this essay, we first outline the unique contributions GTAs can make to fieldtrips, then summarise what we believe GTAs can learn from fieldtrips. Following this, we outline some of the challenges and tensions that GTAs might face when teaching on fieldtrips, before concluding with a number of concrete recommendations aimed at GTAs teaching on fieldtrips and more senior faculty working with them to help make the most out of GTAs working on fieldtrips.

The unique contributions GTAs can make to fieldtrips

GTAs have unique contributions to make to fieldtrips and can support students' learning in direct and indirect ways. As is established in the emerging research on GTAs' role in the learning process, the GTA can be an effective 'middle person' between students and staff, occupying simultaneously the position of (research) student and teacher (Park, 2011). In the context of fieldtrips, this role is extended and deepened given the extended and often necessarily more informal social interaction between teaching staff and students. For example, we found students felt comfortable asking us what they thought might be 'silly' questions or they initiated

conversations about our own educational trajectory, finding GTAs more relatable and approachable because of their more junior status, their common 'student' status and, sometimes, their greater proximity in age. In this way, GTAs broke down the student-teacher boundary by creating a 'dialogue lens' (Pilsworth, 2017) for research-informed teaching within a fieldwork context.

Moreover, our own relatively recent experience of being taught allowed us to complement more senior faculty's teaching in ways closely informed by recent memories of what we enjoyed and found helpful as students. At the same time, our current status as active researchers and researchers-in-training allowed us to offer first-hand practical advice on issues which students who were just setting out as researchers experienced. In one case, the GTA's own experience of having recently lived in the city as an undergrad also allowed them to direct students to additional relevant resources, places and events that more senior faculty were not aware of. In this regard, fieldtrips can also function as an opportunity for international GTAs to overcome institutional barriers to accessing teaching work (Winter et al., 2014).

The GTAs role as a 'middle person' also worked the other way around, as GTAs were able to solicit, on behalf of the course conveners, students' opinions on how to improve and develop fieldtrips in the future. Our relative approachability and the greater ease with which we found students were able to relate to us, meant we were able to approach them informally and engage more deeply and openly with their reflections on what had worked and what was less

successful. This could then be fed back to conveners, in an anonymous form where relevant, and help them and their colleagues to reflect on their own teaching and develop trips for future years. This is important also because fieldtrips are expensive parts of the curricula, and are tiring to conduct, but are widely appreciated by students. For many departments, returning to the same place consecutively offers a means by which to minimise the burden on teaching and administrative staff while also deepening staff's knowledge of the place. Soliciting evaluative comments from students is thus vital in developing and refining the role(s) of fieldtrips in relation to both the specific goals of the trip (often fostering a research context and developing research skills), as well as situating the gained knowledge within the wider curriculum (Coughlin, 2010; Lonergan and Andreson, 1988). In this context, GTAs can play an important role in ensuring feedback about the trips is captured effectively and fed back to those in charge, thus contributing to the feedback loop of curriculum development at universities.

GTAs' approachability in terms of their institutional status can extend to have an even more substantial impact on those students considering further studies, for example doing a master's degree or even PhD. The GTA can act as a role model of what being a research student is like and relate what doing research degree can be like. We felt this was especially true in moments where we were able to bring in our own research. For example, when giving a lecture that drew on our own research we were able to highlight our own research trajectory and experience and speak to findings from our recent fieldwork (which was undertaken in other

places but touched on related theories and dynamics). Contributing to the deepening of the integration of research and teaching in this way, GTAs can provide a more grounded-in-research learning opportunity for those students eager to learn beyond textbooks. Thinking about the GTA as approachable, not simply in terms of their age or institutional status, but as a 'fellow researcher-in-training' warrants further attention in future research on how the approachability associated with more junior teaching and research staff can aid the teaching experience and help us understand and conceptualise GTAs' unique role in the academy.

On a final note, including GTAs as teaching staff might also prove to be an effective way of enhancing diversity within the academy and, specifically, among staff. Geography is still a very white and middle-class discipline, particularly at more senior staff levels – yet less and less so with regards to the student body (Dorling, 2019). As Lusher et al (2018:203) found, college students' grades improved when they were taught by teaching assistants of a similar 'race'/ethnicity and having teaching staff that students could relate to in terms of demographics such as 'race', class, gender or sexuality also positively influenced students' decisions on majoring and future course enrolment. In this context, including GTAs – who are more likely to be diverse along dimensions such as racialisation, gender, sexuality, or class background, given the only more recent efforts to improve diversity in higher education – on fieldtrips offers a chance for students to benefit from having a more diverse teaching staff (Lusher et al., 2018). This might be of particular relevance for students

from communities which are under-represented in academia and who might thereby gain access to positive role models or, at least, recognise themselves as having a potential place and role in academia. Moreover, whilst research elsewhere has shown that geography fieldtrips provide an opportunity to create a greater sense of community within a cohort (Fuller, 2006; Fuller et al., 2006; Herrick 2010; Phillips 2015), we here argue that the sense of community and belonging created via fieldtrips can be extended, via GTAs, to also include even teaching staff. This offers unique and arguably less-recognised opportunities to leverage fieldtrips as opportunities to enhance the students' – and teachers' – learning experience.

What GTAs can learn from fieldtrips

Fieldtrips offer important sites of learning, for students but also for GTAs. For students, fieldtrips help enhance learning practices by developing research skills and deepening their understanding of the empirical realities underpinning their classroom learning (Krakowka, 2012). In being 'outside the constraints of the "four walls classroom setting", supervised learning can take place via first-hand experience' (Lonergan and Andreson, 1988:64). From a GTA perspective, fieldtrips offer the opportunity to develop as both a researcher and teacher. From a researcher perspective, fieldtrips – especially where they involve a significant research element – offer GTA and other teaching staff a chance to reflect on their own research practice and on how their research sits within a wider body of disciplinary knowledge. For GTAs, in particular, fieldtrips in this way offer great potential to reflect on their on-going PhD research and broader training as researchers,

as well as providing them with a chance to acquire new knowledge that might not always be as closely related to their area of expertise as the literature they usually engage with.

For students as well as GTAs, fieldtrips can also be sites of learning about academia, in terms of its implicit norms, the history of the discipline as well as current developments. On the trips we attended, the course material ranged across the Human Geography syllabus. As such, we were exposed to a range of sub-disciplines within geography that we were not necessarily overly familiar with from our own research and previous studies. As GTAs based in geography but with different levels of exposure to geography pre-PhD (one of us had moved from sociology into geography), we were able to better contextualise our own research and develop a broader understanding of the landscape of the discipline (Chadha, 2011). This is essential for the development of GTAs' skills base also with regards to research-based learning (Brill, 2017), as entry level lectureships require applicants to be able to lecture well beyond their individual sub-field. More generally, it is a reminder of the breadth of the subject and the importance of knowing how your work and the way it is taught fits within the context of the discipline.

