Postgraduate Pedagogies Journal

Vol 3 No 1 2023

Postgraduate Pedagogies is an open-access journal devoted to articulating and sharing the perspectives of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). We publish contributions that convey the experiences, reflections, and analyses of current and recent GTAs, those who work with GTAs, and those who support them. The journal offers theoretical reflections as well as empirically grounded articles and case-studies.

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Cover image by **Elisa Stafferini**

ISSN 2633-9870

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Foreword: GTAs negotiating development trajectories in the modern edu-factory.

Arinola Adefila

The third issue of Postgraduate Pedagogies provides a rich assemblage of the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) experience, capturing the nuances of practice within the complexity of a rapidly changing education-factory. The articles offer a range of perspectives from the community of GTAs about the duality of the lecturer/GTA-PGR role, identity transitions, and the skills, attributes and knowledges needed. The Postgraduate Pedagogies Journal continues to demonstrate the uniqueness of knowledges and insights that GTAs provide in Higher Education Institutions, including a kaleidoscope of the dynamics of their relationships with each other, their students, experienced colleagues, and their institutions. This issue also provides well-structured and analytical solutions for enhancing staff recruitment, professional development, and the student experience.

Higher Education (HE) is intrinsically linked to societal norms and values; the activities and outputs of academic life have their geometric patterns imprinted in the real world. Issues like widening participation, international student numbers, and the utility of training and qualifications are continuously debated because of wider implications, both personal and collective. As such, the student experience and pedagogies

that support transformative learning are scrutinised on account of the enduring influence they have. GTAs' liminality with respect to connection with students is often described as positive, this argument is overwhelmingly supported in this issue. All the GTAs link their papers to student engagement and success. It is also evident that a GTA community of practice has developed and is strengthening the capabilities of members through reflexive exploration and an ethics of care.

Drawing on a broad variety of methodologies and concepts the authors discuss their contribution to HE, even though GTAs have limited access to training, professional development or supportive scaffolds which could enable them to learn by taking risks and evaluated decision-making. The discourse around GTAs is increasingly taking place against the backdrop of precarious and conflicting roles which affect the mental and psychological wellbeing of many overburdened, teaching laden GTAs. The teaching load skewed towards GTAs who have little discretionary power is restructuring academic staff recruitment; though the skills and responsibilities required to be efficient lecturers are becoming more complex. Primary skills such as self-efficacy, confidence, autonomy, and decision-making are repeated throughout the issue.

Xueting Ban makes a case for international GTAs inclusion in academic life. Ban reveals the challenges PGRs from outside the UK face with respect to meeting stringent visa conditions

and the contributions they make to support University incomes. The paper by Ban states “four fundamental academic benefits” for recruiting international PGR students as GTAs in UK HEIs, highlighting the innovation their intercultural engagement provides for internationalisation at home.

The challenges of including GTAs in the mainstream of academic institutions is critiqued extensively by Kirsty Warner. Warner presents findings of the evaluation of an intervention designed to “improve inclusivity in applications and solidify the position of the GTA in the broader faculty dynamic.” Such interventions, Warner concludes are required to support freedom and opportunities for GTAs to design teaching activities autonomously. GTAs are able to develop valuable professional skills which empowers them to develop confidence, agency, and self-efficacy.

The working conditions of GTAs are notably varied across HEIs based on institutional resourcing, administrative gatekeeping, pedagogic ethos, and depth of mentoring and coaching relationships. Campbell et al. reflect on the experience of teaching from the periphery within a Russell Group university as an opportunity to develop individualised pedagogies. The GTA community in the Campbell et al. group supported each other through reflexive encounters that enabled them to employ ethics of care and use relational pedagogies which they argue students need. GTAs are in a position to offer consistent levels of support because of their

proximity to the student experience. Bethan Davies' experience of teaching was not as favourable as their colleagues at UCL. Davies argues for better support and recognition. The working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, Davies' suggests, made already challenging circumstances for GTAs even more uncertain. GTAs had to contend with isolation, increased workloads, and unequal access to opportunities.

Alice Leavey turns attention to the need for more structured mentoring and leadership for GTAs. Picking up on Davies' criticism about the use of discretionary power by senior academics, Leavey argues that academics should be leaders who have responsibility for nurturing and empowering early career academics. Alan Perry warns against homogenising GTA identities, Perry reflects on their experience as a GTA, a junior academic, albeit with considerable industry experience. Perry understood the skills required and the attributes necessary for balancing competing industry demands, professionalism, and self-care; this was not presented to students. Perry wrestles with the conflicting tensions of sharing relevant industry experience with the normative hierarchical positioning of elevating the ideas of senior academics. They argue for ethical approaches to teaching and mutual respect and integrity between GTAs and more experienced academics.

Lowe et al. present reflections from the use of a Community of Inquiry approach used by GTAs in the discipline of

geography, reporting that student engagement was enriched by GTA support. The COVID-19 pandemic had deskilled students due to restrictions of using physical spaces to learn together. GTAs enrich learning experiences for students by discussing their own research. Carleigh Bristol Slater also uses their experience from primary education to enhance student engagement in hybrid learning environments. Slater emphasises how their previous knowledge of developing collaborative pedagogies enabled them to tackle the problem of poor engagement in HE classrooms. Ionescu replicates this approach in their interdisciplinary classroom by introducing "the two Es – of emotion and exploration" to empower students to make connections between theory and practice. Alma Ionescu demonstrates that GTAs can develop their academic practice by asserting their authority and credibility using evidence-informed approaches to support transformative learning in their classrooms.

Nick Lawler develops a model for enabling students to become critical thinkers. Lawler argues that GTAs have unique strengths because of their proximity to undergraduate students, pointing to research which highlights that GTAs are more attentive, accessible, and more invested in the students they teach. Lawler's model supports a systematic structured, scaffolding for learners to develop critical thinking skills.

Volume 3 of Postgraduate Pedagogies spans the diverse experiences of GTAs. All the authors provide personal and

distinctive perspectives, ranging from the challenges faced as Early Career Researchers with little autonomy, complex teaching responsibilities, a novice determination to make a difference and varying mechanisms of support from Institutions and the HE sector. This issue makes a persuasive case for embedding institutional support mechanisms for GTAs to develop academic skills, competencies, and attributes, as well as their own voice. It is also a celebration of the Community of Practice GTAs have developed and used to promote their self-efficacy and positive student experience.

Introduction to Issue 3

By Nicole Anderson, Kristyna Campbell, Lauren Clark, Jesper Hansen, Alex Hastie, Sarah Kunz, Thomas Lowe and Alex Standen

We are delighted to be introducing our third issue of the *Postgraduate Pedagogies* journal. When in 2018 we first began to have conversations about providing a platform for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) to share their perspectives and engage in scholarly debate about teaching, learning, assessment, and the wider Higher Education (HE) environment, we never imagined stretching beyond a first collection of essays. To see this third issue come to fruition five years later is thus a cause for both celebration and reflection.

Celebration because of the quality, variety and originality of the articles we have been able to publish. Celebration too because of the relationships we have built with our authors and – we hope – the opportunities we have afforded them and their readers to reflect on their educational practice in scholarly terms, to receive constructive and developmental feedback, and to be part of a cross-disciplinary community which values and amplifies their voices. And celebration for the ongoing growth and development of the journal: we have welcomed new GTAs to our editorial team, we will soon be publishing our first Special Issue, we have reached a broad

range of institutions, researchers and academics, and we have seen – firsthand – the ever more pressing gap our journal aims to fill.

Hence also the cause for reflection. In the foreword to our first issue, Professor Dilly Fung wrote that, 'Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are […] almost as invisible as the air that students breathe. Institutions struggle, even when willing, to give GTAs voice' (2021: 1). It is clear to us – through subsequent issues and the abstracts and articles that we receive – that this feeling of invisibility persists and – if anything – is becoming more urgent. We have published articles highlighting the on-going relevance of topics such as precarity, identity and liminality; articles which call for more support and recognition from institutions; and which have consistently demonstrated the enormous contribution that GTAs are making to the HE sector. It is also a moment of reflection for us as editors: three of the original team have now moved into full academic positions – fantastic achievements, but with that comes the busyness of academic life and an increasing distance from the lived reality of the GTA experience. And so, as we reach this milestone of our third issue, we reflect on the sustainability of the journal, and are considering ways to ensure it continues to be properly resourced, and fully representative of the GTA community.

However, for now let us return to celebration. This issue contains 10 engaging and varied essays which showcase the full range of the GTA experience:

- Ban takes as their premise that, in the UK, around 40% of postgraduate researchers are international. Their paper explores the academic benefits international GTAs bring to the UK's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the academic rationales for UK HEIs' recruitment of international PGR students to work as GTAs.
- Warner's paper provides a rich account of seven funded academic initiatives carried out by Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) at King's College London, UK, over 2021-2022. The 'Enhancing Education Funding' enabled the GTAs to offer effective support to their students in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and granted them the opportunity to showcase engaging academic content, while developing their leadership skillsets.
- In a collaborative article by Campbell, Gurini, O'Sullivan and Trollope, they explore how an "ethic of care" was established in teaching sessions led by GTAs at a time when class sizes are increasing. In this reflective piece, they detail how students were supported through various pedagogical practices based on relationality and connection. Fostering caring teaching environments also enabled GTAs to reflect on the challenges of this work and come together to build a community of practice.
- Davies' contribution is a literature review, which explores the impact of Covid-19 on GTA working conditions, focusing on challenges faced by GTAs as a

result of the pandemic as well as sector-wide challenges around precarity, job insecurity, overwork and mental health. The paper makes several suggestions based on the literature review, including sustained research in this area to explore methods of supporting GTAs to ensure that they progress in their academic careers.

- Leavey's contribution explores the role of GTAs in disrupting cycles of toxic leadership and competition within academia. Drawing on their own experience in academia, Leavey suggests that as GTAs are still developing their academic identities, they may be in an ideal position to learn from poor leadership that they may have experienced to create a better working environment for students and GTAs in the future.
- Parry's paper, drawing on the author's personal experience, builds on previous scholarship around GTA identity to consider the dynamics of the transition from working in industry to being a GTA. Observing their own experiences through a Foucauldian lens, the author explores themes such as precarity, cultural difference, uncertainty, and the importance of 'Problematisation'.
- In Lowe, Venema, Aarnink, Boekhout, Leman and Osborne's article, the authors explore a learning activity, Postgraduate Spotlights, where postgraduate researchers presented their research methods to undergraduates. This was followed by

critical discussion, which they argue fostered a Community of Inquiry. This activity ultimately allowed the undergraduate students to understand better how a range of methods are used by researchers.

- Slater's piece reflects on how graduate teaching assistants and instructors incorporate more collaborative teaching practices in hybrid classrooms. The article focuses on the hybrid learning experience during COVID-19 of a primary school teacher who transitioned into a GTA role.
- In Ionescu's article the author reflects on their experiences as a postgraduate teaching assistant teaching Global Health to medical students. Through dialogic pedagogy, the author frames theory as the beginning of knowledge to encourage productive classroom dialogue. This dialogue requires making space for emotion and exploration, which can result in transcending the boundaries of discipline to have a successful interdisciplinary dialogue that is meaningful, promotes active learning and critical thinking.
- Finally, Lawler's piece explores the role of GTAs in teaching critical thinking, from the perspective that this should not be limited to a set of intellectual skills but encompass emotional and social aspects of learning. The author argues for GTAs' unique positioning as to be of enormous benefit here and offers a framework (building on the work of Jenny

Moon, 2005) which can support GTAs' lesson planning, formulation of learning outcomes and design of classroom activities.

In sum, these 10 articles offer insight into the diverse experience of being a GTA, and the varied contributions GTAs make to UK Higher Education today. We hope that you enjoy reading these articles as much as we have enjoyed editing them!

From international PGR students to international GTAs: Academic rationales for international GTA recruitment in UK higher education institutions

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Abstract

The increasing supply of international postgraduate research (PGR) students has become an emerging market for international PhD programmes within the realm of international higher education. The United Kingdom has witnessed a sharp upsurge in the number of international PGR students enrolling in UK higher education institutions (HEIs) in the past decade. Additionally, a considerable number of international PGR students assume the role of graduate teaching assistants to support teaching activities in UK HEIs. Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are essential to the delivery of instruction in universities, particularly in research-intensive institutions (Nyquist, 1991; Gray, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Bort, 1993; Olaniran, 1999), working as tutors, laboratory instructors, supervisors, or even lecturers (Chiu & Corrigan, 2019). A rising number of international PGR students thus contribute to the undergraduate student learning process by lecturing and helping with teaching in the

UK (International Unit, 2016). International PGR students undertaking GTA roles are an important resource for UK higher education to assist with the instruction of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the academic benefits international GTAs bring to the UK's HEIs and summarises the academic rationales for UK HEIs' recruitment of international PGR students to work as GTAs.

Through a systematic and thematic analysis of previous articles and documents, this paper delineates four fundamental academic benefits and recruitment rationales for the employment of international PGR students as GTAs in UK HEIs. These academic benefits include improving reputation and ranking; enhancing internationalisation at home (campus internationalisation and decolonising the classroom); promoting curriculum and pedagogic innovation; and improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration. The aforementioned findings facilitate a thorough and all-encompassing comprehension of the academic value implicated in the recruitment of international PGR students as GTAs in UK HEIs.

Introduction

International postgraduate research (PGR) students are increasingly being hired on a part-time basis to support undergraduate and postgraduate teaching in the United Kingdom's higher education institutions (HEIs). Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are PGR students who support academic and teaching staff with instructional responsibilities in HEIs. GTAs are critical to the delivery of instruction in universities, particularly in research-based institutions (Nyquist, 1991; Gray, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Bort, 1993; Olaniran, 1999). In the academic years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, the percentage of international (non-UK) PGR students in the total PGR student population in UK universities remained constant at 41% (HESA, 2022). The number of international PGR students enrolled in UK HEIs was 46,735 in 2020/2021 and 46,350 in 2021/2022, according to HESA (2022). Commonly, international PGR students take on extra sessional and precarious teaching work to make up for the income shortfall. According to The Economist (2016), universities had already recognised that PhD candidates are inexpensive, highly inspired, and disposable labour. Meanwhile, according to Chiu and Corrigan (2019), in exchange for financial support, GTAs face significant pressure to conduct research and generate high-quality papers while concurrently working as tutors, laboratory instructors, supervisors, or even lecturers. International PGR students contribute greatly to the undergraduate student learning process by lecturing and

helping with teaching in the UK (International Unit, 2016). In addition, universities rely heavily on sessional (temporary or short-term) staff to teach undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (Croucher, 2016). Therefore, international GTAs assume a crucial and indispensable function in augmenting the provision of teaching and learning support at UK universities.

The current research on international PGR student recruitment focuses mainly on economic rationales. For UK institutions, international tuition fees are a profitable market (Humfrey, 2011; Robson, 2011). International students are considered to be of great importance to the UK's economy as they make significant contributions through tuition fees and other expenses incurred while studying in the country. According to Universities UK (2017b), the gross output produced by international students for the UK economy in 2014-2015 was £25.8 billion. International students bring significant consumption and investment to the UK, including expenditures on accommodation, food, travel, entertainment, and other related expenses, as pointed out by Zhu, Su & Cheng (2015). For example, data from 2011/12 reveals that there were 488,000 international students enrolled in UK HEIs, generating a total of £3.9 billion in tuition fees and £6.3 billion in living expenses, as reported by BIS (2013a). Additionally, the recruitment of international GTAs in UK HEIs provides universities with the opportunity to obtain international high-quality academic labour at a comparatively low cost, thereby effectively reducing labour

expenses. Provision of undergraduate courses by universities depends heavily on sessional faculty (Croucher, 2016); PhD candidates, on the other hand, are underpaid when they are required to do unpaid labour such as class preparation and replying to students outside of class hours (Baldry, 2019). Indeed, using PhD students to do most of the undergraduate teaching decreases the number of full-time jobs (The Economist, 2016).

According to Park (2002), employing multiple GTAs for undergraduate teaching is a cost-effective strategy, reducing salary expenses and allowing academics to concentrate on scholarly activities. As a cost-saving strategy, universities resort to employing cheap and precarious labour. As the supply of cheap but high-quality academic labour, international GTA recruitment in UK HEIs can mitigate labour costs. Consequently, there are a number of economic rationales motivating the UK HEIs' recruitment of PGR students as GTAs. However, there is a paucity of research about academic rationales for international GTA recruitment in UK HEIs. The concept of internationalisation in higher education can be defined academically as the incorporation of an international, intercultural, or global element into the objectives, operations, or implementation of tertiary education (Knight, 2003). International GTAs are a rich source of cultural, academic, and pedagogic experience and internationalisation at home. Meanwhile, international GTAs are essential components of international teaching staff; therefore, it is of great value to investigate the academic

benefits they contribute to UK universities. This article focuses on the academic rationales for international GTA recruitment at UK universities. This article aims to investigate the academic rationales behind the recruitment of international GTAs in UK universities and to summarise the academic benefits that they bring. The goal of this paper is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the academic benefits that international GTAs offer to UK HEIs and to highlight the academic rationales behind their recruitment.

This study conducted a systematic literature review (SLR) of 44 existing studies on international GTAs in the UK and academic benefits, published during the period from 2011 to November 2022. The review was based on the two research questions listed below, in accordance with the study's stated purpose:
RQ1. What academic benefits do international GTAs contribute to UK universities?
RQ2. What are the academic rationales for UK universities' recruitment of international GTAs?

International PGR students at UK universities

The increasing globalisation and regionalisation of societies and economies, coupled with the demands of the knowledge economy for a highly skilled and diverse workforce, have created a context that necessitates greater internationalisation in higher education (de Wit & Altbach, 2020). Internationalisation encompasses a broad variety of

issues, including curriculum internationalisation and local institution internationalisation, student and staff mobility, transnational collaboration, the construction of international campuses, and the recruitment of international students and staff (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Turner & Robson, 2008; Caruana, 2009). The UK has been at the forefront of the internationalisation of higher education, and its success in attracting international students over the past two decades demonstrates its competitiveness in the global education market.

The UK has systematically announced a series of international education policies aimed at attracting and recruiting international students. These policies include initiatives such as the British Full-Cost for Overseas Students policy introduced during the tenure of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (Humfrey, 2011; Walker, 2014), the UK Prime Ministers' Initiative (PMI) (Blair, 1999; British Council, 2003), and its subsequent iteration PMI2 for International Education (Blair 2006), the Coalition Migration Policy (Cameron, 2011), International Education Strategies (IES) introduced in 2013 (BIS, 2013a, b), IES: global potential, global growth in 2019 (HM Government, 2019), and the new Post-Study Work (PSW) visa policy implemented in 2019 (IDP Connect, 2019). These policies are indicative of the UK's sustained efforts to facilitate the recruitment of international students, attract international students, foster a diverse and inclusive learning environment and promote the UK's position as a leading destination for higher education.

According to The British Library (2017), the UK is regarded as the fourth-largest distributor of PhDs globally, owing to its high level of international mobility, resulting in an exponentially increasing number of new PhD graduates within the country. The number of international students enrolling in doctoral programmes in the United Kingdom has risen significantly over the last decade. For example, from 2007 to 2008, the amount of international PGR students has risen by 24%, from 22,300 to 27,610 (International Unit, 2016). International students represent about half of the yearly postgraduate research degree cohort in the UK (UKCISA, 2011). In science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, international PGR students are the essential source for the UK academic "supply chain" (Hsieh, 2012; Larner, 2015; Universities UK, 2018). In the academic years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, the percentage of international (non-UK) PGR students in the total PGR student population at UK universities remained constant at 41% (HESA, 2022). The number of international PGR students enrolled in UK HEIs was 46,735 in 2020/2021 and 46,350 in 2021/2022, according to HESA (2022).