At the same time, fieldtrips are also key sites through which GTAs can learn about teaching. They function as spaces where GTAs can interact, informally whilst on the job, with more senior members of staff. These spaces of informality need to be actively curated by departments at other moments, whilst being incidental, such as at dinners or over group breakfasts, on fieldtrips. Trips therefore provide an

excellent way to learn through informal interactions, 'shadow' lectures and teaching approaches of more senior teachers, and potentially develop mentors. Fieldtrips also provide an obvious opportunity to solicit feedback from both senior staff and students on GTAs' teaching approaches – something that might be harder to get during busy term time. On our trips, we had the opportunity to deliver lectures to groups of students, as well as lead smaller groups on tours whilst accompanied by more senior members of staff. We supervised groups of students in their fieldtrip-based research, helped design research exercises that students would carry out and briefed students in the relevant research methods. In these moments we had the chance to reflect on and ask informally for advice about how to engage students, what had worked before (e.g. on previous trips) and how the more established teaching faculty prepared for lectures and other teaching events.

This extended beyond the fieldtrip, which whilst an important launch point for connecting with other members of staff, provides a relatively unique form of teaching. Going beyond the fieldtrips themselves, trips allowed us to also reflect on teaching back in the classroom and the relationships established during the trips provided us with the connections to seek further pedagogical advice and guidance. We had the opportunity to meet and get to know members of the teaching staff, who we might not usually engage with, after guest lectures, in coffee shops, and at dinners. Fieldtrips thus provide a platform through which GTAs can extend their network as they provide the chance to meet potential mentors located across the discipline, outside

the narrow range of their own research, and potentially find out about further teaching opportunities. In general, then, fieldtrips are uniquely important because in their informality they differ from other moments in the wider teaching practice. As Oliver et al. (2018) note, on-site, practical fieldwork constitutes a memorable experience through which students learn. Advancing this, we argue that they also provide memorable experience moments for those who teach and are learning to teach.

Challenges and tensions that GTAs might face when teaching on fieldtrips

The work of GTAs on fieldtrips is not without potential challenges. The approachability, while offering numerous opportunities and benefits, as identified above, also provides potential for moments of confusion and tension for GTAs, senior staff, and students. As such, fieldtrips are a lot of work and can cause stress for GTAs in addition to the more established forms of stresses that GTAs routinely experience, such as concerns about self and their role and ability. Such additional stress can result from preparing for teaching, from having to teach while being observed by senior staff, from being constantly on-call with students and in some cases, from adopting an informal pastoral role, as well as the emotional labour of navigating the position of GTA.

Firstly, GTAs can struggle to navigate the dual identity of student and staff (Park, 2011) inasmuch as the between-ness status of GTAs and the associated blurring of hierarchies can undermine GTAs authority or simply negatively affect their confidence to act with authority. This can be especially true

when GTAs' PhD supervisors are on the trip, as is often the case, because this requires the GTA to navigate multiple and particular roles. While, at best, the supervisor is a supportive mentor and teacher to the GTA, the supervisor also has a certain authority and power over the GTA unlike that of any other faculty member. On the fieldtrip, the GTA now has to mediate this role as their supervisor's student while in the very same moments also becoming a teacher and authority to students themselves, a dual role that might feel awkward, tense and is certainly not an everyday experience. Moreover, the GTA might now feel they have to doubly prove themselves to their supervisor, both as student and teacher, adding another level of potential stress.

Moreover, being relatively young female GTAs – especially with students who lived in London and were used to relatively mixed classes, as undergraduate classes include mature students, the student university life is mixed across graduate and undergraduate studies and students often socialise outside of the undergraduate student body – exacerbated the potential stresses and tensions of being a GTA on fieldtrips. For instance, we might feel that our behaviour is under extra scrutiny. Teaching staff including GTAs are sometimes invited out for dinner, drinks or even nightclubbing especially on trips with older students. While we have gone for coffee, dinner and even drinks with bigger groups of students and have enjoyed his experience, especially young female GTAs will always and continuously have to consider how engaging such invitations might potentially affect their professional standing and authority – and monitor their own behaviour and group dynamics - in

ways that senior faculty do not have to worry about as much. So, for instance, while we have been told of instances were staff joined students at nightclubs on fieldtrips – and retrospectively reflected that they might not do so again – we would not consider engaging such invitations in the first place because we would instantly be aware that it might blur boundaries too much.

As has been shown in other contexts, preparing students in advance of fieldtrips is vital in maximising the learning opportunities they can provide (Noel and Colopy, 2012). In this context, we highlight that this preparation should extend to include tailored preparation for all teaching staff involved, including GTAs. This is especially true in terms of defining what is expected of GTAs, in terms of their role, their responsibilities but also during 'non-work' hours such as dinners. On our trips, navigating the position of GTA was acutely felt in the moments when students and staff parted. As discussed above, students often used their established relationships with GTAs, or simply their relative proximity in age and status, to encourage them to come out for dinner or drinks, an invitation GTAs had to consider carefully and, moreover, navigate in front of more senior staff members. At the same time, more senior faculty regularly invited GTAs to join for dinner or lunch, too. This created opportunities for much valued new informal connections but again required consideration and navigation on behalf of the GTA who similarly had to consider how 'professional' they had to remain in such contexts while also being sufficiently 'fun' and informal. In these moments especially, GTAs' involvement in fieldtrips extends their ambiguous position within the

academy (Muzaka, 2009), which might require additional work to clearly define boundaries. In our case, we were lucky as the more senior staff we were working with on fieldtrips were generally aware and reflective about such dynamics and were often included in these conversations too: students joked with senior faculty and in one case even tried to convince the head of department to come out for drinks or go clubbing (they declined). Moreover, we could draw on established work-relationships with senior teaching staff, which further facilitated open conversations about expectations and roles.

Conclusion: Recommendations for GTAs that teach on fieldtrips and for more senior faculty working with them

In conclusion, this paper demonstrates that students (in their learning), the staff running fieldtrips (in their teaching) and GTAs (in both their learning and teaching) can substantially benefit from GTAs being involved in fieldtrips. We argue that the approachability and in-between status of GTAs offers, for example, an opportunity to close the teaching feedback loop in an informal way that benefits staff and students alike. On the other hand, it provides moments for GTAs to connect informally with more senior members of staff, solicit much needed but often challenging-to-acquire feedback on teaching as well as research, and provides 'natural' moments to learn about the wider discipline in a space that is often very open for discussion.