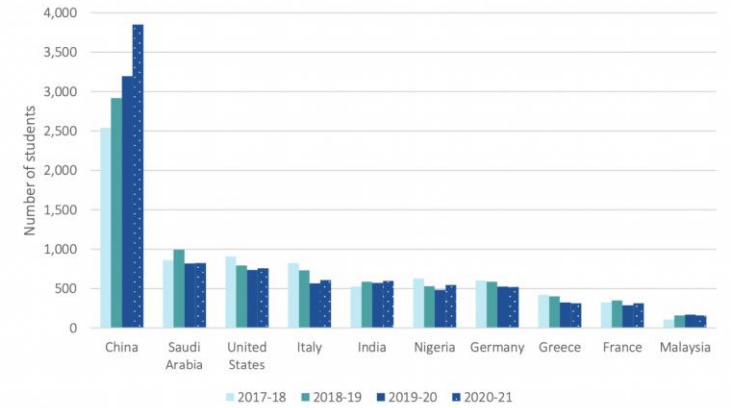

FIGURE 1. Top 10 domiciles of international PGR entrants in the UK, from 2017-18 to 2020-21
Source: Adapted from Universities UK International (2022)

Based on Figure 1, it can be ascertained that China, Saudi Arabia, and the United States occupy the top three positions as the leading sending nations of international PGR students enrolled in HEIs within the UK. Meanwhile, from the academic year 2016/2017 to 2020/2021, among international (non-UK) PGR students, Chinese PGR students studying in UK universities grew from 13% to 22% (HESA, 2022). The count of PGR entrants from China exhibited a surge of 20.5% during the interval spanning from 2019-20 to 2020-21(HESA 2022). According to HESA data (2022), China has been the leading sender of international PGR students to the UK's HEIs in the last decade.

International PGR students are a significant source for the UK's higher education, especially, in fields such as STEM and

to assist in the instruction of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Additionally, for UK institutions, international tuition fees are a profitable market (Humfrey, 2011; Robson, 2011). Thus, the UK's ongoing efforts to attract and retain international PGR students are propelled by the heightened economic profitability associated with recruiting international students and the country's desire to maintain its status as a leading destination for international higher education. Consequently, with the ongoing increase in the enrollment of international PGR students in UK higher education, there is an emerging trend involving the active participation of PGR students in supporting undergraduate and postgraduate instruction.

International GTAs in UK universities

Within higher education institutions, PGR students are frequently hired to teach undergraduates and postgraduates, and occasionally this position is included as part of a doctoral studentship. Due to visa restrictions and higher costs, international PGR students study in the UK under heightened pressure to finish their studies within three to four years. Previous studies on international GTAs have mainly focused on how they strive to combine their identities being instructors and researchers (Winstone & Moore, 2017), as well as the establishment and assessment of structured GTA teaching support programmes (Chadha, 2015; Beaton, 2017). Additionally, international GTAs are commonly described by a deficit approach (Collins, 2021a), where they are perceived

as lacking in teaching experience (Plakans, 1997; Muzaka, 2009); and GTAs are generally regarded as having an imperfect professional identity (Harland & Plangger, 2004; Winstone & Moore, 2017). Meanwhile, international GTAs encounter difficulties with both linguistic and cultural translation (Winter et al., 2014). The lack of English proficiency and different cultural backgrounds (Borjas, 2002; Jia & Bergerson, 2008; Kim, 2009); cultural bumps and adjustment stresses emerging (Wan & Guo, 2022) in international GTA literature, and the difficulties that international employees encounter in adjusting to the UK HE context are common themes (Luxon & Peelo, 2009). While some studies seek to address the benefits of GTAs' work (Winter et al., 2014; Jordan & Howe, 2018), GTAs are also referred to as both fish and fowl (Winstone & Moore, 2017), as they can switch between the roles of academic staff and students depending on the context (ibid).

International GTAs offer tremendous opportunities for internationalisation at home and are a great source of academic, educational, pedagogical, and cultural experience for domestic students. Internationalisation at home refers to the intentional integration of international and intercultural elements into both formal and informal curricula within local educational settings, targeting all students (Beelen & Jones, 2015). Regarding the expanding amount of international personnel in UK HE, international GTAs deserve further attention (Universities UK, 2017b). Additionally, the range of possibilities to benefit from the rich academic and

cultural resources that international faculty provide the broader campus is underutilised in UK HE (Hsieh, 2012). Furthermore, a diverse campus academic community can assist in curriculum and pedagogical innovations (Kim, 2010; Bodycott et al., 2014). Similarly, the HEA (2014b) advocates for greater acknowledgement of the academic community's diverse spectrum of cultures, knowledge, experiences, values, attitudes, beliefs, and meanings as it works to internationalise classrooms and campuses. Hence, international GTAs are vital components of teaching staff. Consequently, it is of tremendous significance to shift the focus from exploring the perceived challenges and issues faced by international GTAs to exploring the academic benefits they contribute to UK HEI.

Methodology

The systematic literature review (SLR) method (Keele, 2007) was used in this paper to identify and analyse the available studies on international GTAs at UK universities in order to investigate the academic benefits international GTAs provide to the UK's HEIs. In this research, the author followed the principles and SLR procedure template supplied by Kitchenham & Charters (2007). First, a systematic literature search was conducted on Scopus to find relevant studies examining the academic benefits international GTAs contribute to the UK's HEIs. The terms “graduate teaching assistant,” “international academic staff,” and "international

graduate teaching assistant" were used to search the titles, abstracts, and keywords of articles. After searching with these terms, 3836 relevant research studies were found in Scopus. The search was then refined, and articles were selected for analysis based on the below inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Figure 2).

Several inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to decide which research would be included in this review. Regarding the inclusion criteria, first, the type of paper should be an article or conference paper. Second, the title, abstract, or keyword had to contain “UK” referring to the context. Additionally, articles had to focus on the benefits, contributions, and advantages of international GTAs. Furthermore, only English journal articles were included in this review. To assure coverage of publications published over the previous decade, the data timeframe was set between 2011 and November 2022. In terms of the exclusion criteria, book chapters, reviews, books, and dissertations were not considered. Additionally, the author excluded the papers that were not original research and not relevant to the topic. The search was performed in November 2022.

The author then followed the process outlined above to come up with the final pool of articles to be analysed. This resulted in 34 journal articles and conference papers that were included in this analysis. The author excluded redundant and identical digital object identifier studies. The number of papers in the pool of analysed papers then

dropped to 30. Furthermore, the forward and backward chaining approaches were used for this review. Through this step, the author further selected and added 18 relevant papers, reducing the likelihood of omitting pertinent studies. Meanwhile, the author used the quality criteria (Guyatt et al., 2011) as illustrated in Figure 2 to evaluate the research quality of the chosen studies for this review. The author analysed each study using these quality evaluation criteria, which are comprised of questions that serve as an assessment tool to assess the amount that each paper contributes to this study. As a result, 44 reports were retained in the final pool (42 journal articles and 2 conference papers). The method is presented in Figure 2.

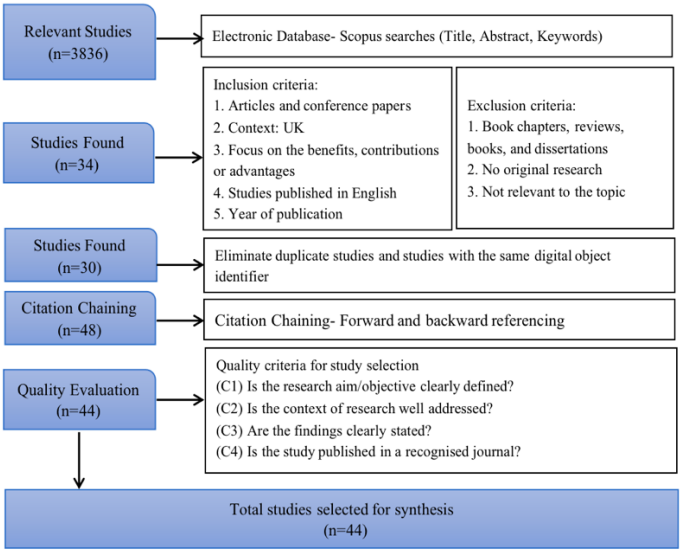

FIGURE 2. Research protocol

To illustrate the profile of existing relevant studies on Scopus, the yearly research output, subject area, and affiliation of the researcher for the chosen studies are presented below in Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 5. Figure 3 illustrates the annual output of journal articles and conference papers. The increasing number of papers on Scopus further suggests the significance of this subject area. Figure 4 presents the Scopus-defined subject areas of the related papers: 72.6% of the studies are in the social sciences, and 9.7% of the studies are in business, management, and accounting. As evident from Figure 5, most articles were published by authors who listed affiliations with the University of Kent, University College London, UCL Institute of Education, and University of Surrey.

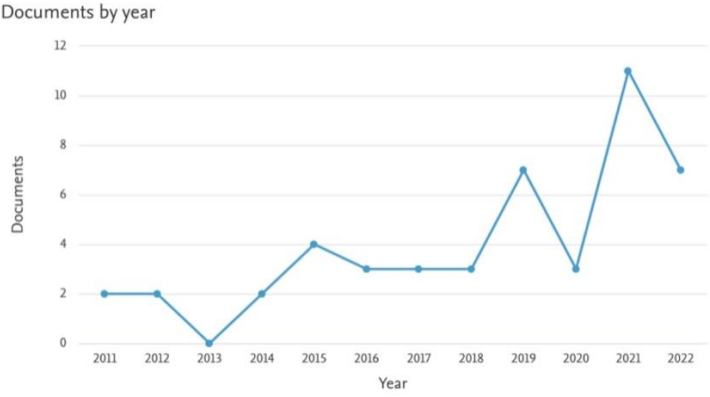

FIGURE 3. The final pool (k = 44) by year of publication

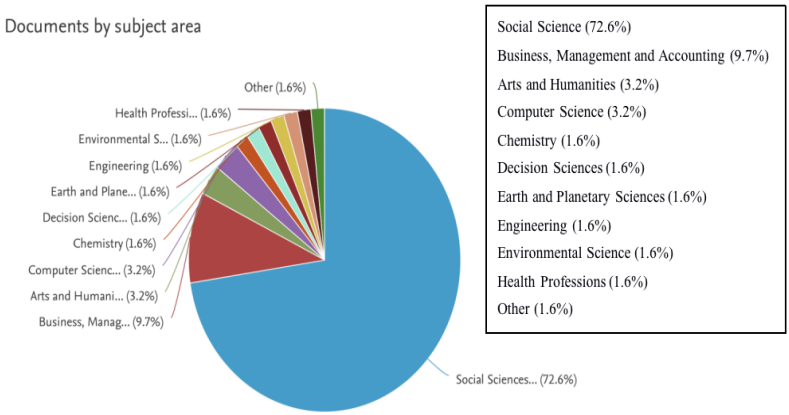

FIGURE 4. The final pool (k = 44) by subject area

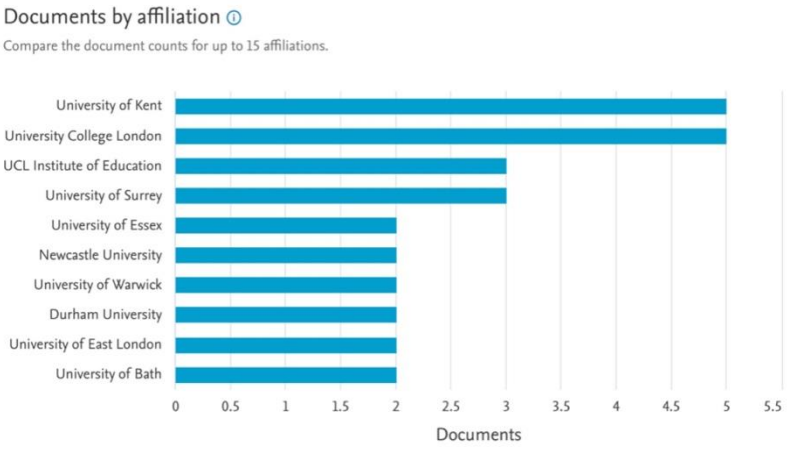

FIGURE 5. The final pool (k=44) by affiliation

The present investigation employed mixed methods to analyse the collected data. Specifically, both thematic analysis and NVivo tools were utilised as the principal methods to derive meaning from the data. Thematic analysis was utilised to identify patterns and themes within the data, whilst the NVivo software was employed to arrange, manage and expedite the analysis process. The use of thematic analysis provided the author with the freedom to identify themes that were not pre-determined, thereby allowing the data to be presented objectively. Furthermore, the discussion section of the paper was structured based on the themes that were identified through the thematic analysis, thereby providing a coherent and organised presentation of the findings in accordance with the research objectives.

Study findings

Based on the systematic and thematic analysis of the previous articles and documents, this paper summarises four main academic benefits and recruitment rationales, including improving reputation and ranking; internationalisation at home (campus internationalisation and decolonising the classroom); promoting curriculum and pedagogic innovation; and improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration. Each theme and its respective factors are summarised and discussed in detail below.

Improving reputation and ranking

The recruitment of international PGR students as GTAs is essential to improving UK HEIs' reputation and university ranking. The expansion of higher education has been partially driven by the pursuit of internationalisation agendas by academic institutions, which seek to enhance their position in global rankings (Johansson & Sliwa, 2014). International students and international staff are not only a symbol of a high-quality image and a tool for internationalisation; they are also seen to improve the prestige of HEIs (British Council, 2010; DTZ, 2011; Lomer, 2016). In the UK, increasing global competition for knowledge and the proliferation of high-quality education options for students have led to a perceived need for academic institutions to develop brand awareness and unique selling points to attract students (Lomer et al., 2018). It is common practice for universities to recruit international GTAs, associate lecturers, and contract employees as part of their international orientation strategies to increase the staff-to-student ratio, which is regarded as indicative of high-quality education by many ranking organisations (Chadha 2013). Additionally, market-framed research contests (Kim, 2009), which are institutionalised in the United Kingdom via the Research Excellence Framework (REF), assist the internationalisation push. To get a high ranking in the REF, UK HEIs should recruit international personnel qualified of producing high-quality outputs (Johansson & Sliwa, 2014). Thus, international teaching staff recruitment is strongly tied to the institution's international reputation in its pursuit of becoming a world-class university.

International GTAs are considered important members of the academic community, contributors to the university's status as an international institution, and significant contributors to the university's research endeavours.

The significance of world university rankings is highly pronounced for universities engaged in international competition, as these rankings serve as a critical avenue through which institutions can attain esteemed international recognition (Fernandes, Shukla & Fardoun, 2022). The Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings is widely regarded as one of the most reputable organisations for evaluating educational institutions. It is the only ranking table that examines all of a university's core missions, including teaching, science, knowledge transfer, and international acceptance (Anowar et al., 2015). To rate universities around the globe, the following metrics and weights are used: 40% is decided by peer review, 10% is determined by ranking by major (mainly international) graduate recruiters, 20% is determined by citations (per capita) of published academic journals, 20% is determined by teaching staff and student ratios, and 10% is determined by international orientation (Soh, 2013). In addition, accreditation frameworks, which are highly sought after for their ability to improve institution ranking positions, are another worldwide standardising factor. Some accrediting schemes, like EQUIS, require an institution to have a particular percentage of international employees (Johansson & Sliwa, 2014). As a result of academia's incorporation into a market-based discourse that

places an emphasis on worldwide competitiveness as a need for success, universities in the United Kingdom have begun to increase their international staffing levels to promote internationalisation (Johansson & Sliwa, 2014). Thus, international GTAs working as international teaching staff are beneficial to the teaching staff and student ratios, and international orientation promotes the university's global ranking, enhances competitiveness, and expands the HEI's global influence. Rankings are also important in shaping student choices, and many academics will most likely seek to work at highly-ranked institutions that attract ambitious students (Lim & Ørberg, 2017). According to BIS (2011), international students are attracted to the United Kingdom based on its reputation for both educational excellence and worth. With a higher percentage of international GTAs who work as teaching staff, the HEI will be in an advantageous position in terms of global ranking and reputation. Therefore, the recruitment of international GTAs who have multiple roles in the university, such as international PGR students, academic staff, and teaching staff, holds the potential to boost the global ranking and reputation of UK HEIs.

Internationalisation at home: campus internationalisation and decolonising the classroom

Internationalisation is at the forefront of the agenda for institutions in the UK and worldwide. Since the 1990s, internationalisation initiatives in higher education have expanded, from a focus on staff and student mobility to a

greater emphasis on the internationalisation of the provider mobility, programme, and curriculum (Altbach, 1989; Blumenthal et al., 1996; Knight, 2014; Xu & Montgomery, 2019). This progression reflects a logical shift from concerns primarily focused on enhancing enrollment through curriculum modifications and innovative teaching methods to a more comprehensive goal of fostering students' global consciousness and intercultural understanding. Universities are focusing more and more on enhancing and expanding opportunities for domestic students to internationalise as part of their international strategies, and an internationalised curriculum and internationalisation at home (Jones & Brown, 2007; Altbach, 2017) are two key components of these strategies (HEA, 2014a; Harrison, 2015). Meanwhile, an additional topic that has come to the forefront of the literature on campus internationalisation is international student and staff recruitment (Altbach & Knight, 2007) and the subsequent attempts to combine domestic and international students (Harrison, 2015).

The engagement of international GTAs in the process of internationalisation of higher education has the potential to actively promote the decolonisation of the classroom and knowledge. The process of decolonising the curriculum entails undertaking a thorough critical analysis and questioning of the Eurocentric and colonial prejudices that permeate the content, methods, and pedagogical approaches utilised in educational settings. Since the Rhodes Must Fall campaign started at the University of Cape Town in 2015,

contesting the primacy of white voices and eurocentrism in academia, the decolonising academia movement has gained prominence in the United Kingdom (Charles, 2019). Hsieh (2012) asserts that institutions would greatly benefit from viewing their international staff not as a burden but as a valuable source of knowledge. Additionally, the active involvement of GTAs from postcolonial backgrounds, and potentially worldwide, in classrooms prompts academics to expand existing frameworks in order to acknowledge and appreciate the innovative and diverse teaching efforts made by these GTAs (Collins, 2021b). Robson (2011) claims that transformational internationalisation results from the incorporation of students' and instructors' diverse worldviews into curriculum design, instruction, and interaction. Evidence presented by Collins (2021a) demonstrated that postcolonial GTAs contributed a wide range of perspectives, methods, and subject expertise to the classroom. In addition to bringing expertise and teaching methods developed in their own countries to UK HEIs, international GTAs support removing boundaries between international students and domestic instructors and promoting an inclusive learning environment. According to Yang & Singh (2015), international GTAs assume the role of cultural mediators between international students and domestic instructors, fostering cross-cultural understanding and cultivating an inclusive learning environment. Thus, employing international GTA is beneficial for HEIs due to the unique perspectives they bring to campus culture, knowledge, and research. As a consequence, international GTAs assist in internationalising the campus and

diversifying the student and staff body, thereby contributing to the decolonisation of knowledge and the classroom. In accordance with the internationalisation strategies, international GTAs play a proactive role in promoting the process of internationalisation at home, encompassing both campus internationalisation and the decolonisation of the classroom.