Reflecting on our experiences, we have three key recommendations to fully harness this potential. Firstly, it is

essential to prepare thoroughly for the trip, well in advance of leaving. In particular, GTAs and staff should discuss explicitly: 1. the expectations around what work the GTA is to carry out in terms of teaching and pastoral care, 2. what specific responsibilities the GTA will have, and 3. what the norms are for socialising with students but also with staff. Moreover, it should then also be discussed what the GTA wants to get out of the trip for their own development. In this context, it is important for the GTA to actively reflect on this matter and for senior staff to realise that GTAs are fellow teaching staff but also more junior and less institutionally secure teachers, for whom potentially more is at stake, and who they, in effect, are mentoring during the trip.

Second and relatedly, it is important for the university or department to treat GTAs not solely as a cheap teaching labour force but to structurally encourage and facilitate their learning on trips, by setting expectations, providing guidance and allocating hours and resources to the above-described preparation activities. This sort of explicit, preparatory conversation is key for allowing GTAs to perform to their full potential, successfully navigate any tensions that may arise during the trip and get the most out of the trip for their own development. This is especially the case as, given the nature of fieldtrips, GTAs are hardly able to leave the situation while on the trip and therefore it is vital for them to understand what exactly the trip will entail and to be able to prepare for that in advance.

Thirdly, staff should reflect on the benefits of having GTAs on fieldtrips and offer them opportunities for learning during the trip and, where viable, offer opportunities to develop

lasting mentoring relationships. Similarly, GTAs should, before the fieldtrip, reflect on their own role and expectations and take the chance to discuss their ideas, questions or concerns. This again comes back to the importance of having conversations in advance of the actual trip: staff need to be made aware of what GTAs want to get out of the trip, what their own pedagogical aims are and what they are currently working towards in their teaching development. For example, is there scope for GTAs to give a guest lecture on the course or lead on developing one of the activities? Will marking be expected? Fundamentally, any conversation must thus attend to whether GTAs can develop their teaching skillset through the trip. In all this, it is vital that the department and university offer the right institutional framework in the form of guidance, best practice and resources for these conversations to take place.

References

Brill, F. (2017) 'Learning from the Institute of Making: Connecting Research and Teaching: Students as Partners in Shaping Higher Education', ed. Vincent Tong, Alex Standen and Mina Sotiriou.London: UCL Press

Chadha, D. (2013) Reconceptualising and reframing graduate teaching assistant (GTA) provision for a research-intensive institution, Teaching in Higher Education, 18:2, 205-217, DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2012.696537

Cho, Y., Kim, M., Svinicki, M. & Decker, M. (2011) Exploring teaching concerns and characteristics of graduate teaching

assistants, Teaching in Higher Education, 16:3, 267-279, DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2010.524920

Coughlin, P (2010) Making Field Trips Count: Collaborating for Meaningful Experiences, The Social Studies, 101:5, 200-210, DOI: 10.1080/00377990903498431

Fuller, I., Edmondson, S., France, D. Higgitt, D.,& Rainen, I (2006) International Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Geography Fieldwork for Learning, Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 30:1, 89-101, DOI: 10.1080/03098260500499667

Fuller, I.C. (2006), What is the value of fieldwork? Answers from New Zealand using two contrasting undergraduate physical geography field trips. New Zealand Geographer, 62: 215-220. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-7939.2006.00072.x

Herrick, C., 2010. Lost in the field: ensuring student learning in the 'threatened'geography fieldtrip. *Area*, *42*(1), pp.108-116.

Krakowka, A (2012) Field Trips as Valuable Learning Experiences in Geography Courses, Journal of Geography, 111:6, 236-244, DOI: 10.1080/00221341.2012.707674

Lonergan, N. & Andresen, L. (1988) Field-Based Education: Some Theoretical Considerations,Higher Education Research & Development, 7:1, 63-77, DOI: 10.1080/0729436880070106

Lonergan N, Andreson LW (1988). Field-based education: Some theoretical considerations. Higher Education Research and Development 7, 63–77

Lusher, L., Campbell, D. & Carrell, S (2018). TAs like me: Racial interactions between graduate teaching assistants and undergraduates. Journal of Public Economics (159), 203-224 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2018.02.005

Muzaka, V. (2009) The niche of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs): perceptions and reflections, Teaching in Higher Education, 14:1, 1-12, DOI: 10.1080/13562510802602400

Noel, A., & Colopy, M. (2006) Making History Field Trips Meaningful: Teachers' and Site Educators' Perspectives on Teaching Materials, Theory & Research in Social Education, 34:4, 553-568, DOI: 10.1080/00933104.2006.10473321

Oliver, C., Leader, S. & Kettridge, N. (2018) Birmingham Bog outdoor laboratory: potentials and possibilities for embedding field-based teaching within the undergraduate classroom, Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 42:3, 442-459, DOI: 10.1080/03098265.2018.1455816

Park, C. (2004) The graduate teaching assistant (GTA): lessons from North American experience, Teaching in Higher Education, 9:3, 349-361, DOI: 10.1080/1356251042000216660

Pawson, E., & Teather, E. (2002) 'Geographical Expeditions': Assessing the benefits of a student-driven fieldwork method, Journal of Geography in Higher

Education, 26:3, 275-
289, DOI: 10.1080/0309826022000019864

Phillips, R., 2015. Playful and multi-sensory fieldwork: seeing, hearing and touching New York. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *39*(4), pp.617-629.

Sherfinski, M., Weekley, B. & Slocum, A. (2016) After Arthurdale: Place-based education and early childhood in West Virginia, Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, 13:2, 164-183, DOI: 10.1080/15505170.2016.1196403

Short, F., & Lloyd, T. (2017). Taking the Student to the World: Teaching Sensitive Issues using Field Trips. Psychology Teaching Review, 23(1), 49-55. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1146413

Wiers-Jenssen, J., Stensaker, B., & Grogaard, J., (2002) Student Satisfaction: Towards an empirical deconstruction of the concept, Quality in Higher Education, 8:2, 183-195, DOI: 10.1080/1353832022000004377

Winter, J., Turner, R., Gedye, S., Nash, P., & Grant, V. (2015) Graduate teaching assistants: responding to the challenges of internationalisation, International Journal for Academic Development, 20:1, 33-
45, DOI: 10.1080/1360144X.2014.986661

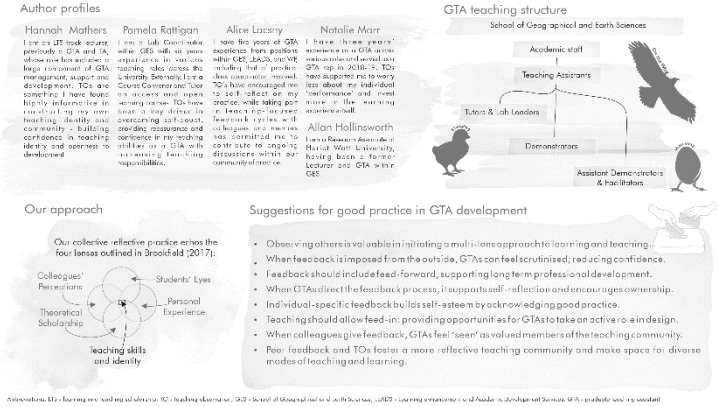
Reflections on the value of teaching observations: a holistic training model for GTA development

Hannah Mathers[1], Natalie Marr[1], Alice Lacsny[1], Pamela Rattigan[1], Allan Hollinsworth[2]

[1] University of Glasgow, UK

[2] Heriot Watt University, UK

Abstract



Introduction

The University of Glasgow is a Russell Group institution in a research-intensive setting and is structurally divided into four cognate Colleges: Arts; Social Sciences; Medicine, Veterinary, and Life Sciences; and Science and Engineering. The School of Geographical and Earth Sciences (GES) occupies an unusual liminal space straddling multiple Colleges: Arts, Social Science, and Science and Engineering, encompassing students, Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and staff from diverse backgrounds including the fine arts, physics, computing, history, biology and literature alongside traditional 'geographers' and 'geo-scientists'.

GTAs in the School are primarily, but not exclusively, postgraduate research students from a variety of academic backgrounds and contribute substantially to the overall teaching portfolio, particularly in the undergraduate degrees. Undergraduate degrees are four years long with GTA teaching concentrated in years one and two, primarily supporting two types of practical class: labs and tutorials, with a significant role to facilitate student discussions, further student engagement and encourage students to explore in more depth through reflection on lecture content in a more skills-focused manner. In these spaces GTAs act as a near-peer role model for UG students. Many GTAs are graduates of the School and so are able to support students due to their familiarity with the teaching staff and the degree structure. In complement to this, non-alumni GTAs, especially international PGRs and those with non-GES undergraduate training, provide a diversity of knowledge and experience in complementary subjects to the geosciences and geo-humanities and serve as active role models for interdisciplinarity. Positions as Teaching Assistants (TA) are

also offered intermittently, with these individuals progressing from GTA work to manage teams of GTAs with increasing contribution to curriculum design and development (Figure 1).

Increasing professionalisation of GTA roles as facilitated by both the shift to fixed term contracts and through emphasis in the UK Professional Standards Framework (Descriptor 1) has seen a positive shift in the profile of GTAs within the Higher Education sector. At departmental level we (as GTAs) have sometimes continued to experience identity conflict and uncertainty regarding the value of our work and place in the School teaching community, which is echoed in other contexts as evidenced by Watson (2018). This illustrates an experiential lag between policy change and immediate cultural change experienced by individual GTAs. Consequently, we believe it is imperative that GTAs are appropriately trained and supported to feel confident and respected as teachers and supporters of learning. Working in a mixed discipline school necessitates that we as GTAs teach in contexts where we may have low confidence in our subject specific knowledge. Acknowledging this stressor, our training model aims to route confidence in student-centered teaching skills and learning facilitation, rather than a didactic transmission approach.

In the following paper, we present a model for the integration of teaching observations (TOs) and associated reflective practice into GTA development that we believe helps to build confidence, self-evaluation and the notion of evolving pedagogic practice into GTA teaching methodology. The model was initially developed for the undergraduate Geography degree in our School and has in the last three

years been expanded to cover early years of our Earth Science degrees, in order to enhance learning community formation and student retention. Drawing on experience from the sciences and social sciences, and the perspectives of both the observer and observee, we reflect on a number of ways in which engagement with an observation process can be pivotal in GTA identity formation and participation in the wider teaching community. We make recommendations for GTA-stage relevant training and development by classifying GTA experience under three terms we have defined as: 'hatchling', 'fledgling' and 'on the wing' (see Figure 1).

Our model is informed by our shared experiences and critical reflections of GTA development within our School. In response to a call for presentations at the annual GTA Developer's Forum in 2019, we assembled a small team to consider GTA experience and support in the School. Our discussions offered us an opportunity to reflect on practice, but also to recognise, document and critique our training model that spoke to the needs, challenges and opportunities we had identified. This paper is one outcome of that process and is written with a reflective voice, informed by the experiences and insights of each of the authors and further resourced by informal feedback from GTA peers. In our School we are now revising and promoting the teaching observation model in light of our reflections, in order to provide support and development relevant to GTA stage and requirement.

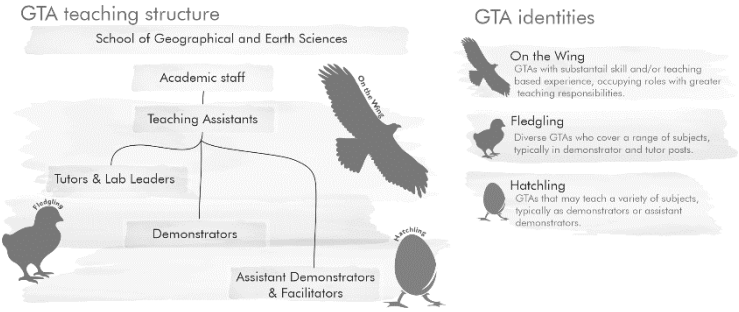


Figure 1. Structure of GTA teaching involvement and development (including GTA identities as separate from roles) in GES, University of Glasgow.

As part of GTA development at the School, we support an optional programme of teaching observations. Teaching observation opportunities and benefits are described and advertised repeatedly throughout the academic year via GTA Induction and teaching meetings. Meanwhile, GTA testimonials and example feedback are available as a permanent reference section for GTAs on the online learning platform, Moodle. Once the observation has been requested, the GTA convenor creates a teaching observation request form and feedback proforma. GTAs volunteer to participate via teaching meetings, contacting GTA peers in their team or academic staff directly. Our approach echoes two of Gosling's (2014) types of peer review: emphasising development and collaboration over evaluation. The uptake of the TO programme is good (in non-COVID years) where a collaborative cohort has been established. In the next sections we reflect on the impact of the TO programme (Figure 2) through the voice of GTAs in certain teaching environments.

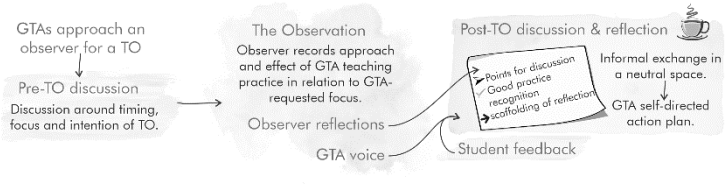


Figure 2. Teaching observation process, from initiation by a GTA, through to development of a GTA self-directed action plan.