Promoting curriculum and pedagogic innovation

International GTAs are also important for promoting teaching, curriculum innovation, and pedagogical innovation at UK universities. The rising international faculty community in the UK gives significant prospects for altering the programme material and execution in UK higher education (Minocha, 2016). Evidence from UK HE highlights the necessity of greater integration of international academics, especially concerning their exposure to diverse academic, pedagogical, and cultural environments that may contribute to innovations in teaching and learning (Kim, 2010; Green & Myatt, 2011). The recruitment of international GTAs can contribute to this goal by bringing diverse cultural perspectives and pedagogical and academic experiences to UK universities. International staff who trigger a debate concerning pedagogical practice outside of the UK HE framework may facilitate pedagogical innovation by addressing latent assumptions about local pedagogical practices (Hristov & Minocha, 2017). Academics with international backgrounds can advance research and knowledge generation, modernise teaching and assessment

techniques, and deepen intercultural understanding (Sanderson, 2011). Similarly, incorporating diversity in HEIs and developing culturally inclusive curricula can promote campus internationalisation and academic staff integration into UK HE (Caruana & Ploner, 2010).

Meanwhile, Kim (2010) proposes that international academic personnel can support constructing pedagogy and networks of pastoral assistance for international students by leveraging their international academic and knowledge capital, consequently benefiting employers. Consideration of international academic staff as facilitators of campus internationalisation is congruent with Willis & Hammond's (2014) study, which stated that the academic cohort can develop both the curriculum and students' educational experience. Similarly, international instructors are able to educate students on international aspects of higher education, including contextual comparisons, intercultural awareness, and cross-cultural knowledge transfer (Bailey et al., 2021). Furthermore, international staff can play a part in shaping the development of a globalised and internationalised curriculum (Willis & Hammond, 2014). International GTAs in the UK HE thus constitute an underutilised potential to shape the development of a curriculum that is creative and relevant to the global community and offers a variety of internationalisation opportunities. Academic staff that have gained experience abroad are viewed as a provider of educated worldwide academic practice that fosters innovation in UK HEIs' teaching

and learning practices (Hristov & Minocha, 2017). Like domestic GTAs, international GTAs are also filling teaching responsibilities that alleviate strain on already overworked permanent faculty members as the number of students at their institutions rises. As both teaching and academic faculty, international GTAs can thus be perceived as a provider of qualified global practice. As a result, UK HEIs will benefit from these international resources and the resulting diversity to improve pedagogical approaches and curriculum innovation. Drawing from international GTAs is likely to foster and maintain synergistic and inclusive learning contexts that serve all members. Therefore, international GTAs are crucial for promoting teaching, curriculum innovation, and pedagogical innovation.

Improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration

The recruitment of international GTAs is also crucial to improve students' intercultural competence and international collaboration. Instead of monolithic cultural domination, Ryan's (2012) concept of the transcultural classroom emphasises reciprocity between and inclusion within cultures. According to Reysen and Katzarska-Miller (2013), global citizenship involves a sense of belonging to a broader community and emphasises interdependence and interconnectedness between nations and people worldwide. To build students' intercultural competence and traits for global citizenship, well-developed pedagogical frameworks

demand academic educators who are proficient in fostering intercultural competence and global citizenship (Trede, Bowles & Bridges, 2013). According to Alberts (2008) and Pherali (2012), students believe that instructors who are foreign to their culture and demonstrate intercultural sensitivity can help them overcome preconceptions, while also exposing them to a range of perspectives, locations, and cultures. By adding elements of their local cultures and learning experiences, international GTAs can make their classrooms more accessible. Hsieh (2012) claims that rather than expecting the international staff to blend in, UK universities should deliberately benefit from them regarding the rich cultural diversity and pedagogical resources they represent on campus. According to Trede, Bowles & Bridges (2013), an international professional experience is well-positioned to provide possibilities for students to enhance intercultural competence, intercultural learning, and global citizenship. It has been stated that the presence on campus of international academic staff, in combination with international students, is a valuable tool for exposing the home student to international perspectives (European Commission, 2013). International GTAs can be viewed as a potential initial step toward transformative internationalisation in a way that challenges and modifies the values of staff members, students, and the community. Interaction with international GTAs could therefore assist students in generating a greater depth of concepts and strategies from intercultural communication, as well as sharing and deepening their comprehension of intercultural

learning. Consequently, international GTAs are valuable resources for inspiring students to embrace diversity and cultural differences, as well as to raise intercultural awareness and improve students' intercultural competence.

The classroom serves as a crossroads of global power disparities, internationalisation agendas, and firsthand experiences of student-teacher interaction for students. Regarding transcultural classrooms, international GTAs have the potential to position classroom transcultural engagement within a consciousness of multiple agendas and power relations operating at everyday, institutional, and national levels cutting across the classroom (Collins, 2021b). Additionally, international academic staff significantly contribute to international networks of researchers, providing a structure for cross-border collaboration and eventually leading to joint publications with a larger impact than UK-based articles, as stated by Universities UK (2017a). Furthermore, Lawson et al. (2019) reveal that native-born academics and students benefit from the international academic staff through increased international cooperation and collaboration. According to Edler et al. (2011), the international academic staff promote engagement with both domestic and foreign enterprises and researchers. Engagement with international GTAs can facilitate the establishment of international collaborations and the expansion of international networks, as demonstrated by previous research on the subject. In order to foster global citizenship and advance cultural understanding, intercultural

competency, and global interconnectedness, international GTAs are a crucial component of higher education programmes. Therefore, international GTAs are also essential to improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration.

Discussion and conclusion

Based on a thematic analysis of the study findings, this paper further discusses the summarised four main academic benefits and academic rationales of recruiting international GTAs to teach at UK universities. Below are detailed discussions and conclusions of four major themes:

Improving reputation and ranking: The recruitment of international GTAs to teach at UK universities can contribute a range of benefits related to reputation and ranking. The recruitment of international teaching staff is closely tied to an institution's international reputation as it strives to become a world-class university. International GTAs are viewed as valuable components of the academic community and are considered important contributors to the university's status as an international institution and its research endeavours. Their presence as international teaching staff can benefit the student-to-teacher ratio and international orientation, which enhances the university's global ranking, competitiveness, and global influence. By demonstrating a commitment to diversity and global perspectives, the

recruitment of international GTAs who have multiple roles in the university can enhance the reputation, ranking, and influence of UK HEIs. Overall, the recruitment of international GTAs to teach at UK universities can bring a range of benefits related to reputation and ranking, including improved reputation and influence in the academic community, enhanced influence and higher rankings, and increased prestige, which can attract more students and funding.

Internationalisation at home: Another academic benefit that international GTAs can contribute to UK HEIs is to promote internationalisation at home, including campus internationalisation and decolonising the classroom. International GTAs teaching in the UK contributes to creating a more diverse and international environment on campus. International GTAs bring a wide range of diverse perspectives, methods, and subject matter expertise to the classroom. In addition to sharing their own established teaching techniques from their home countries with UK HEIs, they also emphasise the importance of inclusivity and breaking down barriers between international students and domestic instructors in the learning environment. In addition to enhancing students' learning experience, the recruitment of international GTAs can also contribute to efforts to decolonise the classroom and challenge traditional power dynamics. By bringing in international perspectives and promoting inclusivity, these GTAs can help disrupt traditional hierarchies and create a more equitable teaching and learning environment and a more inclusive and

representative space for learning and knowledge-sharing. As a result, employing international GTAs can be beneficial for HEIs, as they bring diverse perspectives, knowledge, and research to campus. Therefore, the recruitment of international GTAs to teach at UK universities assists in internationalising the campus for diverse students and staff, helping to decolonise knowledge and the classroom, and stimulating internationalisation at home.

Promoting curriculum and pedagogic innovation:
International GTAs have the potential to facilitate innovation in teaching, curriculum, and pedagogy and boost the learning experience for students at UK universities. The recruitment of international GTAs brings diverse cultural perspectives and academic and pedagogical experiences that can contribute to integrating resources and strategies that can encourage creativity and innovation in pedagogy and curriculum. Additionally, the international GTAs also represent an untapped resource for shaping the development of a globally relevant and innovative curriculum, as well as providing various internationalisation opportunities. Meanwhile, international GTAs play a crucial role in filling teaching positions that address faculty shortages and alleviate the burden of overworked permanent faculty as student enrollment increases. As both teaching and academic faculty, international GTAs can be regarded as a provider of qualified global practice, and UK HEIs can benefit from these international resources and diversity to improve pedagogical approaches and curriculum innovation. Furthermore,

international GTAs also bring diverse and international perspectives and experiences to the curriculum, which can engage students and provide students with a more diverse range of learning experiences. By drawing on international GTAs, universities can promote an inclusive and collaborative learning environment that benefits all community members. Therefore, international GTAs are essential for promoting innovation in curriculum, and pedagogy in UK HEIs.

Improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration: Improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration skills can be a significant benefit of recruiting international GTAs to teach at UK universities. International GTAs can be viewed as a potential initial step toward transformative internationalisation in a way that challenges and modifies the values of staff members, students, and the community. Interacting with international GTAs, students can gain deeper insights and approaches to intercultural communication and enhance their understanding of intercultural learning. Interactions with international GTAs enhance students' capacity to collaborate successfully with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Students can improve their ability to collaborate across cultural boundaries, which can be a valuable skill in a variety of fields. International GTAs are valuable resources for promoting diversity, cultural awareness, and intercultural competence among students. In a globalised society where individuals are increasingly required to work with people of varied cultural origins, cross-

cultural communication and collaboration skills can be desirable skills to help students stand out in the job market. Consequently, engagement with international GTAs also leads to the development of international collaborations and networks. As such, the incorporation of international GTAs into higher education programmes is crucial for fostering global citizenship, intercultural understanding, and global interconnectedness, as well as for enhancing students' intercultural competence and international collaboration.

Overall, through a systematic and thematic analysis of previous research, this paper summarises the four main academic rationales for recruiting international GTAs and the benefits they contribute to UK HEIs. International GTAs, therefore, represent an important aspect of the internationalisation of higher education that contributes to improving reputation and ranking; enhancing internationalisation at home (campus internationalisation, and decolonising the classroom); promoting curriculum and pedagogic innovation; and improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration. International GTAs provide enormous potential for internationalisation at home and are a significant provider of cultural, educational, pedagogical, and academic knowledge. International GTAs are critical components in internationalising higher education including campuses, curricula, teaching and the learning experience. Consequently, it is crucial to investigate the academic benefits and contributions they provide to UK universities. Therefore, international GTAs merit additional

consideration, and I would recommend future researchers delve deeper into their contributions.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study, which include:

Scope: This study only considers the academic rationales for recruiting international GTAs and the academic benefits that they contribute to UK universities. Hence, this study does not address other potential rationales, benefits, or impacts, such as economic, social, or national rationales or benefits. There are still other ways that international GTAs contribute to UK universities, which should not be disregarded. Thus, I would recommend that future research expand on the benefits that international GTAs can generally contribute to UK HEIs. Additionally, whilst the study primarily focuses on international GTAs, it is pertinent to acknowledge the limitations of the paper concerning the treatment of domestic GTAs. Local GTAs have received limited attention in this study. To gain a more comprehensive view of GTAs, it is imperative to develop a more nuanced understanding of their diverse backgrounds and experiences, including their ethnic, racialised, cultural, and class identities. Therefore, it is crucial for future research to achieve a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the experiences of all GTAs.

Methodology: The Scopus database may not include all

relevant studies or sources, and the search may be limited to a specific time period or language. This can potentially limit the scope and comprehensiveness of the findings. The inclusion criteria used to select relevant studies for the review may be biased or may exclude important studies or perspectives. Thus, this study may rely on a limited range of research methods and sources, which may not fully capture the complexity and diversity of experiences of international GTAs or the institutions they work at.

Generalisability: The findings of the study may not be representative of all the academic benefits that international GTAs can contribute to all UK universities and may not be generalisable to other countries or contexts.

The single perspective: The study may only consider the perspective of the institutions and may not consider the perspectives or experiences of international GTAs or other stakeholders.

Therefore, a study that mainly focuses on the academic rationales for recruiting international GTAs and the academic benefits that they contribute may not fully capture the complexity and diversity of the rationales and impacts of these international GTAs or the HEIs they work at. It is important to consider a range of perspectives and to use a variety of research methods to acquire a deeper comprehension of the benefits and limitations of recruiting international GTAs to teach at UK universities.

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GTAs Enhancing Education Fund (EEF): Supporting Student engagement & Providing resources for GTA agency

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Abstract

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are often an underfunded and underutilised resource in Higher Education departments. However, when provided with resources and autonomy, GTAs can facilitate greater student engagement and develop core professional skills necessary for future academic roles. This article explores the development and outcome of the Enhancing Education Funding (EEF) call, developed by the Arts & Humanities Research Institute at King's College London (KCL). The EEF was created on the principles of collective participation, with the dual purpose of supporting students' engagement para-COVID-19 and enhancing the autonomy and leadership skills of GTAs in the Faculty of the Art & Humanities, KCL. Under EEF, seven projects were funded to support ten GTAs in leading curriculum-based, supervisor-supported projects between 2021-2022. Details of the theoretical basis for the funding call, the funded projects and the GTAs evaluation of their

projects are provided. Findings are based on hour-long focus group interviews conducted at the end of the project, with all awardees and summaries of seven end-of-project reports produced by the ten funded GTAs. The findings from this study highlight that where collective participation is used, GTAs can be given more responsibility and autonomy and can create engaging content for students that can supplement the curriculum in a valuable manner. However, this can only be effectively achieved if GTAs are established with a framework of continuous support, particularly in areas such as administration and receive resources, such as payment for time.

Introduction and Background

By 2021 there was growing evidence of declining student engagement attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic (Hope, 2021) and the abrupt transition students experienced from face-to-face to distance learning (Robinson & Hullinger, 2008; Khalil *et al.*, 2020; Lemay, Bazelais and Doleck, 2021; Wester *et al.*, 2021; Garris & Fleck, 2022, 2022; Ngo, 2022). Increases in self-directed study time (Studente, Ellis & Desai, 2021) and absences in face-to-face contact time among students (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Joshi *et al.*, 2022) bread the symptoms of declining student engagement, which reported to be less attention and effort (Garris & Fleck, 2022), increased student stress levels (Dyczkowska, 2021: 156), increased burnout (Chen, Kaczmarek & Ohyama, 2021) and less participation during classes and seminars (Whiting, 2022). Whilst this decline in engagement was not limited to a single university but a systemic issue replicated across faculties and universities globally, evidence of it within the Faculty of the Arts & Humanities at King's College London was the initial inspiration for the creation of the Enhancing Education Fund (EEF).

As a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA), I was at the forefront of witnessing declining student engagement. This reduction was particularly evident in students' social and behavioural engagement. It manifested in behaviours such as refusing to turn cameras and/or microphones on during small group engagements, leaving the seminar up to 10 minutes before

the end of the session and refusing to present or relay work to the wider group by maintaining silence, even when given opportunities such as delegating a respondent, providing me with feedback to read aloud or typing the response in the chat box. Each of these behaviours demonstrated a reluctance, or refusal to engage that was not evident during in-person seminars. On reflection, this change is potentially attributable to several factors, including a change in my ability to provide alterative solutions for engagement and to elicit responses from students with the shift to online learning.

As the pandemic progressed, it became evident that there were activities, workshops, or resources that I could produce to enhance student engagement if the correct supervisory support and resources were provided. This reflection revealed the precarious position in which GTAs exist, within the higher education framework, in often both wanting to further student engagement but being limited in their reliance on more senior academics for support and resources. This precariousness is also noted by Hastie (2021), who refers to the 'in-betweenness' of student and staff identities in GTA's experiences, Winstone and Moore (2017) who refer to the liminality of GTA's status as neither a teacher or full student, and Jing (2020), who refers to graduate teaching assistants as "the Other teacher". Park and Ramos (2002: 47) take this observation a step further, denoting that "evidence suggests that many GTAs feel like "donkeys in the department" because of their heavy workload, sizeable

responsibility and limited autonomy". For me, the chance to gain experience as a GTA is invaluable for my future career. However, the restrictions on paid hours and a lack of autonomy in designing and planning seminars has limited my opportunities for learning and confidence building.

In this regard, I feel there were chances missed to integrate my work and ideas more readily into the modules I taught on, because of the junior nature of my role. Despite their wide range of roles and responsibilities (Sharpe, 2000), GTAs can be broadly categorised as postgraduate researchers who facilitate university-level (typically undergraduate) teaching and assessment within the context of defined modules (Ryan, 2014). Undergraduate student's educational experience can be enhanced, with increased one-on-one support and additional opportunities for informal feedback, by effectively engaging with GTAs. Whilst academics have made several positive observations of GTA's impact on student's experience (Groccia, 2001; Fung, 2021; George & Rzyankina, 2022), it is essential to note that these positive impacts are often only apparent when an effective framework of training and an appropriate departmental environment is fostered (Young & Bippus, 2008). This environment occurs where GTAs are provided with appropriate resources, peer-support and are viewed and valued as an essential member of the wider faculty teaching staff (Smith *et al.*, 2021). As Jenks and Cox (2020) summarise, some successful approaches to supporting GTAs include collaborative teaching, supporting GTAs to become active departmental members and establish

academic identities (Fairbrother, 2012) and defining pedagogical commitments (Madden, 2014). Despite the evidential methods and attributed importance of integrating GTAs into modules and departments, opportunities to enhance GTA's roles in undergraduate education are overlooked (Campbell *et al.*, 2021), with scholars denoting that even willing institutions struggle to give GTAs a voice (Fung, 2021: 1).

Teaching experience is essential for GTA's professional development and future career prospects (Hardré, 2005; Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2021), particularly for those who wish to pursue a career as a lecturer, teacher or researcher within higher education. These job roles require specific skills such as self-efficacy (Campbell *et al.*, 2021; Shum, Lau & Fryer, 2021), confidence, autonomy and decision-making. There is a wealth of literature which highlights the positive impact that engaging trainee teachers[1] in extra-curricular projects, workshops or seminars can have on a trainee's cognitive and practical skills development (e.g. presentation and task development, conceptualisation, leadership, time-management and organisational skills) (Guadarrama, 2002: 173; Buskist, 2012; Hung, Lim & Lee, 2013: 208; Blessinger & Carfora, 2014), and psychological empowerment (Seery &

[1] This literature refers to trainee teachers employed within a secondary school setting. GTAs are effectively teachers in training, and so it is inferred that the findings would also apply to GTAs. However, literature specifically exploring GTAs in this context is very limited.

Donnell, 2019: 427). Within secondary school teacher training literature, one form of support approach through mentoring and autonomy is termed collective participation.

When applied to GTAs, this approach sees multiple members of a collective (in this case, a department) work together to achieve an outcome both beneficial to the collective (in this case, enhanced student engagement and curriculum knowledge) and the individual (in this case the GTA's core skills and future career as educator). It is from this understanding of creating a project with mutual benefits through collective participation that the EEF was developed.