Framework for Reflection

Our critical reflection on teaching observations and their value for GTA development echoes Brookfield's (1995) model of four considerations: (1) Students' Eyes (2) Colleagues' Perceptions, (3) Personal Experience, and (4) Theoretical Scholarship. Brookfield surmises that, in order to be truly reflective, we must acknowledge, understand, and critically reflect on our teaching from our own perceptions and beyond. It is essential at all levels of teaching to reflect on our own experiences from the perspective of the student, considering feedback from our learners. This is because the student perspective can emphasise 'those actions and assumptions that either confirm or challenge existing power relationships in the classroom' (Brookfield, 1995: 30).

In complement, discussion among colleagues is essential for good reflection-informed practice. This method of reflection is relevant as we examine the role of teaching observations in GTA development. As such, it is important to acknowledge the value of peer observation, not only for skills development, but also for building confidence in teacher identity (Atkinson & Bolt, 2010). Meanwhile, self-reflection permits us to interrogate 'the paradigmatic assumptions and instinctive reasonings that frame how we work' (Brookfield,

1995: 30). Examining and reflecting on our own practice can help us engage critically with our pedagogy and identify areas for development (Miller, 2010). This ethos underscores this paper, as we reflect together on our shared context. Finally, we turn to Brookfield's acknowledgement of theoretical literature. It is the method through which our understandings are shaped and the base to which we return after reflection. We recognise that it is important for all educators to engage with reflective practice throughout their career and that this should include digestion of theoretical literature.

For the scope of this paper, we focus on the value of peer observations and self-reflection throughout GTA development. We begin our discussion with the context of a GTA's developmental journey within GES. We discuss our reflections using a collective voice combining the experience of four GTAs and the GTA convener for Geography and Earth Science undergraduate teaching. We reflect on the value of teaching observations in three different teaching settings: 1) small-group teaching; 2) large-group teaching; and 3) online teaching. More broadly we discuss the development of a teaching community within GES. We conclude our paper with recommendations for a model that integrates teaching observations and reflective practice into GTA development.

Discussion

School (departmental) context

Assignment to teaching roles is GTA-led, whereby GTAs formally apply for specific roles such as Demonstrator, Tutor or Lab Leader, and, in most cases, GTAs sign fixed term contracts. Roles are appointed by experience, merit, and

availability ensuring a broad community of GTAs whose teaching work is largely independent of their research connections, and which results in teaching that is engaged and consistent. GTAs are required to complete six hours of training (three institutional, three in School) and may also choose to participate in training offered by the university's Academic and Digital Development Team (ADD). GTAs are also encouraged to engage in the university's teaching recognition programme: Recognising Excellence in Teaching (RET), which is aligned with D1 of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) and utilises TOs and peer-supported workshops. The explicit focus on reflective practice in this programme emphasises this as fundamental in the development of professional teaching.

Our vision for GTA development addresses the themes defined by Zotos et al. (2020), who recognised teacher identity issues in their own surveyed GTA cohort around their role on the course, affect, personal goals, and desired student perception. The provision of GTA training and observation aims to address these by:

- Defining GTA roles and responsibilities,
- Advertising a network for support and development,
- Providing opportunities for GTA feedback and feed-in to teaching approach and course design, and
- Assisting in the establishment of reflective practice and teacher identity formation.

On reflection, we feel teaching meetings are the primary context for developing a teaching community between convenors and amongst GTAs. Teaching meetings also provide spaces for innovation, discussion and design, actively

encouraging conversations around best practice. It is a valuable way for GTAs to reflect on and communicate their experiences, influencing the design and adaptation of curriculum materials and lesson structure. This collaborative and supportive approach is one we believe facilitates development in GTA confidence and validation of teacher identity. Reflecting on teaching situations where meetings and feedback opportunities were not designed into the GTA support model, we (as GTAs) have felt under-recognised as an autonomous, but less-experienced, teacher. This under-serving of graduate student training needs in relation to teaching has been recognised by Austin (2002) highlighting the importance of autonomy, self-efficacy and GTA community.

In addition to looking forward to the next teaching session, these (bi)weekly meetings also allow us to reflect on teaching from the previous block, discussing both what has worked well and how we might amend other areas in the future as well as suggesting approaches to solving problems involving both classroom issues and subject content. Engagement with University provision of continuing professional development and scholarship activities is communicated and promoted through these teaching meetings, GTA mailing list and Moodle channel. We will now discuss this local approach to GTA development through reflecting on teacher identity formation in a range of teaching environments.

Large Group Teaching: Using TOs to reinforce a sense of teaching community

Within geography and earth science, large lab classes are instructed by a pair of GTAs (one lab leader and one lab demonstrator). These large group sessions involve different

responsibilities depending on role – leaders guide the lab, and demonstrators facilitate student discussion. However, within this lab setting, there is room to manoeuvre between these roles, depending on subject-specialism and desire to try something new. The role of the lab leader is usually undertaken by a GTA 'fledgling', or a GTA 'on the wing' – someone with previous teaching experience of a similar nature. The demonstrator, meanwhile, is usually a 'hatchling' (completely new to teaching or someone wanting a different experience) or sometimes a 'fledgling' with limited availability.

Our experience of demonstrating or assisting a more senior member of academic staff in the 'hatchling' phase of development differs greatly from working alongside another GTA. Senior staff often overlook the value of GTAs, providing fewer opportunities for GTAs to 'own' their role and rarely gave feedback. This can discourage GTAs from engaging in professional development or from seeking feedback from established staff, because they feel their professional identity is not acknowledged. It is important that both GTAs and the staff working with them are attuned to: "Recognizing and making room for the complex life worlds of GTAs and allowing for the customization of identities based on desire and need" (Pierson, 2018; p.50). In contrast, within the GTA community there is mutual recognition and often collaborative work on professional development – we believe this is rooted in a shared understanding of professional identity, often reinforced through the TO process.

Large group teaching can be a little more daunting than tutorials and perhaps as a result of this, tutors have more frequently requested teaching observations than lab leaders

and demonstrators. Most commonly, GTAs receive feedback from early career staff and other GTAs; while this has led to community building it can also produce feelings of separation and hierarchy within a department. This experience is particularly common in research-intensive institutions, where members of staff are under increasing pressure to publish research. As a result, teaching is often undervalued and under-resourced (Rawat and Meena, 2014; Young, 2006).

In the context of these larger group labs, peer feedback is often ongoing, with lab leader and demonstrator communicating before, during, and after each session. Due to the nature of teamwork required, reflection and peer observation are a way for the team to work together effectively. In this setting, peer observations are especially relevant and can have immediate influence on the way a lab is run.