The Enhancing Education Fund (EEF)

In January 2021, I raised the issue of dwindling student engagement and missed opportunities for GTA's to the then team I was working for at the Arts & Humanities Institute King's College London: Dr. Edward Stevens (current Impact & Knowledge Exchange Manager, KCL), Mr. Mark Johnson (current Festival Manager, Being Human festival) and Professor Anna Reading (Professor of Culture and Creative Industries, KCL). As a team, we developed 'The Enhancing Education Fund', a small grant (£1000) funding call for postgraduate researchers (PGR) who had experience as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) in the Faculty of Arts & Humanities. The grants were intended to enable GTAs to lead the design of a course or skill-specific engagement activity for

students in collaboration with module convenors. Whilst the premise of the fund was developed from an understanding of collective participation, as previously explored, the design, developed over three months, further facilitated impact through several mechanisms.

Firstly, as reasoned above, the fund supported GTAs to *develop agency by enabling them to plan and* lead a project. GTAs often follow the directions of senior staff but have limited opportunities to create programs (Curren, 2008: 606). Therefore, this funding call provided a platform from which GTAs had to collaborate with module leaders (obtaining signatory sign-off and short recommendations on projects) but within a context which emphasised the leading role of the GTA. In this regard, agency was developed through collective participation, where GTAs were required to plan, design, and deliver the project under the mentorship of the module leader using the following supportive but structural framework:

Design Phase (the 3rd of May to the 31st of July, 2021): Awardees were allocated funding and used this time to design, prepare and organise the resource or activity, for the start of the Autumn 2021 term.

Delivery Phase (September 2021-December 2021): Module Convenors ensured that the planned activity or resource was implemented, in line with the current Government and College Covid-19 guidance.

Analysis & Feedback (December 2021-January 2022): Awardees were to submit a one-page report detailing actual activities and how their understanding of engagement as a PGR/GTA had developed because of the project.

One mechanism that supported this structure was the provision that GTAs could claim payments for their time at the same rate as college-wide GTA pay. GTAs are often underfunded with limited resources (Dougherty, 2010; Banks & Spangler, 2021). When funding calls are applicable, their limits ensure that GTAs or postgraduate students cannot claim salary costs. To improve inclusivity in applications and solidify the position of the GTA in the broader faculty dynamic, we ensured that GTAs could claim payment for their time throughout the project. Overall, embedding the GTA with decision-making responsibilities within the course framework and supporting them with an income enhanced the development of their academic identity and agency (Tobbell, O'Donnell & Zammit, 2010), supporting the development of CV-enhancing skills and personal and professional development.

Secondly, the funding call supported students across the Faculty of the Arts & Humanities at King's College London by providing additional activities and resources tailored to their courses. GTAs were viewed as being in a unique position to facilitate student engagement because within the Faculty of the Arts & Humanities, they are often more likely, as seminar

leaders, to engage closely with smaller groups of students (from 10-28 students per group), rather than large scale lectures (upwards of 30 but more often 80+ students). It was proposed that this close contact with students ensures that even though GTAs are more junior in terms of their academic career and potential teaching experience, they would be more likely to understand the current cohort knowledge and the perceived challenges associated with a module. One mechanism that supported this structure was the inclusion of a student on the panel of three judging funding call submissions and selecting successful applicants. The three panellists were: Dr Mary Seabrook (the Head of GTA Development/STF), Dr. Aleksandra Kubica (Research Officer for The Bridge Group), and Karina Au (CMCI BA student). They based their assessments of the projects on its feasibility, appropriateness, departmental support, and the GTA's understanding of the benefit to students. In including Karina, she was best placed to understand if applying GTAs had an accurate perception and understanding of current student's course concerns and could therefore ensure that the activities and resources which were funded were most likely to have the most significant impact.

Methodology for selecting funded projects

Each applicant was required to read two pages of call guidance before completing three sections: Approval, Project Details and Budget. The approval section was used to confirm

module convenor support (in the form of a signature), whilst the Project Details section included questions such as:
Provide a brief overview of the project. Consider the project aims and delivery. Please also consider if all Covid-19 restrictions were to be lifted would you adapt the project and if so how (500 words)
If this project was to be approved, how would it benefit students on this course or module (200 words),
Why do you want to lead this project and what do you hope to gain from this experience (150 words)
The panel of three were given a week to read over the applications and provide an indicative score of between 1-5 for each response by each applicant.

1	Has not answered the question at all
2	Has answered the question in part
3	Has answered the question satisfactorily
4	Has answered the question well, providing a clear outline of the project/ demonstrating critical reflection / demonstrating feasibility
5	Has answered the question strongly. Has provided an excellent outline of the project aims and objectives/ demonstrating strong critical reflection / articulating specifically how they might gain from the programme / provided a clear and appropriate budget demonstrating value for money

Table 1. Marking Criteria for assessing the suitability of the projects[2]

This assessment method meant that each applicant received three overall scores, one from each panellist. I collated the individual and overall scores into a single spreadsheet and in a two hour online meeting the three panellists then cross-compared scores. The fifteen projects were then ranked. Some projects were immediately categorised as 'to be funded' because all three panellists scored them highly across the questions. Others required debates between the panellists and lead to proposals such as the merger of some projects with similar goals. The conditions for funding were then relayed to the GTA applicants.

Funded Projects

Launched in March 2021, the funding call saw overwhelming support from the PGR community at King's. The funding call closed on the 25th of April, 2021, with fifteen applications received from across the Faculty of the Arts & Humanities. The successful seven applications represent a diverse set of projects, facilitating impact across six departments and affecting upwards of ten undergraduate modules offered by

[2] This process and the marking matrix was inspired by the Undisciplined Spaces funding call, designed by Dr. Edward Stevens and Mr. Mark Johnson.

KCL.

Project Name	**Project Lead(s)**	**Connected Module & Department**	**Project Description**
Interactive Discourse Analysis Workshops	Lauren Cantillon & Taylor Annabell	7AAICC30: Research approaches. Culture Media & Creative Industries Department	This project provided a training opportunity in discourse analysis for CMCI MA students interested in the role of discourse(s) in language, media and culture.
Decolonising the Archive	**Sandip Kana**	British Imperial Policy and Decolonisation, 1938-64 6AAH3017& 6AAH3018. Department of History	This project saw the creation of a digital journal and a short lecture, guiding students on using the resource and facilitating student access to a much more comprehensive range of perspectives and primary sources than those principally drawn from British archives.
Bridging the Gap between School and University	Kristina Arakelyan, Rhys Sparey,	Theory I. Undergraduate, 1st year. Department of	This project created a one-stop-shop resource for undergraduate students, supporting

Music Resource Pack	Susannah Knights	Music	them to settle into the Department of Music by helping them develop basic skills needed for theory- and essay-based courses.
Undergraduate Reading Group	Adam Bull	Modules across the Undergraduate BA in Digital Culture 2021-2022. Department of Digital Humanities	This project consisted of a series of reading groups led by postgraduate research students for undergraduates in the DDH department. The choices of readings were led by the groups themselves and were not required to fit neatly within the standard departmental curriculum.
Renaissance Hands: Palaeography Skills Workshop	Julian Neuhauser	'Early Modern Literary Culture' and 'Books that Matter'. Undergraduate, 1st Year & 3rd Year respectively. English Department	This project saw two 'transcribathons' (skills workshops) held. These 'transcribathons' gave students the opportunity to acquire and build skills in early modern English palaeography, or the

			study of 16th and 17th-century handwriting.
Postcolonial Film Club	Claire Crawford	5SSPP210 Postcolonial Theory & 4AAOB103 Introduction to Politics. Department of Political Economy	This project created a fortnightly film club consisting of a 3-hour film showing and discussion group. It aimed to engage students in post- and anti-colonial topics before they make their second-and third-year choices.
Writing London through the Queer Archive: Joe Orton	Katie Arthur	Department of English, Undergraduate, 1st year, Writing London: Autumn module	Based on the life and work of the outrageous and highly influential playwright Joe Orton (1933-67), this project consisted of a practical workshop introducing students to literary London using hands-on archival and creative research methods.

Table 2. Information about the seven projects funded under the EEF.

Analysis of case for GTA led projects

To analyse the impact of this project, all awardees submitted a one-page report detailing the actual activities, student feedback[3], and reflections on their experience and engaged in a focus group termed the 'end of project meeting'. Student feedback denoted within the reports was overwhelmingly positive. Many of the reports included observations from the students such as *'it brings a new practical element to the module that doesn't happen in other seminars'* and more specific observations such as *'It absolutely enhanced the class, it allows us to view texts as those in the early modern period would have, interesting and engaging. Allows us to look through their [i.e., early modern writers'] eyes'.* It is worth denoting that these responses were reported by GTAs themselves within the report and that they could have engaged in selective reporting. Yet what was consistently noted over four of the seven feedbacks, was the provisions that the funding provided creating opportunities for practical engagement not ordinarily available within the module, which was also echoed in the GTA's reflections. One GTA noted that it enabled them to *'Curate tailored materials for*

[3] Each GTA was asked to collect feedback, but the mechanism for doing so was left to their discretion. Whilst this provided the GTA's with additional agency and creativity in collecting responses, one limitation of this is that there was no formal process for collecting feedback. As this was a pilot project, a better more structured feedback system is something that could be developed if further iterations were developed.

practical sessions for students' and *'develop materials for an introductory lecture integrated into the course syllabus' (GTA 1)*[4]*.*

GTA 6 summarised the overall impact of the EEF fund as:

'The financial support meant that I could offer students access to a type of practice-based learning…that they never had encountered before. The freedom to design the activity meant that I could bring a project to the department that I knew would be welcomed and which fits well with some of our (perhaps underexplored) strengths. It also gave me the opportunity to lead a pedagogical project, meaning I have a very concrete example of leadership in teaching to put on my future applications. Not only that, but developing this programme as a new type of 'practice based' teaching has given me more confidence with similar teaching activities and has allowed me to securely add an activity-based approach to my pedagogy'.

This quote firstly indicates the success of the funding call in enabling this project to extend the scope of the department, providing additional relevant and course related opportunities for student engagement. Secondly, it explicitly denotes the significance of the project in providing the GTA with an example of leadership which will support the GTA's

[4] All GTA's have been randomly allocated a number (e.g. GTA 6) to anonymise quotes.

future career. In this regard, this project and the GTA's developed capacity to design and deliver content within the scope of limited budget and resources, and within a set timeframe, is a replication of the conditions of future work as a lecturer. This early exposure to this leadership opportunity means that this GTA has an explicit example of impact on student engagement they can use to secure future work. Finally, this quote emphasises the GTA's development of key skills, aforementioned in the literature review. In being offered the opportunity to experiment with a new form of pedagogy, this GTA was able to develop specific skills such as self-efficacy (Campbell et al., 2021; Shum, Lau & Fryer, 2021) and now has the confidence to replicate this form of practice in the future. It could be inferred that this experimentation is important because by increasing this GTA's toolbox of pedagogy, it will enable the GTA to further adapt the design and delivery of different future content to different learning environments and contexts. Fundamentally, by providing the GTA with different tools for teaching, the conditions for positive student engagement increase. The provisions for responsibility and the additional experience the project provided is also mirrored in GTA 3 and GTA 10's reflections:

'It has allowed us to consider further the series of small decisions made in developing curriculum and feel the weight of responsibility in how we position approaches to students and select particular texts for them to engage with'. (GTA 3)

'The project has reinforced our teaching skills, since it

demands that we consider pedagogy and inclusivity….it has encouraged us to re-evaluate our own theory, writing and analysis skills, by necessarily considering what it means to write and analyse well, which are inevitably useful for our own research purposes. Our involvement with GTA work was limited in the academic year 2020-21 because of the pandemic, and this has also been a great opportunity to continue developing our skills as educators. (GTA 10)

Here, both GTA 3 and GTA 10 describe how the project provided an opportunity to reflect and re-evaluate their current practices, developing a better understanding of how students engage with certain texts and pedagogical approaches. These skills are not only fundamental to a future within higher education, as they form the premise of curriculum design, but pertain to the GTA's current development as an academic. Furthermore, it can be inferred from GTA 10's responses that this project provided a chance for the development of teaching skills such as communication, collaboration, and adaptability. And regarding developing skills such as teaching outside of the classroom:

'It's helped me conceptualise how teaching might build student engagement in non-educational settings…through a recognition of the need to build confidence for students who have not had much access to institutional environments before. In this way, the project has affirmed my belief in an inclusive, accessible, and creative pedagogy'. (GTA 1)

Yet despite the provisions of the module leader support, some GTAs experienced difficulties in organising and implementing the sessions. Organising room bookings at KCL were denoted to be '*very complicated'.* Complications stemmed from rooms already being scheduled to host events or teaching time, and the GTA's needs were seen as a lower priority within the hierarchy of the university. The GTA leading one project felt they were unable to *'respond to student feedback about the sessions being too late in the evening, because the room booking team would not let me have a room in the afternoon' (GTA 7)*. In this regard, further support from both the module convenor and the project funder (AHRI) was needed. This demonstrates the need for more administrative support for GTAs, particularly where provisions such as room bookings, equipment hire, or equipment use may occur.

Other feedback focused on the challenge of ensuring that resources were *'collaborative, interactive, and engaging'* but functioned within the *'parameters of accessibility'* (GTA 9). In this regard, it was proposed that a future funding call should embed further support and training, particularly in designing accessible resources. It should be supported by broader faculty-wide training for GTAs in accessibility practices within the classroom. Furthermore, awardees proposed that the application form for the funding call be amended to ask about the skill competency level of GTA's where specialists or specific platforms (e.g., KEATS) are embedded within

proposals. This would ensure that if training in a specialist skill is needed to deliver the project, this skill deficit could be addressed through module leader or funder support earlier in a project's development.

Conclusion

Overall, as is evident in the above findings, the provision of funding and associated support from projects such as EEF, which rely on collective participation, can support GTAs to work in collaboration with established academic staff and module convenors to challenge and enhance course content (Pierson, 2018), developing transferable skills such as communication, collaboration and problem-solving necessary for career development and to enhance student engagement. In this regard, if GTAs are given more responsibility and autonomy in this structured manner, they can create engaging content for students that can supplement the curriculum in a valuable manner. Yet these provisions must be embedded within a framework of continuous support, particularly with greater provisions in areas such as administration. Therefore, future opportunities like this should enact a balance of supporting GTAs to establish agency, facilitating autonomy and confidence building in the design of module-specific content through facilitating payment, embedding them within the department infrastructure, and providing effective bespoke training relevant to their developmental needs (Bale & Anderson,

2022).

Acknowledgements

I'm extremely grateful to the previous staff members of the Arts & Humanities Institute, particularly: Dr Edward Stevens, Mr. Mark Johnson and Professor Anna Reading for providing me with the chance to design and lead the funding call. I would also like to aknolwlge the hard work of all of the GTAs involved in the projects: Lauren Cantillon & Taylor Annabell, Sandip Kana, Kristina Arakelyan, Rhys Sparey, Susannah Knights, Adam Bull, Julian Neuhauser, Claire Crawford, Katie Arthur and the various departments and staff members who facilitated the projects. Finally, I would like to thank Dr Mary Seabrook, Dr. Aleksandra Kubica, and Karina Au for their time and effort in assessing the projects applications.

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The Significance of Care in a Global Higher Education Institution: An insight from the Periphery

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Abstract

This article explores the significance of an ethic of care (Noddings, 2005) in higher education pedagogy, in light of the rapid growth in the undergraduate student population. Drawing on the experience of teaching from the periphery, as both students and staff, four Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) reflect on the issues arising from their respective practices, as they taught on an undergraduate social sciences programme at a London-based Russell Group university.

A resounding concern for providing sufficient care to their students emerged. The continued growth of student cohorts sustained the GTA's interest in ensuring that students felt

supported and included during their learning. This was explored through Noddings' (2005) seminal scholarship on an ethic of care, which has since inspired the development of more opportunities for relationality and responsiveness in taught sessions.

Notably, the authors considered how participating in a community of GTAs helped to navigate teaching on a rapidly expanding programme. A discussion depicting their journey of professional development is offered, along with reflections detailing their experience of becoming genuine, contributing members of the teaching community. While the benefits of this community were significant, several challenges still arose. These were broadly a result of the lack of clear expectations in the GTA role, the striving for a consistent pedagogical approach across the seminars, and the doubt in expertise encountered by the GTAs.

The discussion aims to promote the GTA voice, and to equip early career teaching staff with the knowledge to help them thrive in the current higher education landscape, which is characterised by large cohorts.

Introduction

The number of students enrolling in Higher Education (HE) in the UK continues to soar (HESA, 2022), undeterred by the weakening staff-to-student ratio. Consequently, university staff are accountable for supporting a growing number of students. Although this is known to place further pressure on administrative staff, in addition to presenting pedagogical issues for permanent teaching staff, Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are also confronted with challenges as they are oftentimes responsible for seminar delivery (Quinterno, 2012; Partin, 2018).

In this article, we report our experience of this, as GTAs, focusing on our pedagogical practices carried out over the 2022-23 autumn term on an undergraduate social sciences programme at a London-based Russell Group university. On average, we each led two seminar groups with approximately 18 students in each. The process of reflecting spanned a ten-week teaching block, which revealed how we addressed the issue of care and support in the classroom as a result of the sharp rise in student numbers.

The reflections demonstrate how we strived to ensure that care would still be encountered within the learning setting, both as a value and a practice (Held, 2007). Throughout the article, Noddings' (2005: 15) ethic of care is referred to; the essence of which is based on "…a connection or encounter between two human beings – a carer and a recipient of care,

or cared-for".

As Persky (2021) reports, in order to experience care, one must feel that they are being responded to within a relationship. These relationships are not limited to two individuals, but it is required that care is aimed at one person at a time, focusing on their needs alone. This corresponds with Noddings' (2012) warning about the suitability of care from one person to the next. The process of grouping students into classes, cohorts, and populations, means losing the unique attributes bought to the space by the individuals (Keeling, 2014). In a caring relation, it is the personalised nature of the relationship that brings about a sense of worth and mattering (Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

To achieve the caring ethic, Clouston (2018) recommended that practitioners model an 'openness' in their teaching and learning settings, demonstrating a readiness to adjust and to be flexible towards the distinct needs of the learning community, though as noted by Persky (2021), this is not always the case. When practitioners project care and respect, students are presented with alternative ways of being with and around one another (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Gerde, Bingham & Wasik, 2012; Persky, 2021).

Barrow (2015) tells how teaching during the years of compulsory schooling tends to focus on an ethic of care, meanwhile teaching in HE tends to focus on content expertise; the notion of how and what care, and to who, is

notoriously unclear in HE (Burford, 2013), emphasising the need for clarification in this context. Keeling (2014: 142) explains how oftentimes, “Institutions leave to individual members of the staff or faculty any responsibility for understanding, responsiveness, or empathy in their relationships with students”, which although is telling of the individualised nature of care, also suggests there may be expectations of the assumed carers.

At the time of compiling these reflections, we were catapulted from the periphery into the department’s staff community, which spurred on the establishment of a network amongst us, in which we could learn with and from one another.

In the discussion we explore the ways that students are supported through pedagogical practice, the support available to GTAs, how we adapted to the role of GTA, and the role of the GTA community. This article offers insight from the caring context (Cassidy & Bates, 2005), with knowledge addressed to early-career practitioners, in particular those who look to foster sensitive caring relations and personhood within their teaching.

Literature Review

This review of literature has been compiled following an exploration of the contemporary higher education (HE)

landscape in the UK, with a keen focus on massification and widening participation policies that have led to undergraduate populations becoming increasingly diverse (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2021). While massification, in the context of the current research, has led to a globalised student population, it has also created an imbalance of resources and staff to students. Cassidy and Bates (2005: 69) confirm that "adequate material resources, time, and knowledge" are required to ensure care can be taken. In this article, we have argued that an ethic of care is required to support the continuation of student development and engagement within these growing classrooms.

The expansion of cohort numbers has been known to result in students feeling less connected with their surroundings (Deal, 2022). Indeed, to ensure that individuals feel partnered with their learning experience, students need to encounter interdependence, to feel that they are part of, related to, or embedded in a community (Held, 2007; Keeling, 2014).

> "It really always comes back to us saying, you are worthwhile, you are meaningful, and this is your place." (Cassidy & Bates, 2005: 81)

Ensuring that individuals receive care during their learning is fundamental but challenging. With contemporary views of 'success' that focus on completion of a module or graduation tarnishing the role of education (Keeling, 2014), practitioners are faced with weaving care principles into their pedagogy

with minimal guidance (Noddings, 2005; Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

The Cared For

The transition to HE is undertaken by more individuals every year and with many arriving from overseas, from marginalised communities, as mature or returning students, the urgency to learn about their unique needs is enhanced (Wilson, 2022). This paper proposes several benefits to implementing an ethic of care to support undergraduate students in their pursuit of learning.

Noddings (2012: 771) has centred her interpretation of an ethic of care around five characteristics, which include "listening, dialogue, critical thinking, reflective response, and making thoughtful connections among the disciplines and to life itself". This process is driven by a motivational displacement (ibid.), whereby the carer accepts the undertakings of the cared-for as their own, on their behalf (Barnacle & Dall'Alba, 2017). The literature also evidences empathy as a distinctive quality that educators can employ to establish a caring environment (Noddings, 2010); this notion of 'feeling with' (ibid.) enables the other to understand and become more aware of an individual's situation. Held (2007: 15-16) tells that "in practices of care, relationships are cultivated, needs are responded to, and sensitivity is demonstrated." Deep engagement with students throughout their learning has been thought to empower them and to "foster[s] student independence in the future" (Owens & Ennis, 2005: 401). There are perceived obstacles to solidifying

these relationships in HE, including the fleeting nature of interactions as students continue in their progression of learning (Gravett, Taylor & Fairchild, 2021), from module to module, as well as the limited opportunities to converse one-to-one (Burford, 2013).

As the student population continues to grow, individuals are encountering larger cohorts within lectures and seminars, which may lead to assuming that their participation is not valued, preventing them from feeling like a member of the community (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The struggle for a sense of belonging can be owed to how one feels they are attached to, or connected with, a situation or collective (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Deal (2022) reports that without this, students face feeling less motivated and less willing to attend their learning. Feelings of belonging to a community may also stem from establishing trust and an emotional connection with others (Osterman, 2000); this links with the characteristics of Wegner's (1998: 73) community of practice comprising "mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire".

Where an ethic of care approach is taken, there may be a striving to ensure that students feel that they matter. In Schlossberg's theory of marginality and mattering (1989), five stages are confirmed as a means to communicate how individuals are valued in a given situation. These include receiving attention, feeling important, an ego extension, feeling that one can depend on another, and the impression

of being appreciated. By sensing these, individuals may encounter the opportunity to feel heard through their contributions, to bask in receiving praise, and to feel that they are cared for. Relational pedagogies facilitate students to feel valued; where this is achieved, a collaborative and co-creative learning space can be formed (Gravett, Taylor & Fairchild, 2021).

The Carers

While students can support their peers to become part of a collective, the GTA role has also been recognised as a resource to facilitate integration and adjustment; some qualities that support this include their closeness in age to the students, being perceived as approachable, and the enthusiasm they bring to classes (Kendall & Schussler, 2012; Wald & Harland, 2018). Matusovich, Cooper and Winters (2010: 1) acknowledge the emerging contributions made by GTAs to the student experience, including "setting the tone for the classroom climate, and serving as mentors and role models".

In the context of the authors' practices, opportunities to exercise care predominately arose in seminars. These provided opportunities for the cared-for to recognise the caring relationships within their student community and to offer a response (Noddings, 2005). As the carers in these seminars, the GTAs felt responsible for the learning and the holistic development of the students, leading to their feeling compelled to show care in this setting by addressing the

various needs (Held, 2007). As teaching can take place in different ways in HE, for instance in a lecture, tutorial or a seminar, the authors felt that the opportunity for students to interact in smaller groups was advantageous.

The GTAs also exhibited an ethic of care within their community of practice which provided encouragement for their mutually sought lifelong career paths. This also impressed upon the development of their pedagogical practices; through an exchange of anecdotes and encounters, the novice educators reflected on how harnessing this approach fostered the development of a student-centred relational pedagogy. As the GTA practices began to align, they too felt cared for.

Following this brief review of literature, the authors explored how an ethic of care was employed within their community of GTAs to support the development of their professional roles within the institution, and how the continuation of this approach helped to produce supportive seminar spaces for undergraduate students as they acclimatised into HE.

Methodology

This reflective qualitative inquiry was carried out by four GTAs employed at a UK Russell Group University, as they supported a thriving Bachelor of Arts social sciences programme. The collaborative exploration transpired from observations of the

rapid growth in the undergraduate population in recent years, leading to their consideration of the significance of an ethic of care within higher education (HE) and how this could be maintained.

The GTAs were prompted to reflect on how their teaching practices strived to support undergraduates in their pursuit of education, despite the challenges of marketisation and massification (Burford, 2013; Wald & Harland, 2018; Burke & Larmar, 2021). In contrast to grand lecture halls populated with row after row of students, the GTAs were afforded the opportunity to provide more individualised pedagogies to students in seminars and group tutorials; the need for this approach is seemingly becoming less commonplace in HE now as students are encouraged to become more independent and accountable for their learning (Blackie, Case & Jawitz, 2010).

The GTAs arranged to meet regularly and reflect on their experiences of working within the department. The themes discussed throughout the findings, and the theory supporting many of these ideas emerged from informal discussion, and as such are representative of the collective concerns. This reflective article compiles anecdotes and shared views on the GTA teaching experience as discussed informally by the authors. While there has been no data collection or processing, the institution and programme remain anonymous so not to influence the experience of teaching or care, should the article be disseminated widely.

Discussion

Following several reflexive encounters, four notable aspects of our teaching practices arose as commonalities when considering how the notion of care is thoughtfully woven into much of what Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) do within higher education (HE). These included: supporting students through pedagogical practice; adapting to the role of the GTA; support available for GTAs; and the GTA community.

The role of the GTA is to support undergraduate students through the course content. Therefore, when multiple GTAs are working on a module, the team must maintain a level of consistency across all seminar groups. Consistency can be facilitated through centralised decisions made at the module level, for example, centralised decisions regarding assessment, core content, and discussion topics. Consistency can lead to the same learning objectives being met across the module, while also supporting learners to engage with and understand the institutional norms. Whilst the delivery of the seminars may differ contingent on the personal pedagogical practices employed by the GTA, further consistency across seminar groups can be facilitated through the application of Noddings' (2005) ethic of care principles.

The size of the seminars (approximately 18 students) enabled us to build relationships with students, monitor student well-being and provide pastoral support. We all strived to build positive professional relationships with students, establishing

time within our seminars to discuss how each student is adapting to university life and providing an inclusive, supportive space for questions to be answered. This is in keeping with the ethics of care, which extends beyond academic achievement, prioritising the holistic development of the individual (Scott, 2015). It was felt that the caring ethic was more easily transferred to a larger space following the experience of a seminar; in the lecture theatres students had become familiar with one another as well as members of staff, providing a sense of community. This is remarked in Deal's (2022) article, where they contend that creating small groups within large communities can help maintain participation.

The collaborative nature of seminars, coupled with pedagogical adaptations facilitated by the GTAs, exhibits Noddings' (2012) five characteristics of the ethics of care. For example, the characteristic of listening can be assisted through classroom adaptations; dependent upon the needs of the students within each seminar group, we may use table groups to encourage students to discuss the course content and to listen to one another. Other GTAs may move the furniture so all students sit in one large circle, encouraging students to listen to the responses from the whole group. Furthermore, prior research identifies that students in HE value a dialogic approach to learning, where they can share their views and be treated as equals (Motta & Bennett, 2018). We found that we were able to facilitate a dialogic approach in seminars by scaffolding questions and using

structured models of discussion such as think-pair-share, affording students a chance to consider their response and then review.

Although the ethics of care principle underlies almost all pedagogical decisions made within our seminars, the approach also presented vital challenges, particularly considering workload as GTAs are often employed through an hourly rate of pay (Quinterno, 2012; Partin, 2018), and balance teaching with PhD research. However, with students citing ethics of care as a vital component of effective teaching (Scott, 2015), the importance of the principle should not be understated.

While the principles of an ethic of care currently unite our teaching practices, there was initially disparity in our former teaching experiences, which led to various adaptations in how we carried out this ethic in the role of GTA. Coming from various teaching backgrounds, spanning from primary schools to higher education, transitioning to the GTA role was an emotional but gratifying experience. This included adjusting our pedagogies to support the increasingly diverse cohort of students, as well as adapting to the role of a GTA seminar tutor and understanding our place within the teaching community. It was felt that Cassidy and Bates' (2005: 82) research on enacting an ethic of care in education, confirmed our conception of care, stating that it relied on "creating the right environment, building relationships, showing respect, adapting the curriculum, being empathetic and nonreactive."

The delivery of seminars was another concern, as we grappled with embracing the unfamiliar module content. Full autonomy was given to us to modify the seminar resources based on our expertise, but there was an underlying feeling that we should not veer too far from the structures given. This prompted intermittent feelings of uncertainty, which led to miscommunicated expectations and reduced confidence in our roles.

In some of our previous roles, as the main teacher, one might have had full control over the lesson structure and resource content. However, in this instance, there were seven tutors, including the module leader (ML), delivering across 15 seminar groups. The sheer quantity of students that we felt responsible for bought about pressure to ensure consistency across the seminar groups, striving to ensure that we were offering the same learning experiences as fellow GTAs. Weekly seminar topics were prearranged by the ML, which led to a renegotiation of how we perceived our roles on the programme, at times feeling more like a facilitator, delivering the seminar on behalf of the ML. Beaton (2022) aptly describes the GTA role as a dual practitioner, stating that dual practitioners are established teachers in their first career but novices in their new HE educator role. This connected with our feelings of confusion in our positionality; we did not hold the position of lecturers, despite our previous professional experiences working as educators.

In addition to the dual practitioner role, we encountered the dual role of being a teacher and student at the same time, which led to feelings of imposter syndrome. Levy (2022) described imposter syndrome as a feeling encountered when an individual passes oneself off as being more capable than they are. Over the duration of the teaching term, it was felt that there was an expectation that the seminar tutors would have certain credentials, and this was assumed by the students on many occasions, referring to us as 'Doctor' or 'Professor'. This further added to our insecurities in the role, questioning whether we had the expertise to deliver seminars.

Within the department, we were sign-posted toward several individuals who formed the web of support for GTAs. These resources were available in addition to the informal supplementary encouragement and care offered by the GTA community, the latter a prominent finding in Partin's (2018) investigation of the GTA teaching experience. Relevant training was offered through mentoring, where we were partnered with experienced academics or more experienced GTAs; Aparicio-Ting et al. (2022) recognise the mutually beneficial aspect of this practice, where social interaction facilitates the exchange of knowledge, experience, and new perspectives. Pairing practitioners in this way has been thought to gradually bring individuals in from the periphery (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Sutherland, 2009), providing opportunity for "learning how the community functions, how teaching is undertaken by more experienced community

members, how they fit in to the community, and what they might have to offer to the community" (Sutherland, 2009: 148).

The community we created on the programme impacted both our students and us directly. The former was a result of our ability to share our questions about a point of teaching. In doing this, we were able to connect with people who had a range of histories and prior qualifications, that fostered a greater teaching experience, when we intersected each activity with our differing competencies. Together we were able to create a microculture workforce of like-minded people where we wanted our students to have a positive experience; we were proud to represent our institution and we all enjoyed the teaching. Within the microculture, we modelled the care we intended to show in our seminars, to one another. Cassidy and Bates (2005: 79) verify the significance of "embracing the vision" in order to practice projecting our values across all of our teaching encounters.

Mirroring many of the principles of the Expansive Learning Environment Framework (Engestrom, 2014; Fuller, 2014) we have learnt to be better GTAs as a result of the culture and community we work in. Some of the community was generated by the ML who acknowledged our expertise and encouraged us to develop the seminars as we saw fit. A second yet equally important aspect was the role of community in our doctoral journeys. There is an element of isolation in our academic practice; negotiating the change in

identity from a student to an academic and researcher is a solitary journey for a doctoral candidate (Aitchison et al., 2012; Sala-Bubaré & Castelló, 2017), and prior to joining the GTA community, we had few people to turn to. This community supported us to feel that we belonged. Wenger (2000) argues that the social capital gained by our membership to this network as we engaged with each other and aligned our activities with each other, was the force that produced and maintained the community of practice. For us, there is another advantage - not only is the community about the GTA role that we are being paid to fulfil, but it is also about support for our doctoral journey.

As individuals continue to perceive the value of credentials and lifelong learning, the higher education landscape and its population is likely to continue to expand. While this provides invaluable experience to practitioners, offering academics stages to global audiences and platforms upon which complex and critical material can be explored and disseminated, it is vital that the practitioner recognises the many other facets of the learning experience that support the student to flourish, beyond knowledge acquisition. We have argued in this article that the role of the GTA has been pivotal in providing environments for budding scholars' identity transitions, for finding their academic voice, and for becoming part of a wider network that cares for and values them. Indeed, we have also drawn on our practices from the periphery to emphasise how significant our relationships with one another have been, supporting a continuation of care

provision to others in HE, but that greater clarity over the expectations of our roles and how to achieve consistency in our teaching practices, would be welcomed knowledge.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to explore the significance of an ethic of care within the teaching practices of four Postgraduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in a Higher Education (HE) environment with an increasing undergraduate student population. Critically, it was noted that increasing the number of students participating in learning does not tackle the issue of belonging or loneliness; people need to feel seen and cared for. The notion of caring should not become institutionalised, it is an individualised encounter (Noddings, 2005).

We recommend that further research is needed to clarify how members of staff who are teaching from the periphery can be supported to achieve consistency across their pedagogical practices. With this consistency would likely come some clarity about the changing expectations of GTAs in the midst of the changing HE landscape.

Above all, becoming a GTA far exceeded our expectations. We could not have been prepared for how much was to be learnt from our experiences of teaching; we could not have pre-empted how insightful our students would be as they

critically reflected on the course content, nor how open-minded or how kind they would be to one another as they engaged in friendly debates in class. This accepting and understanding atmosphere within the seminars could not have been achieved without the tutors promoting their ethic of care from the offset.

We learnt that in feeling valued and feeling cared for, we were better able to support our students, and to model a relational pedagogy. By forming our community of GTAs, and by exchanging our strategies, our coping mechanisms, and our knowledge, we felt connected, making the GTA identity feel like a stable place in which we could belong.

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Examining the impact of COVID-19 on Graduate Teaching Assistant working conditions

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Abstract

Retaining academic staff within higher education institutions (HEIs) has long been a matter of concern, yet little appears to have changed. However, the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic may have intensified concerns regarding the working conditions in higher education, especially impacting graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). Young and Bippus (2008) and Shum, Lau and Fryer (2021) argue that GTAs lack the confidence to perform their responsibilities, while Alhija and Fresko (2021) argue that low salaries, increased workloads, and decreased levels of job satisfaction are some of the contributing factors that led to GTAs finding new employment opportunities. There should be increased levels of support for GTAs to ensure that they can perform all of their contractual duties to a high-quality standard. This literature review examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on GTAs and what this may mean for the future of GTAs in academia. This paper will conclude with recommendations for HEIs on what can be done to support GTAs.

Introduction

Metcalf *et al.* (2005) and King, Roed and Wilson (2018) claim that there were existing concerns before the COVID-19 pandemic which led to issues retaining academic staff, though as a result of a system-wide problem. From their survey data with 80 academic staff, Selesho and Naile (2014) report that working conditions were likely to be an influencing factor in the retention of academic staff. Although, Rashid and Yadav (2020) indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have exacerbated those concerns in the wider academic sector, including Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), and academic and research employees due to a lack of support. As agreed by Alberti *et al.* (2022:54) who report from their experience as a GTA during the pandemic, noting that "basic course coordinators are responsible for helping GTAs manage uncertainty, but when they also lack information about directives coming from the administration, they become proverbial blind leaders of the blind". While HE senior colleagues may have attempted to support GTAs during the pandemic, personal difficulties may have made it challenging for HE senior colleagues to provide further support as the pandemic led to significant uncertainties and disruptions (Alberti *et al.* 2022). GTAs may be referred to as early career researchers, or as Nikolic *et al.* (2015) explained, seasonal employees, casual teachers or teaching assistants. The role of GTAs is to contribute to teaching and/or other projects on a part-time basis as GTAs are often employed alongside their academic studies (Park & Ramos, 2002; Young

& Bippus, 2008; Muzaka, 2009). This this literature review provides an exploration of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on GTAs while paying close attention to the wider sector issues that have been on-going and perhaps magnified due to the significance of a global crisis. The literature examined in this paper relates to GTA, early career researcher and academic experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic from an international perspective.

The aim of this paper is to:
Understand key contributing factors to GTAs' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Consider the working conditions in higher education before COVID-19 and understand the implications of the pandemic.

Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic

The following section explores the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic examining key literature from international perspectives. As Alberti et al., (2022) suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic was a challenging experience for many in academia and therefore it is important to understand the experiences and perceptions of GTAs, and early career researchers/academics. In Nigeria, Yunusa *et al.* (2021) interviewed seven university lecturers to understand their perspectives on COVID-19 in higher education. Their findings identified that poor digital technology, lack of access to the internet/digital divide, and a stop on research activities,

attending physical conferences and workshops were perceived challenges. Fields *et al.* (2020) interviewed ten learning assistants to identify their experiences of transitioning to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic focusing on a rural Hispanic institution. The findings identified that participants lacked a suitable workspace at home for academic study, they had other commitments to their families which limited the time they could spend on their work, and they had unreliable internet access. Jackman *et al.* (2021) explored the perceived implications of the national lockdowns on doctoral researchers and early career researchers in the UK. 1,142 participants completed an online survey between April – May 2020. Their findings established that the national lockdown created poor working environments, limited access to resources, increased perceived pressures and psychological difficulties. They claim that it is important to consider personal circumstances and individual needs during that time and the implications on their working abilities during a global crisis. Aristovnik *et al.* (2020) conducted a large-scale study exploring students' perspectives on the impact of the first wave of COVID-19 in early 2020, with a sample of 30,383 students from 62 countries. In their findings, participants were generally more satisfied with the support they received from teaching staff and their universities' public relations. Although, similar to Jackman *et al.* (2021), a lack of computer skills and higher workloads prevented participants from improving their performance in a new teaching setting, they were also concerned with increased boredom, anxiety,

frustration and concerns about their future professional career and studies. Aristovnik *et al.* (2020) identified that participants with certain socio-demographic characteristics including males, part-time, first-level, applied sciences, a lower living standard, or from Africa or Asia, were less satisfied with their academic experiences during the crisis. In comparison, females and full-time students were more affected by their emotional life and personal circumstances.