Small group teaching: Building confidence in teacher identity through engagement in TO practice

As 'fledgling' GTAs, in the early stages of small group teaching, we often experienced feelings of inadequacy in delivering these sessions independently. Although we were provided with teaching materials, we felt underqualified compared to the more senior academic staff. Anecdotally, 'fledgling' GTAs have been the most common requestors of teaching observations from both peers and senior staff. Both peer TOs and the collection of informal student feedback on post-it notes or digitally at the end of sessions (Figure 2), have highlighted the value of tutorials to first year students. This additional perspective counters GTAs' perceptions of inadequacy, by demonstrating that students have identified the approachability and non-didactic style of postgraduate

tutors as a strength. Equally, observers noted the relaxed environment for the students, where individuals felt comfortable asking questions and contributing to group discussions. The intimacy of the small group setting (from our collective observing experience) requires a GTA to have confidence in an authentic, or constructed, teaching persona in order to create a supportive and collaborative learning space. Tutorials, in our School, often operate around a single table format which offers a sense of equality for students, who experience their tutor as a person as well as a teacher, operating as one of the group (hooks, 1994).

Tutorials in first and second year are collaborative, focused, and rely heavily on both student engagement and the ability of the tutor to foster, encourage, and direct discussion. These are advanced teaching skills and not necessarily intuitive to 'hatchling' GTAs (Figure 1). GTAs in GES normally 'graduate' into small group teaching after gaining confidence in student group facilitation, as a lab demonstrator. Tutorials tend to be discussion-based or rooted in methods of active learning. To this end, it is imperative that the tutor feels confident, not only in navigating student input, but also at managing adverse or unusual territory – this is particularly important within the second year, where curriculum design means that tutorials can touch upon sensitive or emotive topics. Unlike in lab classes, tutors teach alone and therefore do not have the benefit of having previously 'taught alongside' as a demonstrator.

With responsibilities of leading a small group, teaching observations are imperative for tutors at this stage in their career. Our reflections suggest TOs can reveal new ways of engaging students, or even highlight methods of practice that

work well for particular topics. This experience shows that a proactive and developmental approach to TOs rather than imposed and regulatory (as argued by Gosling, 2014) can generate positive impact on teacher identity in GTAs. In this way the teaching observation process becomes a vehicle, not only for increasing GTA confidence and self-efficacy, but in building community and collaborative working as a teaching team through observer pairs. The engagement in TOs requires trust on both sides. It is common that teaching observations do not result in direct changes in practice, as with observations of staff (Marie et al. 2018), and often GTAs are not able to make changes they would like due to the confines of their role. However, we have observed that tutors in small group teaching roles willingly invest time in learning experience evaluation and self-reflection. Reviewing one's own teaching from another perspective helps to alleviate some of the initial tensions of having a peer observation and can also foster reassurance in the knowledge that others are undergoing the same process.

Teaching Online: Recognising the value of collaborative reflective practice

In March 2020 all our teaching moved online; a new environment for most of us. With this significant shift in practice there was, perhaps, an even greater need to reinforce support for GTAs in developing a confident teaching identity. The feelings of inadequacy mentioned above were just as rife, if not more focused, when examined in this new context.

In some of our TA experience, online delivery does offer a more flexible model for TOs, with the ability to record classes, allowing tailored attention and providing more

opportunity for self-reflection. Importantly, online TOs provide an opportunity to gain shared experience in establishing best practice (Purcell et al. 2017). This wider TA perspective of what works well in an online format demonstrates that TOs and collaborative reflective practice enable a strong sense of community and build confidence. Both impacts are particularly important for GTA development as we navigate through new and uncertain online territories.

Discussion-based lessons are almost as effectively taught online; student discussions can be facilitated via breakout rooms and tutorial preparation is easily facilitated with online resources (Petrides, 2002). However, collaborative teaching, which is often responsive to classroom dynamics and gains energy from spontaneous adjustments, can be more challenging online (Woods, 2002; Vonderwell, 2003). Project-based sessions that rely on the careful facilitation of group dynamics can be impeded by technological barriers (Song et al., 2004). Here, the opportunity for students to ask questions, or GTAs to observe interactions, can be more stilted. Although this shift has changed the dynamics of large-group and collaborative teaching, from a TO perspective this online delivery format has also encouraged us to 'experiment' with our delivery. As a result, TOs have highlighted new areas of strength and possible areas for further reflection.

Some of us have experienced a self-imposed or perceived pressure to perform in an engaging way when teaching online, which led to the adoption of a more didactic mode. The shift to online delivery may have undermined the teacher identity of some GTAs who are no longer a bridge from lecturing staff to students, but just one of a faculty of

online teachers. Maintaining a feeling of being present and connected to learners can be hampered for some GTAs by technological barriers. TOs can partially redress this balance by heightening our self- and classroom awareness, prompting intention and being present in the teaching space. Negative comparisons with face-to-face teaching experience can be countered with recognition that the focus of the learning experience, and consequently a GTA's role, is still the same: learner facilitation. On balance, reflective practice, engrained by experience of teaching observations, has equipped some GTAs to cope better with this environmental shift. Teaching meetings can also ease the transition by providing a forum to discuss solutions and gain alternative perspectives. These can also act as informal and permissive spaces for staff to express the challenges they are experiencing in pivoting to this new format.

Recommendations: Model for the integration of teaching observations and reflective practice into GTA development

We propose that academic units wishing to strengthen their teaching community and develop the teacher identities of GTAs consider the following recommendations. Our guidance is influenced by Gosling's (2002) recognition of the objectives of developmental and peer review models of teaching observation approaches. Specifically, our approach aims to emphasise mutuality of benefit (observer and observee) with opportunities for improvement (of teaching and reflective practice) through constructive feedback. The positive impact of the School's approach has been recognised through a College Teaching Excellence Award for the Geography-1 Teaching Team (comprising staff and a large team of GTAs).

Investment in effective and sustainable GTA support and training is key. In parallel to this, an attitude in support of development rather than monitoring for quality assurance, is important for fostering community and the development of a separate teacher identity for postgraduate research students. An appointed and time-recognised role of GTA convener is often the foundation of a GTA community of practice. GTA coordinators or course conveners should monitor the teaching experience level of their GTAs in order to offer tailored advice and progression opportunities should these be appropriate. Our suggestions for stage-appropriate integration of teaching observation and reflective practice are summarised in Figure 3.