Through an online survey, Chaturvedi, Vishwakarma and Singh (2021) explored the impact of the pandemic on students attending varied educational institutions including schools, colleges and universities in Delhi, India; 879 of the participants were aged 18 – 39 years old and were attending a college or university. The data identified that sleeping habits, daily fitness routines, effects on weight, social life and mental health were evident for participants, their results suggest that participants established different coping mechanisms to help them overcome stress and anxiety. Coping mechanisms include but are not limited to listening to music, online gaming, web series, sleeping, social media and reading. In their article, McGaughey *et al.* (2021) describe the findings of their large-scale study examining the impact of the pandemic on 370 academic staff in Australia. They concluded that work-related stress, technology, work-life balance, and the consequences on the future of academia were perceived concerns which impacted GTAs' experiences during the COVID-19 crisis. In their literature, Riforgiate, Gattoni and Kane (2022) explain from their experiences during the

pandemic that they witnessed issues with student mental health, diversity, inclusion, and affordability as well as being challenged by furloughs and staff dismissal due to funding issues. The literature presented in this section recognises that significant challenges and issues were being experienced by academics from institutions internationally. This demonstrates that the COVID-19 pandemic had implications for the quality of work being produced, the mental health and well-being of both staff and students, funding issues and creating a positive work-life balance.

Supporting Graduate Teaching Assistants

It is clear from the previous section that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a variety of challenges for GTAs and therefore, it is necessary to understand how to support GTAs to ensure that they are able to continue to progress in their academic career through quality support. Kendall and Schussler's (2012) online survey aimed to compare professors and GTAs from the undergraduate students' perspectives in the United States of America. Their findings identified that GTAs were perceived as uncertain, nervous, and hesitant, whereas participants claimed that professors were confident, knowledgeable, and organised. This may indicate that further work is required to support GTAs to further develop their skills and gain additional confidence. Venkatesh (2020) acknowledges that to support an individual is to give assistance and help the individual to handle demands and

cope with the pressures of their personal and professional responsibilities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Alberti et al. (2022) recognise that GTAs required an increased level of support to ensure they could operate and perform their duties alongside their academic studies.

Osman and Hornsby (2016) reported that 49 academics responded to a survey and follow-up in-depth interviews to understand early career academics' perceptions to develop their teaching practices in South Africa. In their findings interviewees claimed that they began their careers with little experience which resulted in difficulties balancing the working responsibilities of teaching and research; also, difficulties in becoming accustomed to the academic culture. In their conclusion, they acknowledge that early career academics get little support for teaching and there needs to be a greater balance between research and teaching.

Through interviews, Remmik *et al.* (2011) examined the teaching and development possibilities of 25 early career academics in Estonia. Their findings identified that support through informal relationships created opportunities to learn in the academic community and develop their teaching abilities. In addition, as part of a wider collection of research, Ellis, Deshler and Speer (2016) reported the findings from an analysis of an initial baseline survey completed by 341 participants which was created to support the growth of a professional development program to improve GTAs' professional development in a mathematics department in the United States of America. Their results showed that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were aware that changes

were needed to their GTA professional development provisions and were willing to engage in the development of their programmes to support GTAs. Supporting Ellis, Deshler and Speer's (2016) findings, Shum, Lau and Fryer (2021) surveyed 310 graduate students to evaluate their teaching approaches, self-efficacy, interest, and teaching ability through a mandatory 10-week training course at a research-intensive university in the Asia-Pacific region. Their data identified that pre-existing teaching beliefs can be changed by attending training courses specific to supporting them with their teaching approaches and self-efficacy.

King, Roed and Wilson (2018) interviewed 30 academic staff in five UK HEIs, they concluded their qualitative study by advocating for an induction process that is not a series of training commitments, but instead, a developmental and supportive approach to cater for their specific needs to help them perform their responsibilities more efficiently. They recognised that structured and guided programmes should be reviewed to support the changes in working conditions and the development of GTAs as early carer academics. This is important for GTAs as they are at the beginning of their careers; Alberti *et al.* (2022) suggest that training and professional development are pivotal to their future progression in their career. Therefore, tailored training specifically for those at the beginning of their careers may help to encourage them to pursue further and more permanent roles in HE. In addition, Remmick *et al.* (2011) assert that informal relationships can help to develop

teaching abilities and gain a greater sense of comfort in the academic community. This therefore suggests that increased support both formal and informal through building relationships and participating in organised training are beneficial for GTAs, early career academics and researchers.

The wider academic sector

While it is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenging experience for many, Park (2002) and Slack and Pownall (2021) recognise that there are wider sector issues that have perhaps been exacerbated by the crisis. Loveday (2018) interviewed 44 individuals on a fixed-term contract in a UK HEI. Their findings suggest that luck was perceived as the way to obtain a role in HE, even on a fixed-term contract, "it's sort of like a gift that's fallen out of the sky: I'm just lucky" (Loveday, 2018: 5). This suggests that obtaining a role, even fixed term, in HE is brought on by chance, rather than the skills, qualifications and suitability for a role. Park (2002) investigated the perceived benefits and limitations of employing GTAs in the United Kingdom (UK) as part of a case study in a research-led university. Through email correspondence, 22 staff and 15 graduate student participants provided data suggesting that GTAs are useful in delivering tutor supervision. The GTA role provides doctoral students with an income to support them through their studies, and to provide experience teaching on undergraduate courses. However, participants claimed that

their workload varied throughout the year and that their salary was relatively low. In comparison and more recently, Alhija and Fresko (2021) obtained written recommendations from 158 GTAs to examine the challenges of being a graduate teaching assistant in order to understand how to improve GTAs' work performance. Their findings were similar to Park's (2002) study, where participants most frequently mentioned working conditions in two categories: salary and non-salary employment conditions. A major recommendation was for their salary to represent the amount of work completed in order to perform the assignments of their roles. In addition, participants were concerned with job security and the need to arrange their roles so not to interfere with their academic studies. Slack and Pownall (2021) examined predictors of GTAs' well-being in HEIs in the UK through a mixed-methods survey, 83 doctoral students participated, and 80 participants offered recommendations for improving GTA well-being as an additional qualitative element of the survey. Participants' concerns and recommendations included increased pay, further training and continued professional development opportunities, mental well-being support and acknowledgement and realistic expectations of the time required for teaching preparation and marking. In their study, Menard and Shinton (2022) explored the career paths of researchers who experienced long-term employment on short-term contracts through examination of case studies of academic staff in a UK research-intensive university, interviews were conducted with 24 academics including research staff. Unequal access to opportunities for

developing a teaching portfolio, poor or lack of managerial support, bullying and discrimination were perceived obstacles to career progression in academia. Implementing strategic solutions to support GTAs post-pandemic is to ensure that they can sustain the demands and pressures that may have developed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As argued by Venkatesh (2020), the nature of jobs has changed. They claim that supporting employees adequately is to ensure that job loss, changes and outcomes are managed to create new and more sustainable working conditions and to ensure that the sustainability of a workforce is upheld. Alberti *et al.* (2022) recognise that the GTA role is an initial step into a more permanent academic post; therefore, supporting GTAs is to ensure that they are confident and willing to pursue further academic positions with a greater understanding of how to perform their responsibilities.

Alberti et al. (2022) indicate that there are concerns surrounding the working conditions of GTAs but also that this may be a wider sector issue, not only being experienced by GTAs but academic staff overall (Selesho & Naile, 2014). The University and College Union (UCU, 2022) recognises that HE staff have been participating in industrial actions throughout 2022 and 2023 with the hope to improve working conditions for all. Alberti *et al.* (2022), Jackman *et al.* (2021) and McGaughey *et al.* (2021) claim that working conditions during the pandemic were challenging and therefore, it is important that GTAs are being given increased levels of support to ensure that they are feeling comfortable and confident within

their roles. In their review, Persky *et al.* (2020) report that modifications were essential to sustain working conditions during the most challenging periods of the pandemic; they argued that even just changing the times for meetings helped to accommodate the pressing work demands that the pandemic caused. Basalamah and As'ad (2021) aimed to analyse the effect of work motivation and the implications on the job satisfaction of management lecturers at a private university in Indonesia. 105 participants contributed to a survey and the findings identified that participants' perceived motivation impacted their job satisfaction and therefore, fair compensation could be a motivating factor to increase job satisfaction. In line with recent industrial action in the UK, The University and College Union (UCU, 2021) and Ali and Andwar (2021) argue that failing to offer fair working conditions and compensation to employees diminishes the work they contribute within the organisation. It is important to consider that GTAs may be experiencing increased challenges to perform their academic and professional responsibilities, which may have been magnified by the pandemic. However, it does appear that these concerns relate to a sector-wide issue and therefore, academics and researchers at every level may require increased levels of support to navigate their roles and responsibilities post-pandemic.

Recommendations

This literature review has established a key number of recommendations which have evolved from the literature examined here; it is evident that increasing work is being conducted on GTAs and early career researchers/academics especially since the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore, this should be sustained in order to continue to understand the GTA experience and their contribution to academia. It would be useful to explore the role of the GTA in more depth to understand their specific needs and wants post-pandemic. In their literature, Selesho and Naile (2014) and Alberti *et al.* (2022) suggest that increased support and professional development programmes are key to supporting early career academics, not only as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic but also due to wider issues with working conditions in academia. Employers and employees need to have a clear understanding of job expectations and ensure that they fulfil only what is expected of them as per their job description which is being continuously fought for by the UCU (2022). Any further expectations and/or increase in work demand should be compensated fairly and negotiated fairly between employer and employee. In addition, Ali and Andwar (2021) recognise that wages are a key reward for employees, acting as a motivating and stimulating factor. Therefore, acknowledging that offering wage increases to employees who are delivering high-quality standards over some time will show them value and appreciation for their work ethic and devotion to their jobs. Basalamah and As'ad (2021) argue

that rewarding staff for their time and effort is essential to increase job satisfaction, therefore HEIs should put forward incentives to ensure staff job satisfaction remains high. Loveday (2018) suggests that obtaining a career in academia is based on luck, however, Hassard and Morris (2018) and Richardson, Suseno and Wardale (2021) claim that casual contracts create job insecurity and fail to demonstrate appreciation toward academics. Therefore, contractual negotiations should be performed to ensure that fixed-term contracts are not long-term and instead, offer employees the opportunity to become permanent employees. Although there may be underlying reasons why HEIs have been unable to offer improved and increased levels of compensation, the most effective way to maintain high-quality standards is by providing employees with the correct training and support to support them in their future careers. Improving working conditions is a necessary action to take, consistent failure to improve academic working conditions may be impacting the retention of employees in HEIs and this must be prioritised, further exploration of this is necessary (Alberti *et al.* 2022).

Conclusion

This literature review recognises that the working conditions in HE are challenging. Significant knowledge outlines the working conditions of GTAs during the pandemic and recognises the potential implications for the future by providing GTAs with quality support. For GTAs and early

career researchers, the development of the COVID-19 pandemic may have significantly impacted the initial years of their careers due to unstable conditions and during their own doctoral studies. Radical actions can and should be taken to address the sector's ongoing issues and create better opportunities for future GTAs. However, the working conditions and the COVID-19 crisis may have increased the issues for GTAs and early career researchers/academics which were apparent before the pandemic. Thereby, this suggests that greater work is needed to improve the working conditions and create a more stable and enjoyable sector. Further research is needed to monitor the working conditions of GTAs and early career researchers/academics.

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Leadership in Higher Education: Graduate Teaching Assistants as the agents of change

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Abstract

A large cultural shift is occurring in academia. 'Success' is becoming viewed as more than just the publication of high-impact papers and the acquisition of large research grants before their competitors. To be revered by their peers, within their institution and across their field, academics must also demonstrate motivational leadership and engaging teaching. Early career researchers (ECRs) tend to suffer the most from the detrimental effects of this 'publish or perish' research culture as they sit at the bottom of the traditional academic hierarchy. For those ECRs that work as graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), poor leadership behaviours from supervisors could be deemed 'the norm' and could be reflected in the GTA's teaching practice, or the behaviour might be recognised as harmful and can be actively avoided. This essay discusses how GTAs are in a powerful position to prevent the spread of toxic leadership in higher education

because they are still actively learning and developing their academic identity. I describe how my own experience of poor leadership has shaped my teaching; through this case study, I illustrate how GTAs can utilise positive leadership behaviours to improve the student experience. Future directions for how institutions can facilitate leadership development through training initiatives early in the academic career path are also discussed.

Introduction

What makes a good leader?

'Good leadership' has many definitions due to the varied contexts and career stages it is embedded within. Having a clear vision and driving progress towards it, motivating others, communicating effectively, and demonstrating credibility, respect, courage, decisiveness, and resilience all commonly feature on website lists of characteristics possessed by a good leader. In academia, several qualities beyond these are also required. A systematic literature review (Bryman, 2007) demonstrated that departmental effectiveness is predicted by leaders who treat all staff fairly, encourage shared decision-making, promote a positive work atmosphere, give performance feedback, proactively align departmental goals with those within and external to the university, stimulate research by providing resources and adjusting workloads, and take actions to enhance departmental reputation. However, conflicting priorities between professional bodies, colleagues, students, and personal goals makes good leadership across multiple levels difficult to achieve.

Academic leadership issues stem from the 'publish or perish' culture

Universities compete to enhance education, produce new knowledge, and create stronger societies in exchange for recognition and resources on a global stage. Throughout history, 'success' in academia has most often been perceived

as demonstrating excellent research performance, specifically high quality and quantities of publications, acquirement of funding, and renowned reputation within a field (Braun *et al.,* 2016; Lashuel, 2020). In the United Kingdom, the Research Excellence Framework (2014), first devised in 1986, remains the most prominent measure of this success. The results determine which institutions get a share of approximately £2 billion per year in research funding. Publicly available university rankings further exacerbate the pressure to enhance research performance e.g., *The Times Higher Education World University Rankings* (Braun *et al.,* 2016). In comparison, the Teaching Excellence Framework (2017) is a relatively new measure of academic success and does not carry the same weight. An academic who is passionate about implementing excellent pedagogical practices may not gain the same standing as those colleagues focused more on research and publishing. On the other hand, academics reading straight from their wordy PowerPoint slides, resulting in poor student satisfaction, could still be considered a successful academic within their research field.

The pressures resulting from the 'publish or perish' culture have led to several issues regarding leadership in higher education. Firstly, personnel hire and promotion, resource allocation and training opportunities are skewed in favour of increasing research performance, often at the expense of good leadership and teaching (Braun *et al.,* 2016; Tierney, 2016). In a survey of 233 UK professors, over 60% stated that research outputs were the sole basis for why they were hired

(Macfarlane, 2011). Like teaching (e.g., PGCert; Webb & Tierney, 2019), completion of a leadership qualification is not expected until after being hired. According to Haage *et al.* (2021) this can result in most academics feeling unprepared to lead (77% of 368 surveyed), and those already in formal leadership positions feeling unprepared for their current role (73% of 217 participants). Secondly, focusing more on research can dilute the efforts put into teaching, resulting in an unsatisfactory learning experience (Tierney, 2016). This is important to rectify otherwise students are then less likely to pursue and be prepared for jobs related to their degree (Kneale, 2018). Finally, role conflict can arise as definitions of good leadership differ between stakeholders. Bryman's (2007) review found that what was and was not considered a leadership quality differed widely between studies. Funding bodies, for example, may primarily value qualities underpinning an individual's research outputs to ensure they made a good investment. Universities perceive the ideal leader to strike the perfect balance between teaching, research, and administrative duties while strategically motivating their peers to optimise faculty productivity (Braun *et al.,* 2016). Meanwhile, early career researchers (ECRs) may prefer leaders who prioritise being supportive, empathetic mentors, and doing what is best for the team.

This mismatch between the expectations of the students taught by a module leader, colleagues within a leader's research team and those who hired the leader is a prominent issue in academia.

Who is considered as an academic leader?

Power and responsibility in academia are often only associated with those in officially recognised leadership roles. For example, Advance HE's 2022 Global Leadership Survey for Higher Education specifies 'formal leadership positions' as "Dean, Head, Director, Associate/Deputy, Manager, Vice Chancellor…, etc", while definitions of other roles are more generic i.e., "leading through influence, expertise, mentoring others, etc". While leadership in academia is understudied in general (Braun *et al.,* 2016; Cruz & Rosemond, 2017), very few studies involve those in 'non-positional' roles (Juntrasook *et al.,* 2013). Most research is from the perspective of professors (e.g., MacFarlane, 2011), principal investigators (PIs) and those in administrative positions (Braun *et al.,* 2016). Academics should be considered leaders as soon as supervision or mentorship of other students begins i.e., during a PhD (Haage *et al.,* 2021). Despite making important contributions to higher education (Meadows *et al.,* 2015), graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) have never been specifically considered in studies of leadership before.

Essay aims

This essay aims to illustrate how GTAs could transform the future of leadership in higher education through a combination of utilising positive leadership behaviours in their own teaching practice and preventing the spread of poor leadership in both their research and teaching environments. First, I demonstrate how working towards this aim can improve the student experience by using my

approach to teaching after reflecting on an experience of poor leadership as a case study. Then, I discuss what future actions institutions can take to facilitate leadership development by introducing training initiatives early on in the academic career path. Finally, I suggest what actions GTAs can take to prevent the spread of toxic leadership in higher education.

GTAs could be powerful agents of change

Case study: How reflections on a poor leadership experience shaped my teaching

This case study provides an example of why GTAs aiming to improve their students' learning experience should strive to recognise poor leadership behaviours and prevent them from spreading by employing positive leadership behaviours. The first year of a doctoral training programme in science can consist of completing short projects in several labs and institutions before students select which topic to complete their PhD in. Unfortunately, one of mine involved a poor supervisor. Rather than lead our team, they asserted authority. They did not respect others and they actively discouraged attendance to other events that would have promoted our personal development if they were seen to interfere with working at the lab. They disapproved when we did not adhere to the same intense schedule they followed. It seemed that I was there for the research grant that came with me and as an extra pair of hands to carry out their

vision. Although they are a successful researcher in their field based on traditional measures of publications and grants, they were not an effective leader in the eyes of their students. My experience forms just one small case study demonstrating a larger issue across multiple institutions. Even worse scenarios are known to exist, including examples of bullying, manipulation, and tampering with feedback reports. PhD students, which form the majority of GTAs, are amongst those most affected by poor leadership by academic supervisors in terms of mental health and academic performance (Christian *et al.,* 2021). GTAs have not previously been included in any publications on leadership in academia, so empirical research is needed on the impact of poor leadership on GTAs specifically.

As someone aspiring to continue down the 'traditional' academic career path, I promised myself that I would never let anyone under my leadership feel the same way that I did. I have applied this to my work as a GTA. In one module, I had a small group of students who were tasked with creating a blog and poster on a topic of my choosing. Rather than lecture at them, I took a student-partnership approach, treating the group as one big team where I acted more as a guide, as it creates a 'community of practice' (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002) where students can take on the roles of leaders in their own research (Healey, Flint & Harrington, 2014). In the first lecture, I introduced them to a series of interesting subtopics we could cover, then based my lecture series on those they found most exciting. Halfway through the module,

I asked for anonymous feedback on my teaching practices and leadership style and adapted the sessions accordingly. Before assignment deadlines, I held open office hours for anyone struggling. At the end of the module, students reported that they liked "the personal engagement with [them] all and the helpful feedback", as well as how my "interest [in the topic] was really infectious". Ultimately, this student-partnership approach enabled me to facilitate more peer dialogue, maintain student engagement during a period of online-only learning, and adapt my teaching approach to address individual students' needs, all of which exemplifies positive leadership behaviour (Bryman, 2007). Studies examining the impact of positive leadership behaviours from GTAs and module leaders alike across a wide range of modules and institutions are needed, especially since the potential impact of GTAs on students is growing each year.