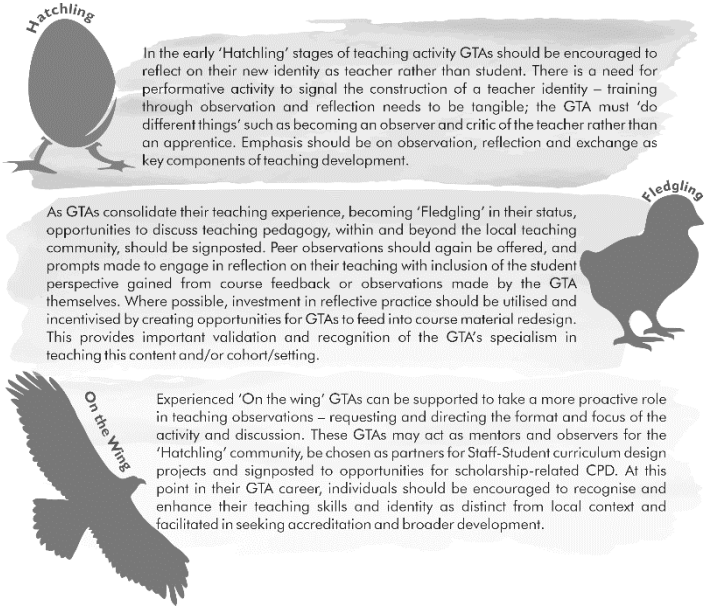


Figure 3. Suggested mode and integration of teaching observations and reflective practice for different stages and identities in GTA development.

Engagement with the Teaching Perspectives Inventory (Pratt, 2001) can help to initiate self-reflection and provide nucleation material for discussions. This may be actively promoted through opportunities to sit-in on others' teaching ahead of beginning their own sessions. There should also be discussion of teaching approach in teaching meetings and signposting of near-peer mentors in the GTA community. As identified in the work of Bovill and Cairns (2014), the pairing of teaching observation feedback with discussion adds value to a peer observation activity. Observations must have opportunities for feed forward and allow space for GTAs to justify and question their own, or the unit's, practice and approach. GTA conveners may work to stretch the skills palette of experienced GTAs and revitalise courses by employing these individuals in alternative roles where GTAs lean on their skills rather than their research specialisms.

Engaging with teaching observations is as beneficial for the academic staff member (observer) as it is for the GTA (observee). The recognition of this reciprocity is key in the development of a trusting and mutual mentoring relationship, with more experienced staff benefitting from the perspectives and ideas of new members of staff (Blackwell & McLean, 1996). The harnessing of new energy and perspective is central to the valuing of teaching meetings in our GTA system. GTAs should feel that their insights are valued and may enact changes in courses, staff attitudes and approach. Critically, we have sought in this paper to not only include GTA perspectives on teaching practice, but to speak directly from those positions by centring GTA experience and knowledge in our discussion of shared challenges and good practice for teaching more widely. In summary, peer feedback and teaching observations foster a more reflective

teaching community and facilitate professional growth and progression into more diverse and effective modes of teaching and learning for both staff and GTAs.

Taking TOs forward: Next steps for a more visible and sustainable observation system

As a group, we are in the early stages of establishing a departmental GTA TO group (TOG), with the focus of fostering GTA development both through TOs and an associated community of reflective practice. Our aim is to scaffold and incentivise the exchange of good practice between GTAs and other teaching staff. This will be achieved through an online platform of guidance, workshops and training. Our ambition is to enhance the connectivity, sustainability and profile of GTA-led teaching for the benefit of the broader School community. The training model we present in this paper offers a strategy for integrating and empowering GTAs within the broader teaching community. It is grounded in shared reflective practice, and mediated by informal mentoring, collaborative teaching, teaching meetings, TOs and informal peer-to-peer feedback and support among GTAs. It is relevant for GTAs and those managing and working with them who wish to enhance the learning environment and experience for teachers and learners.

Maintaining a framework for teaching observation and self-reflection is a labour-intensive endeavour requiring staff buy-in, the nurturing of a culture of trust and belief in developmental practice. Our model facilitates a shift in perceptions, resulting in enhanced reciprocity and departmental resilience, grounded in a mutually-supportive community of teaching practice. Our collaborative reflective

practice has provided an opportunity to not only share and build upon our individual experiences, but to establish a support structure to facilitate active and meaningful change in our department. This process has also been invaluable in recognising our teacher identities and personal growth as GTAs, as we ourselves continue to navigate 'on the wing'.

References

Atkinson, D. and Bolt, S., 2010. Using teaching observations to reflect upon and improve teaching practice in higher education. Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 10(3), pp. 1 – 19.

Austin, A. E. 2002. Preparing the next generation of faculty: Graduate school as socialization to the academic career. Journal of Higher Education, 73, 94-122

Blackwell, R. and McLean, M., 1996. Mentoring new university teachers. The International Journal for Academic Development, 1(2), pp.80-85.

Bovill, C. and Cairns, A., 2014. Peer observation of teaching as a form of strategic academic development. University of Glasgow: Teaching and Learning Centre. Retrieved November 18, p.2015.

Brookfield, S.D., 1995. Becoming a critically reflected teacher. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Gosling, D. 2014. Collaborative peer-supported review of teaching. In: Peer review of learning and teaching in higher education (pp. 13-31). Springer, Dordrecht.

Gosling, D., 2002. Models of peer observation of teaching. LTSN Generic Centre.

Hooks, B. 1994. Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. Routledge, New York.

Marie, J., Hansen, J., Hazen, M., Elliot, M.I., Piccoli, G., & Thorogood, J. 2018. Student reviewers of teaching practice: Reflections on the design and experience of participants. International Journal for Students as Partners, 2(2). https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v2i2.3370

Miller, B., 2010. *Brookfield's Four Lenses: Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. Faculty of Arts Teaching and Learning Committee, The University of Sydney. March 2010. Sydney, Australia.

Petrides, L. A. 2002. Web-based technologies for distributed (or distance) learning: Creating learning-centred educational experiences in the higher education classroom. International Journal of Instructional Media, 29(1), 69-77

Pierson, C., 2018. Neither Teacher nor Scholar: Identity and Agency in a Graduate Teacher's Life. Unpublished MA thesis, University of Central Florida.

Pratt, D.D., 2001/ Pratt, D.D., and Collins, J. B., 2000. The Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI). Adult Education Research Conference. https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2000/papers/68

Purcell, J. W., Scott, H. I. and Mixson-Brookshire, D. 2017. Continuous improvement in Online Education: Documenting Teaching Effectiveness in the Online Environment through Observations. Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 20(4), pp. 1556-384.

Rawat, S. and Meena, S. 2014. Publish or perish: Where are we heading? Journal of Research in Medical Sciences, 19(2), pp. 87-89.

Song, L., Singleton, E. S., Hill, J. R. & Koh, M. H. 2004. Improving online learning: Student perceptions of useful and challenging characteristics. The Internet and Higher Education, 7(1), 59-70.