Why GTAs have huge potential for a positive impact on the student experience

In terms of potential impact from sheer numbers, 10% of approximately 6000 doctoral students were estimated to have teaching responsibilities at UCL alone (Standen, 2018). This proportion will increase as reliance on GTAs to carry the teaching burden increases as the number of undergraduate students and the need for budget cuts simultaneously rise (Park & Ramos, 2002; Clark, 2021). GTAs also have an underappreciated position of influence. As current postgraduate students themselves, GTAs act as the bridge between lecturers and students (Dotger, 2011; Standen,

2018; Clark, 2021). As they are still actively learning and developing their teaching identity and leadership style, GTAs are usually more up to date with modern pedagogical practices and technology. Students have reported that GTA-run seminars can be more stimulating and that GTAs are more relatable as non-experts (Muzaka, 2009). GTAs may also feel more enthusiastic about learning to teach as they are more aware of the competitive job market facing them after graduation (Standen, 2018). Additionally, GTAs have often graduated from undergraduate degrees more recently than senior academics, so they are more aware of what improvements could be made (Muzaka, 2009; Standen, 2018; Clark, 2021).

Challenges for GTAs

Despite all this potential, many GTAs feel powerless to exercise leadership (Austin, 2002; Clark, 2021) due to a unique set of challenges. The two most direct sources of leadership influence on GTAs are their own PIs (research-related) and the leaders of the modules they teach on (teaching-related). Without good leadership within their own research group, collaborations can fall apart, and publications can be delayed (Frassl *et al.,* 2018). Ineffective leadership by PIs could create more pressure for GTAs to carry the research load, resulting in less time for leadership and teaching experience. Hostile research environments can develop, which can cause ECRs to leave academia entirely (Christian *et*

al., 2021). As GTAs are themselves balancing research responsibilities with personal development (Dotger, 2011), this type of environment could exacerbate their sense of liminality in academic identity (Kinsella *et al.,* 2022).

Many of the teaching-related challenges stem from GTAs not being given the opportunity to exercise academic autonomy (Park & Ramos, 2002; Standen, 2018). Job opportunities primarily consist of overseeing practicals, marking essays, or hosting small group tutorials (Austin, 2002), which limits their decision-making authority and autonomy regarding course design, delivery, and assessment (Muzaka, 2009). This is often because of a misconception regarding lack of experience, partly due to a lack of teaching observations by academic staff (Park & Ramos, 2002). This can all contribute towards a sense of imposter syndrome and role conflict (Haage *et al.,* 2021; Kinsella *et al,* 2022). Furthermore, academic institutions prioritise training doctoral students for research responsibilities, and less for life as academic staff (Austin, 2002; Simmons, 2011), likely another example of the effect of the 'publish or perish' research culture. This is partially because hiring GTAs is usually a short-sighted reaction to staffing shortages (Park & Ramos, 2002). It is not sufficient to assume that a more senior member of academia is an appropriate role model for GTAs to judge their own performance on because good leadership behaviours will not necessarily be demonstrated, due to a lack of formal mandatory training courses.

Future directions for institutions

While participating in the UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN) leadership course, it occurred to me that those who had voluntarily signed up were likely the people who needed it the least, as attendees were already aware of the importance of leadership and took the initiative to better themselves. Poor leaders are typically unaware of the impact of their actions on others because people who do not self-examine end up in a self-confirming cycle of reinforcing their own beliefs (Brookfield, 1998). Therefore, the crucial first step for developing a more positive leadership culture in academia is to increase awareness of and opportunities for leadership training (Haage *et al.,* 2021). By investing in leadership training, universities can eliminate the need for training new leaders on the job, retain more excellent scientists, and increase academic outputs, both in terms of research and teaching (Christian *et al.,* 2021). Most current academics want to complete further training, so demand is not an issue (Tierney, 2016; Haage *et al.,* 2021). Currently, most academic leadership courses last a year, and include just 8-15 staff who were either nominated or competitively selected (Cruz & Rosemond, 2017). Institutions need to make training mandatory prior to staff being appointed as leaders (Braun, *et al.,* 2009; Muzaka, 2009). Additionally, time should be allocated to follow-up sessions after taking on the leadership position to ensure the training is being used effectively.

Focusing on embedding comprehensive training programs in

postgraduate education may be a better use of limited resources, as it could prevent poor leadership behaviours from developing in the first instance (Tierney, 2016). Making GTA training courses mandatory is gradually becoming more common (>50% of UK courses; Lee *et al.*, 2010), but most courses only amount to approximately three days per year (in a survey of 70 UK departments; McGough, 2002). Additionally, these courses are typically focused on facilitating, marking, and delivering pre-designed lecture content. Current university programs for systematic leader development are mainly designed for senior leadership positions, such as department heads. Training must be specialised to the unique needs of GTAs to optimise long-term impact and foster a more student-centred approach to teaching and leadership (Meadows *et al.,* 2015). For example, science GTAs have said that general training courses are not very useful for running labs (Park & Ramos, 2002). While GTA courses are becoming increasingly aligned with the UK Professional Standards Framework (Lee *et al.,* 2010), they simply do not comprehensively prepare GTAs for the full range of duties and challenges in academic life (Muzaka, 2009; Braun *et al.,* 2016; Haage *et al.,* 2021). As academics of the future (Meadows *et al.,* 2015), it is essential that GTAs obtain the necessary leadership skills required to fulfil multiple roles; as supervisor, mentor, ambassador, collaborator, networker, and role model (Braun *et al.,* 2016). PhD graduates are now expected to demonstrate their commitment to continued learning and their ability to adapt in this ever-changing world of employment (Austin, 2002).

Even if GTAs choose not to continue in academia, leadership skills contribute towards building a more competitive portfolio of skills (Muzaka, 2009) and are highly desirable for almost every job (Roulston, 2018).

More studies are required to investigate the effect of evidence-informed leadership training initiatives across diverse research contexts in academia (Hubball *et al.,* 2015; Braun *et al.,* 2016), especially for groups that are currently underrepresented e.g., female, and international GTAs (Winter *et al.,* 2015). So far, it appears that there is no single strategy to developing a leadership program (Hubball *et al.,* 2015), but to be effective it must be ubiquitous. Muzaka (2009: 10) states that "one cannot expect individual departments to invest in and establish comprehensive GTA professional development programmes if other departments and universities in the UK do not do the same". Blended cohort models (Hubball *et al.,* 2015), workshops, one-to-one consultations (Cruz & Rosemond, 2017), network building, journal articles, podcasts and seminar recordings are all examples of flexible learning methodologies used in leadership courses (Haage *et al.,* 2021).

Considering that time, resources, and budget are key concerns for institutions, leadership training could simply be integrated into pre-existing teaching courses, especially since the skills required to lead others and facilitate learning are synergistic. Furthermore, studies have shown that even condensed training (20 hours) makes a significant difference

in teacher effectiveness when GTAs can then practice, apply, and reflect afterwards (Meadows *et al.,* 2015). Another crucial element is feedback and reflection (Braun *et al.,* 2016). Most GTA work is done in isolation (Simmons, 2011), especially since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prompt feedback from a recognised expert in academic leadership will help to foster a sense of scholarly community (Hubball, *et al.,* 2015), and regular meetings between GTAs enables them to gain knowledge from each other's experiences, reflect on teaching identity and practices, and identify areas for future development (Kinsella *et al.,* 2022).

GTA-specific solutions

Unfortunately, developing these initiatives takes time, and the issues associated with poor leadership are current and common. It is easy to assign blame to higher powers for widespread cultural issues, and it could therefore be tempting to give them the responsibility to make changes. However, there are generic actions that all ECRs and GTAs could take to promote positive change in both their research and teaching environments to improve their own experience, as well as the experience of current and future colleagues and students.

Firstly, GTAs should reflect on their own behaviours, and those within their immediate surroundings. Poor leadership behaviours come in many forms and levels of severity and

recognising them can take practice. Before escalating matters to a senior academic, it may be worthwhile initially seeking support networks outside of your official line manager. Many institutions run mentorship schemes that can help with both academic and teaching challenges. If an unbiased feedback culture and a set of guidelines for responsible behaviour are not already set up, this should be suggested. Anonymity in responses, inclusion of everyone in the question-making process, and granting access to all the feedback will ensure greater participation and that someone cannot manipulate the outcome. In research group meetings, more informal smaller sessions between colleagues at similar career levels could be organised to promote a less intimidating environment. For instance, summarising an interesting paper could be an alternative to presenting new data if someone is still preparing their results. Additionally, the focus can be shifted to research being a process, where the steps taken to achieve the desired outcomes are discussed, rather than just the outputs themselves once they have been achieved.

Secondly, GTAs should be proactive in creating their own opportunities to exercise academic leadership. To reduce feelings of isolation, discuss leadership and pedagogical techniques, and create opportunities for reflection, GTAs could set up informal meetings themselves (e.g., Kinsella *et al.,* 2022). Ideally, they should involve the module leader to discuss how to approach upcoming tasks, where there is room for creative control and what has or has not worked well in previous years. This will decrease feelings of

uncertainty and increase likelihood of support and openness to new ideas from module leaders (Park & Ramos, 2002), thus forming a stronger partnership between levels of the academic leadership hierarchy. Importantly, GTAs should arrange receiving feedback from module leaders, other GTAs and the students themselves.

Conclusion

Ultimately, effective leadership is an essential prerequisite for a university's success, especially as academia shifts the focus towards approaching scientific challenges in larger and more complex collaborations, which requires new forms of leadership (Braun *et al.,* 2016). Yet, leadership is a skill which is under-developed by graduates (Roulston, 2018) and staff alike (Bryman, 2007; Braun *et al.,* 2016). This essay has outlined why it is essential for academic institutions to provide formal, mandatory leadership training for new leaders before beginning their role, and why GTAs should be considered as an important part of this group. As academics on the border of two traditionally delineated communities (research and education; Standen, 2018), GTAs have exciting capacity for innovation, and therefore enormous potential for acting as agents for change regarding leadership in academia. GTAs are the 'ground zero' for preventing the spread of potentially toxic leadership behaviours to subsequent generations of students, and therefore potentially future researchers.

Acknowledgements

I thank two anonymous reviewers for their comments on this manuscript. I also appreciate the UKRN leadership course which gave me the inspiration and confidence to write this paper. https://www.ukrn.org/event/leadership-2021/

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‘Precarity and Power Relations’: Navigating the Transition from Industry Professional to Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA)

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Abstract

The role of the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) has been established as a “liminal space between studenthood and teacherhood” (Elliott & Marie, 2021: 71.) and even contested as a kind of “limbo” (Compton & Tran, 2017). Interestingly, however, most research only considers the joint role of GTA as both teacher and student, without considering the possible external professional roles and identities held by various GTAs. Resultantly there exists a gap in the literature in which the dynamics of the transition from industry professional to GTA are unexplored.

This paper seeks to address this gap by examining the transition of a professional strength and conditioning coach into the role of a GTA, specifically, a GTA based in the United Kingdom whose primary PhD research uses sociocultural

theories and the post-structuralist work of Michel Foucault (1977, 1978, 1983a, 1983b, 1991). Building upon Campbell's (2022: 209) suggestion that the "autobiographical method is a valuable tool for GTAs to support the exploration of the meanings of their multi-memberships," the paper is structured as a reflective essay enriched with autobiographic and autoethnographic 'moments.' These 'moments' are then analysed for themes relevant to the broader conversation around GTAs, as well as through a Foucauldian theoretical lens.

Finally, and crucially, although this paper draws upon one specific professional's experience, it is intended that the observations, themes (precarity, cultural difference, uncertainty, and the importance of 'Problematisation') and analyses are far more broadly applicable and presented in a way that allows for enriching conversations across multiple industries.

Introduction

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) make up a substantial portion of the higher education workforce, and yet the position of the GTA is unique within that landscape, occupying what Elliott and Marie (2021: 71) refer to as a "liminal space between studenthood and teacherhood" or what Compton and Tran (2017) consider to be a kind of 'limbo.'

Relatedly, research has looked at the GTA through multiple lenses and angles, including but not limited to social class (Hastie, 2021) representation, (Elliot & Marie, 2021) power gaps (Clark, 2021) and even how the GTA role relates to Walter Benjamin's metaphysics of transcendence (Jaines, 2021). Interestingly, however, most research only considers the joint role of GTA as both teacher and student, without considering the possible external professional roles and identities held by various GTAs. Resultantly there exists a gap in the literature in which the dynamics of the transition from industry professional to GTA are unexplored.

This paper seeks to address this gap by examining my transition from a professional strength and conditioning coach into the role of a GTA. Importantly, this GTA role has exposed me to sociocultural thinking and the work of Michel Foucault, which I will use to enrich my analysis. The paper begins with an overview of Foucault, outlines my research process, and then a presentation of three autoethnographic

moments and their related theoretical and Foucauldian analyses before concluding with a summative commentary.

An Overview of Foucault

Although summarising the work of Foucault in a short section would be impossible, readers may find it useful to situate his work broadly in the region of poststructuralist thinking. For Foucault, reality and identity are socially constructed, and these constructions are ongoing yet often unconscious or normalised processes. At heart, Foucault advocates for examining, questioning and 'problematising' these processes in order to raise awareness, broaden the available discussion and better develop personal ethics (Foucault 1978, 1983a, 1991). In relation to this specific paper, I utilise Foucault's concepts to suggest that the role of the GTA, including the available spaces and ways in which they can operate, is socially constructed and subject to complex power relations. I also suggest that in order to better develop personal ethics through what Foucault would call care of the self, GTAs and others within academia need to begin questioning and problematising the many taken-for-granted processes around them.

The Research Process

I introduce my research process to both explain and

legitimize my decision to present a selection of personal narratives regarding my experiences transitioning from professional practice into the role of GTA. As a contributing author, I have been involved in the profession of strength and conditioning since 2014, and I began my role as a GTA at the start of 2022. For this paper, I have built upon Campbell's (2022: 209) suggestion that the "autobiographical method is a valuable tool for GTAs to support the exploration of the meanings of their multi-memberships," and have adopted an analytic auto-ethnographic approach (Anderson, 2006). This research method utilises researchers' autobiographical data to thickly describe, locate, and analyse their experiences (Chang, 2008), whilst also committing to "develop theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena" (Anderson, 2006: 373) Moreover, my member researcher status and positionality, that is, the "position that I have chosen to adopt within the given research study" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013: 71**)** alongside a commitment to theoretical analysis and a blend of expression and theory (Anderson, 2006; Denison, 2016) made this approach a strong theoretical match. Using this approach, I have written three 'autoethnographic moments' or 'vignettes' each of which is presented, followed by a streamlined thematic analysis focused on GTA-experience-specific insights, as well as analysis through a Foucauldian lens. Specifically, I draw attention to Foucauldian concepts such as problematisation and power relations.

To improve academic rigour, my initial analyses each went through a process of re-examination by an experienced

qualitative, Foucauldian researcher acting as a 'critical friend,' an approach validated within academic librarianship (Hultman Özek, Edgren & Jandér,2012) clinical settings (Carlson, Nygren & Wennick, 2018) and teaching (Kiewkor, Wongwanich & Piromsombat, 2014). Moreover, I have endeavoured throughout the paper to implement critical reflexivity, (Bettez, 2015: 936) being "attentive to how [my] experiences, knowledge, and social positions might impact each aspect and moment of the research process". Indeed, Foucauldian logic would argue that this step is essential for the ethical conduct of qualitative research (Markula & Pringle, 2006). Lastly, to ensure broader generalisability, I attempt in each analytical section to make connections and comparisons to other industries and areas, aiming to identify shared situations, problems and areas for discussion.

Auto-Ethnographies and Analysis

Will We Ever Use This In Our Jobs?

'Will we ever use this in our jobs?' One of my undergraduate students asks. They're about 20 minutes into a deeply technical two-hour long seminar and their eyes have already somewhat glazed over; they've disengaged from the content. I search my brain for a reason and all I can think of is some spiel about 'transferable skills,' and 'underpinning knowledge,' but deep down I know the reality is that they won't ever really need to use that information. As I talk to the student I find myself torn, do I tell them the truth based on

my decade of industry experience and risk damaging a relationship with the senior staff member who designed the content? Or do I knowingly lie to the student, misleading them about the industry and, in my mind, acting unethically?

These themes of uncertainty, of this precarious position, sit at the heart of the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) experience, especially for GTAs who have transitioned from professional practice into academia. As a new, junior staff member, it didn't feel like my place to criticise course content, but as an experienced industry professional, I was keenly aware that the content was miles from meeting the needs of the industry. I was uncertain how to act, and uncertain how my actions might be perceived.

Analysing the situation through a Foucauldian lens, I would draw into question and problematise the taken-for-granted assumption that academia prepares students for industry, as well as the implicit assumption that in-depth technical knowledge alone is central to professional success. Supporting this, a recent review in my field (Szedlak et al. 2022) interviewed industry professionals with an average of 16 years of experience, who overwhelmingly suggested the same. If technical knowledge being seen as paramount is the familiar norm, then in thinking with Foucault, I would seek to make this strange.

Reflexively, it is not lost on me that my position as a practitioner first, and academic second, may bias my stance

on this. Nor is it lost on me that my affinity for Foucauldian thinking renders me far more likely to find fault than it does to find merit. Nevertheless, I believe the points stand up to scrutiny. My experience is in the field of sports science, yet I've heard similar stories from GTAs within engineering, health sciences, business management, film and music production. Uncertainty, precarity and an acute awareness of the gap between academia and industry are commonplace.

Too Harsh

'Can you change your feedback?' I'm asked. Yet I'm unsure why. My feedback was detailed, it was honest, and it was constructive. In the world of sports performance that's exactly the type of communication that athletes perceive as useful and positive, even relationship-enhancing. (Rhind & Jowett, 2010). Yet I log back into the system, find the two students mentioned, and amend their feedback. I make it kinder, gentler. 'You evidently did not attempt to engage with this task' becomes 'Make sure to review the exam rubric fully.' 'You've only written 1500/3000 words' becomes 'Make sure to fully utilise your word count.' I soften my words, but do I lose my impact?

Reflecting on this situation, the themes that come to mind are cultural differences, precarity and uncertainty. Culturally, academia is different to industry. My world, performance sports, is cutthroat. Competition is fierce, contracts can disappear overnight, and coaches with out-of-this-world egos can yell at you, give you the silent treatment, or even make

your job incredibly difficult (sometimes even by accident or incompetence). In my mind, if that's the world we're sending students into, then they need to be prepared for direct, unfettered feedback. Yet as a new staff member, a GTA, my position feels precarious, and I find myself uncertain; should I tow the party line and adhere as closely as possible to university-approved practices? Or should I be more honest and upfront with my students? Moreover, being that I had already identified student dissatisfaction with learning outcomes and real-world applicability, was changing my feedback only going to further worsen this disconnect?

Turning to Foucault, I become distinctly aware that the university system is socially constructed, and I begin to problematise that system, to critically examine the taken-for-granted ways in which it operates. I question, if the university does not suit its intended purpose, should we not act to change it? It does not escape me, however, that doing so would be an inherently political act, and I ponder how this meshes with my precarious position as a GTA.