Vonderwell, S. 2003. An examination of asynchronous communication experiences and perspectives of students in an online course: A case study. Internet and Higher Education, 6, 77-90.

Watson, S. (2018) GTAs and Demonstrators at University of Glasgow. UCU Glasgow. [Accessed online: 25-03-2021] www.ucuglasgow.wordpress.com/author/ucuglasgow/

Woods, R. H. 2002. How much communications is enough is online courses? Exploring the relationship between frequency of instructor-initiated personal email and learners' perceptions of and participation in online learning. International Journal of Instructional Media, 29(4), 377-394.

Young, P., 2006. Out of balance: Lecturers' perceptions of differential status and rewards in relation to teaching and research. Teaching in higher education, 11(2), pp.191-202.

Zotos, E.K., Moon, A.C. and Shultz, G.V., 2020. Investigation of chemistry graduate teaching assistants' teacher knowledge and teacher identity. Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 57(6) pp. 943-967.

Author biographies and correspondence

Frances Brill

Frances Brill is the Margaret Tyler Research Fellow in Geography at Girton College, The University of Cambridge. She is an an urban-economic geographer with an interest in planning. She has taught at UCL, in the Geography department, the Bartlett School of Planning, and the Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies. She currently teaches undergraduates and postgraduates at UCL and at the University of Cambridge.

Email: fnb22@cam.ac.uk

Pamela Campbell

I am a Lab Coordinator within GES with seven years experience in various teaching roles across the University. Externally, I am a Course Convener and Tutor on access and open learning courses. TOs have been a key driver in overcoming self-doubt, providing reassurance and confidence in my teaching abilities as a GTA with increasing teaching responsibilities.

Email: p.rattigan.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Lauren Clark

Lauren Clark is a Lecturer (Education) at the UCL Institute of Education, with expertise in critical pedagogy, student-staff partnership and higher education pedagogy.

Originally from San Diego, California, Lauren moved to London in 2011 to do an MSc in Psychology of Education at the IOE. Throughout her academic career, Lauren has been involved in research on child development and psychology, cooperative learning, and, more recently, student-staff partnership in higher education. Lauren completed her doctorate in 2020, which focused on different conceptualisations of critical pedagogues in English universities, exploring the relationship between theory and practice.

Email: l.clark.14@ucl.ac.uk

Manuela Irarrazabal Elliott

Manuela Irarrázabal Elliott is Director and Editor at the trilingual literary journal *Espacio Fronterizo • Espace Frontière • Borderland*. She recently completed a PhD in Classics at UCL, where she researched ancient emotions from a cognitive perspective. As a PhD student at UCL, she took part in several student-engagement schemes, such as ChangeMakers, ASER Facilitators and Student Reviewers. She was a Student Representative for her department and her faculty, and a student elected member of the Academic Board. Previously, she was a lecturer in philosophy at Universidad Católica de Chile, where she worked in a student engagement programme for BA students.

Email: manuela.elliott.12@ucl.ac.uk

Jesper Hansen

Jesper Hansen is a Lecturer (Teaching) in UCL Arena Centre for Research-based Education. He began his work in Arena focusing on preparing GTAs to teach but now works primarily with early-career academics who are new to teaching. His current research focuses on capstone assessment and queering language learning in higher education.

Email: j.hansen@ucl.ac.uk

Alex Hastie

Alex Hastie is a lecturer in human geography at Coventry University, with expertise in film/cinema, audiences, postcolonial and popular culture.

Alex has researched and written about the relationship between postcolonial cinema, popular culture and film audiences. His PhD, Postcolonial Popcorn, examined contemporary Maghrebi-French film for the ways it uses Hollywood genre to tell unfamiliar stories in familiar ways. Alex is now pursuing new research into how people engage with diverse film cultures through online streaming platforms ranging from Netflix to MUBI.

Email: alex.hastie@coventry.ac.uk

Allan Hollinsworth

I am a Research Associate at Heriot Watt University, having been a former Lecturer and GTA within GES.

Email: a.hollinsworth@hw.ac.uk

Rowan Jaines

Rowan Jaines is an ESRC sponsored PhD researcher in the Department of Geography at the University of Sheffield. Her work focuses on landscape and labour conditions in the Fens of Eastern England, as well as the use of creative methods in social sciences research.

Email: rvjaines1@sheffield.ac.uk

Sarah Kunz

Sarah Kunz is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies at the University of Bristol. Sarah received her PhD in Human Geography and has taught at UCL, Coventry University, and the University of Bristol. Her research focuses on privileged forms of migration, the politics of migration categories, and the relationship between mobility, coloniality and racism. Sarah is currently working on a monograph on the postcolonial history and politics of the category expatriate and is conducting research into investment migration and the global Citizenship Industry.

Email: sarah.kunz@bristol.ac.uk

Alice Lacsny

I have five years of GTA experience from positions within GES, LEADS, and WP, including that of practical class coordinator involved. TO's have encouraged me to self-reflect on my practice, while taking part in teaching-focused feedback cycles with colleagues and mentors has permitted

me to contribute to ongoing discussions within our community of practice.

Jenny Marie

Jenny Marie is Head of Academic & Learning Enhancement at the University of Greenwich. She has a long interest in student-staff partnership, gaining a National Teaching Fellowship in 2018 in recognition of her leadership in this area. While at UCL where she led their student-partnership schemes, UCL ChangeMakers and Student Reviewers, which supported GTAs and taught students to work in partnership with staff on quality enhancement projects and different aspects of quality assurance. While at Greenwich she has worked closely with the Students Union and is currently leading a strand of work on embedding student partnership into the curriculum.

Email: j.a.marie@greenwich.ac.uk

Natalie Marr

I have three years' experience as a GTA across various roles and served as a GTA rep in 2018-19. TOs have supported me to worry less about my individual 'performance' and invest more in the learning experience itself.

Email: n.marr.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Hannah Mathers

I am an LTS track lecturer, previously a GTA an TA, whose role has included a large component of GTA management, support and development. TOs are something I have found

highly informative in constructing my own teaching identity and community – building confidence in teaching identity and openness to development.

Email: hannah.mathers@glasgow.ac.uk

Alex Standen

Alex Standen is Associate Professor (Teaching) in the Arena Centre for Research-based Education in University College, London (UCL). Prior to her present post, she taught Italian and European Studies at the Universities of Birmingham and Auckland. At UCL she has led development programmes for GTAs, probationary staff, personal tutors and doctoral supervisors. Her research interests include postgraduate research student development and student-supervisor relationships. She is co-editor of *Shaping Higher Education with Students: Ways to Connect Research and Teaching* (UCL Press, 2018), in which both students and academics explored how they can work in partnership to advance research-based education.

Email: a.standen@ucl.ac.uk