Engaging in critical reflexivity, there's no denying that my perspective has very much been shaped by my time in professional sport, perhaps there are people who have far smoother, kinder and more collaborative experiences in the industry, and perhaps those people would be far more naturally inclined to take a gentler approach towards student feedback. On balance, though, I believe the theme of cultural differences between industry and academia applies across

various professions, and that experienced GTAs across multiple fields must navigate these differences.

Shouting in the Rain

Back when I first read through the seminar notes, I got a sinking feeling in my stomach. I knew beyond any shadow of a doubt that the session would be a nightmare to deliver. I was being asked to take multiple groups of 20 or more undergraduates through timed maximal effort sprinting, outdoors, in the dark, in late autumn. As I arrived early to set up, I knew my gut instinct had been correct. It was already raining, the floor was soaked, and for the first hour I watched students jog on the spot trying to stay warm waiting to take a single sprint, desperately hoping with crossed fingers that no one injured themselves. As the sessions went on the rain became worse, visibility became poorer, and the sound of the water bouncing off the floor, along with the wind, meant that my shouts were becoming less and less audible. With icy hands, the students were finding it hard to use their stopwatches to record times, and in the pouring rain, the paper they were supposed to record their data on all but fell apart. After what seemed like some of the longest, and coldest, three hours of my life, I walked back to my car, wrapped my now-soaked “waterproof” jacket and trousers in an old towel, cranked my heater up to full, and shivering, drove home.

Reflecting on that situation, the themes I keep coming back to are rank, precarity and uncertainty. As an experienced

strength and conditioning coach, I *knew* the session was going to be bad and I could have corrected it yet felt unable to do so. As a GTA, I'm the 'rookie,' the 'novice'. There's a whole academic structure and hierarchy (lecturers, senior lecturers, readers, professors) to navigate, and I sit right at the bottom of it, I'm 'outranked.' In my professional world, as a strength and conditioning coach, I'm the expert. Athletes look to me for advice, knowledge and leadership and I feel confident to provide it. In the academic world, however, I feel uncertain, I find myself in a precarious position. Caught between using my experience to deliver a better session, whilst not wanting to upset senior staff by making changes to an established way of doing things.

Foucault's concept of power relations offers a lens through which to view this situation. For it's not that senior members of the university are simply holders of power enacting their whims at will, instead, they guide or direct "the possible field of action" (Foucault 1983a: 221). Nor is it that I, or any GTAs, are unable to enact change or 'push back' (indeed the ability to do these things is central to Foucault's definition of power relations). The problem is that each individual exists within a complex web of relationships, accountabilities, decisions, influences and priorities, which although appearing to have perfectly clear aims (improving teaching/research) are often not attributable to any clear inventor or originator (Foucault 1978: 95). It is the difficulty of navigating this web which makes the GTA feel so uncertain.

Reflexively, I have to acknowledge a certain degree of ego-attachment on my part; the transition from expert to novice, the move down the perceived social and career rankings weighs on me. In many ways, this professional 'competitiveness' has been trained into me through many years of elite sport, a field rife with what Foucault would call disciplinary practices (Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010; Jones & Denison 2017; Jones, Avner & Denison, 2022). When you spend years focused on helping athletes gain every possible competitive edge, that mindset, that language, it bleeds over into your everyday life. Yet, with all that said, it still seems strange to me that my experience doesn't seem to automatically 'carry over,' even when I have significantly more practical experience in the task at hand.

Once again, my experience is my own, and exists within my own sport and exercise science niche, yet I believe it is an experience shared by many GTAs transitioning from professional practice into academia. I've spoken to engineers who have worked on some of the world's most cutting-edge technology and yet been asked if they could figure out an online learning platform. I've heard from lawyers who have handled multi-million-dollar cases only to be told that's not how the law works by senior academic staff. The same questions arise; what space does the GTA inhabit? How much scope do they have to shape their practice? And how do they navigate their new 'lower' status, their relegation from expert to novice?

Thematic and Foucaultian Commentary - In Summary

Through analysis of these three short vignettes, common themes emerge: precarity, cultural difference, uncertainty, and the importance of 'Problematisation'. These provide insight into the broader social phenomena of GTA experience and academia. Precarity refers to the unstable position that the GTA occupies, underpinned by, and potentially understood as, a set of complex and shifting power relations best conceptualised as a "capillary-like network that ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them" (Foucault, 1978: 93). Cultural difference refers to the gaps between industry and academia, whether that be in content or communication style. Linked to both of the above is uncertainty, in the midst of these relations, how does the GTA choose to act? Do they honour their experience as a practitioner, or align themselves more closely with the university status quo? And in making these decisions, are they truly able to engage in care of the self, the 'self-forming activities' that Foucault (1983b) would argue as being central to ethical living?

Lastly, but by no means least, is the importance of Foucauldian problematisation in all of this, the act of "affective unhooking" of questioning the unquestioned and of "rendering the familiar strange" (Coffey, 2019: 87); Because is it not strange that an academically gifted student often goes on to struggle upon entering the profession that

their degree allegedly prepared them for? Is it not strange that we (as experienced industry professionals) are asked to communicate with students in a manner that leaves them open for culture shock as soon as they enter industry? And is it not strange that professionals with years of relevant industry experience should feel unsure of how to utilise this experience within academia? By asking these questions we are thinking with Foucault, challenging expectations and norms, struggling against power "where it is most invisible and insidious" (Foucault, 1977: 208), questioning our own identities in relation to them, and beginning to enact the first steps of shaping ourselves to act more in line with our own ethics and integrity.

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Postgraduate Spotlights: Using a Community of Inquiry approach to enhance student engagement in geographical higher education

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Abstract

While the majority of pedagogical practice has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the teaching of geographical research skills has been especially difficult with the loss of fieldwork and practical applications. Furthermore, the move to online teaching has diminished the learning communities

in face-to-face classrooms. In an attempt to counteract these issues, this paper reflects on a learning activity in an undergraduate geographical research methods course, 'Postgraduate Spotlights' where two postgraduate researchers presented their specialist research methods followed by an interactive question-and-answer session with the undergraduates. We (as postgraduates, undergraduates and teaching staff) found that the open and critical discussion in the workshop fostered a Community of Inquiry that encouraged engagement from students stimulating their curiosity about geographical research methods. Through our discussion, we demonstrate the importance of having postgraduate researchers involved in teaching, as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) given their liminal role of researcher-learner. We also emphasise the importance of letting the students lead their own learning, building a Community of Inquiry across academic stages, and creating a constructive dialogue around geographical research methods. While the reproducibility of the workshop face-to-face remains to be seen, this article emphasises the potential for applying such an approach to stimulate free-flowing discussion and ultimately promote a Community of Inquiry.

Introduction

In all teaching, it is paramount that educators combine "theoretical understanding, procedural knowledge and mastery of a range of practical skills", and this is especially important when teaching research methods (Kilburn, Nind & Wiles, 2014: 191). The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting transition to online learning interrupted normal teaching practices and led to pedagogical improvisation (Bryson & Andres, 2020). Within geography, fieldwork is a distinctive pedagogical practice that enriches the discipline (Welch & Panelli, 2003; France & Haigh, 2018), but the pandemic significantly reconfigured the potential to undertake fieldwork activities and hindered the students' abilities to put research methods, fieldwork, and professional practice skills and knowledge into practice (Fuller et al., 2021).

Aside from the issues online teaching has posed on research methods teaching and learning, the move to the online classroom has also exacerbated students' declining sense of community with their peers, the teachers, and the university in general (Zhou, 2020). It has been shown that creating a sense of a university community is fostered by encouraging student participation and positive interactions in the classroom (Garrison, 2011). Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2010) suggested that optimal online learning occurs in a Community of Inquiry (CoI), where students and instructors work cohesively and collaboratively in constructing knowledge. Applications of the framework have shown that

CoI encourages active questioning, and collaboration with peers and/or teachers to discuss content and enrich student learning (Cheung et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2020). In this paper, however, we suggest that the inclusion of postgraduates in the online classroom strengthens the CoI. By "simultaneously wearing the hats of a staff member and a research student, a teacher and a learner" (Fung, 2021: 1) postgraduates, in the role of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) may act as a bridge between academia and undergraduates and facilitate stronger discussions and student learning.

In this paper, we critically reflect on the strengths of a pedagogical approach, *Postgraduate Spotlights*, which we undertook in an undergraduate geography research methods course. Postgraduate Spotlights was a discussion between graduate and undergraduate students around doctoral research projects with a specific focus on research methods and experiences in the field. Such an approach should have the following benefits as standard: (1) The exercise allowed the students to conduct their own learning through questioning the postgraduates' research to benefit student learning; (2) Postgraduate Spotlights enhances a CoI by facilitating a strong online learning community through critical discussions; and finally, (3) it showcases the untapped potential of GTAs for enriching a strong learning community across learner stages (Clark, 2021; Dick et al., 2007; Fung, 2021).

Postgraduate Spotlights

The Postgraduate Spotlights workshop was undertaken as part of an undergraduate-level course focusing on research methodology and design in preparation for their final year of independent research projects. 'Methods for Academic Research' at the Faculty of Spatial Science, University of Groningen invites the students to design, run, and write up their own small group research projects and reflect upon various quantitative and qualitative human geography research methods, including interviews, questionnaires, and Geographical Information Systems (GIS). The course aims to teach students to collect and analyse quantitative and qualitative data, and report and discuss their findings in a research paper. As such, the intended learning outcomes include the ability to identify and describe different types of data collection and analysis, and their ethical considerations. 'Methods for Academic Research' is primarily taught through a mix of lectures (~100 students) and multiple small group classes/seminars (~20 students) led by one of the five supervisors on the course. Prior to the pandemic, the course was solely conducted face-to-face with approximately sixty-eight contact hours over the ten-week course, with eighteen hours of lectures and fifty hours of supervision and consultation.

In the course evaluation for 2020, the students commented that: "*we need to be exposed to the multitude of qualitative approaches*" and crucially, "*I would like to hear more about*

research done in the faculty". Thus, the teaching exercise was inspired, and redesigned as an improvement on the previous attempt considering multiple qualitative approaches and research projects in the faculty. The workshop was conducted in a lecture slot towards the beginning of the course when the students were learning about different research methods. The class was attended by approximately 70 undergraduate students, a lecturer, and two postgraduate researchers. A similar exercise was conducted in 2020 with a postdoctoral researcher on the conduct of mixed methods (namely GPS tracking and interviews) but this did not achieve the anticipated interaction from the students.

In the workshop, Lowe and Venema took part in an online panel discussion on their research methods instead of a teacher-led lecture. Lowe and Venema (Henceforth referred to as GTAs) gave a five-to-ten-minute presentation on their current research reflecting upon their methods (participatory methods and ethnography, respectively) and their strengths and weaknesses. Following each presentation, there was an open dialogue between the undergraduates and postgraduates for fifteen-to-twenty minutes chaired by Osborne (lecturer). The undergraduate students asked questions or posed discussion points orally or via the online classroom's 'chat' function. The questions from the students were plentiful and focused on topics including research ethics, practical issues, and doing doctoral research. Each session on the postgraduate research topic lasted for approximately twenty-five minutes. The workshop was

designed to be relatively informal with the short teacher- and researcher-led aspect followed by an interactive and student-led question and answer session.

To complement the feedback from the course evaluation forms, we conducted a short questionnaire of open questions asking what they liked and disliked about the workshop, what they had learnt, and how it could be improved in the future. A Google Form was shared with the course cohort, with eight detailed responses. To qualify this feedback, two small focus group discussions were conducted with the postgraduates and undergraduates respectively. Ten undergraduates were invited to contribute to the latter focus group discussion and Aarnink, Boekhout and Leman (undergraduates, hereinafter UG) attended. They were asked a series of questions about the workshop, such as the positives, negatives, and implications for teaching and their perceptions on doing research in the future. The focus group discussion was approximately 45 minutes long and allowed the undergraduates to critically reflect on the workshop. Osborne, the lecturer, did not attend the focus group discussions and Lowe and Venema (GTAs) led the focus group discussion, which further emphasised the role Postgraduates as GTAs have in bridging the gap between academics and students. Initially, it was not the intention to include the UGs as authors, but their insights from the focus group discussions justified shared authorship. We also considered that extending the authorship to them would be a continuation and promotion of the principles of the

Community of Inquiry and reflect our understanding that learning and academia should be inclusive and collaborative.

Postgraduate and undergraduate reflections

'Methods For Academic Research' primarily focuses on interviews and questionnaires as geographical research methods. The feedback in the student evaluation forms from the previous academic year demonstrated concern over the perceived lack of methodological breadth and creativity with the suggestion that: "*students [were] being actively discouraged from using their own creative skills*". By introducing the students to research methods they were unfamiliar with, the methodological content discussed in Postgraduate Spotlights was enriching: "*we don't see these other methods in other courses. So, it's nice to get to know them*" (Boekhout, UG). Methodological multifariousness "remains the backbone of […] human geography" (Davies & Dwyer, 2007: 257), but, crucially, the teaching of research methods is widely recognised as a way for students to understand how knowledge is established while enhancing their skills for 'lifelong learning' and increasing their employability (Welch & Panelli, 2003).

Beyond the learning outcomes of the class, these discussions inspired the undergraduates to use different methods in their (future) research: "*It made me feel more open-minded about the style of research that I could do in my bachelor's [sic.]*

project - having the opportunity to try different methods is quite exciting" (Leman, UG). However, in the questionnaire students suggested that they would have liked to try the methods themselves, with one student saying: *"I find it easier to understand something if I do it over just hearing about it"*. While the workshop was largely well-received, this comment emphasises that students want to be a part of the learning process and get hands-on experience with the methods.

Unfortunately, the students were unable to 'learn by doing' (Van Loon, 2019) due to the restrictions from the pandemic, yet they were encouraged to shape the discussion the way they wanted, through the question and answer session: "*It was nice to have a space to ask you questions [...] often lectures can be quite one-sided and especially with online learning it's very difficult to interact*" ([Leman, UG). The interactive question and answer session allowed for critical discussion in a friendly and informal setting. Aarnink, Boekhout and Leman (UGs) stressed that the presence of postgraduate students in the discussion helped 'bridge the gap' for students and enrich their learning: "*Sometimes you just don't quite understand something and sometimes the teachers (...) can dismiss it quite snootily and having a space where there are PhD students talking to you about their research really helps in bridging the gap*" (Leman, UG).

The presence of postgraduates may have promoted and enriched a learning environment where critical discussion was encouraged. In particular Lowe and Venema (GTAs) may

have enhanced the social and cognitive presences in the CoI framework (Figure 1) as extremely receptive and approachable figures in the classroom. Not only did the students feel more welcome to speak freely, but also encouraged student collaboration: "*It was a benefit from online teaching that sometimes when you do put a question in the chat, then your fellow students would just answer it for you… I think all the students were really willing to help each other out, so that was nice*" (Aarnink, UG). Thus, emphasising that the inclusive setting of the workshop also fostered collaboration between students and enhanced their social presence in the class.

Beyond developing a knowledge of geographical research methods in a student-led classroom, the workshop provided a specific example of the methods used in the field at a time when fieldwork was difficult (Fuller et al., 2021). This makes an insightful change for the undergraduates, who suggested that their education was essentially reading around examples of perceived perfect research; by showcasing ongoing research they saw that research is often messy (e.g. Harrowell, Davies & Disney, 2018) and "*it's okay to make mistakes in research*" (questionnaire response). This open account about the issues faced in doctoral research not only built trust between the postgraduates and the undergraduates, thus enriching the CoI, but contributes to Welsh and Panelli's (2003) call for a comprehensive approach to the teaching of research within geography; namely, an appreciation and knowledge of the challenges and options

facing geographers as they investigate social worlds.

Limitations & Future Considerations

Although the exercise facilitated a CoI, the online nature of the workshop had its limitations especially around the use of the online classroom's chat function. Whilst the chat function is "*less intimidating than it is to put your hand up in front of the whole auditorium*" (Leman, UG), it was stressed that the chat function can lead to breaks in the flow of discussion, but also misunderstandings. Boekhout (UG) explained how their question was misinterpreted in the class and due to the longer time it takes to type and receive a response they could not rephrase the question before the discussion moved on.

Additionally, this temporal difference between the typed question and given answer meant that there were occasional awkward pauses in the discussion which were filled by a conversation between the lecturer and the postgraduates: "*The chat function sort of slowed the chat and it felt like we were watching a* [conversation] *between PhD students*" (questionnaire response). Conversely, one student acknowledged the difficulties of teaching online and felt that "*It was nice to have a role. Much better than just listening to a lecture*" (questionnaire response). So, while the online nature of the workshop had its limitations, it was perceived as an improvement over other online teaching experiences.

As we move forward to conducting classes online, it is important to reflect on the positionality of the teachers since both the postgraduate researchers and lecturers are relatively early in their careers and are relatively young. The literature suggests that a strength of including postgraduates in the classroom is that it enhances the connection between teachers and students (Fung, 2021; Muzaka, 2009). This perhaps implies that the exercise may not be replicable with senior academics: "*Sometimes when the teachers are much older, it can create a sort of teacher-student dynamic rather than a collection of equals, I think*" (Leman, UG). However, postgraduates often have much less teaching experience than their senior counterparts, and may not deliver the content as effectively, for example: "*it felt a bit scattered. But that may have been due to inexperience or nerves or anything like that, on behalf of* [the postgraduates]" (questionnaire response). Thus, we believe a mixed-career stage panel would be extremely effective in future classes but stress the importance of including postgraduates in masterclasses for establishing a strong CoI.

Discussion & Conclusion

This paper shows how Postgraduate Spotlights encourage students to consider different methods and think outside traditional 'textbook' approaches (Kilburn, Nind & Wiles, 2014) and engage the students with ongoing research in the department. This made the workshop more rewarding for

students as they could learn what mistakes are made, why they occur, and how experienced researchers choose to overcome them. Encouraging the undergraduate students to lead the questioning in the class also helped to stimulate social and cognitive presence in the classroom, emphasising that students can direct their learning (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2010). Indeed, we have shown how this open discussion encouraged a critical and informative dialogue around geographical research methods in a time when fieldwork was impossible. Crucially, however, Postgraduate Spotlights epitomises the collaborative constructivist underpinnings of the CoI framework (Swan, Garrison & Richardson, 2009) since the presence of the GTAs enhanced the learning community as a result of their liminal role as a researcher-learner (Fung, 2021; Muzaka, 2009).

However, the reproducibility of the Postgraduate Spotlights remains to be seen, especially with different members and groups in academia, and in the face-to-face classroom. While CoI is primarily applied in the online classroom, it is possible to deploy it effectively face-to-face (Warner, 2016). Thus, there is promise that creating a similar learning community will be possible and stimulate more free-flowing discussion between presenters and the students. The feedback from the students, however, suggests that the loss of the online classrooms chat function may be exclusionary for quieter students, perhaps suggesting the need for a hybrid set-up in future iterations. Additionally, our reflections suggested including a greater variety of academics in future workshops

with mid- to late-career academics bringing their extensive experience in research methods to the discussion. We suggest that including senior researchers will enrich the taught content of the class and alongside the presence of postgraduates, with their approachability and relatability (Muzaka, 2009), will only enrich the CoI underpinning this teaching practice.

Postgraduate Spotlights highlights three lessons to take forward in the teaching of geographical methods and future iterations of this workshop. Firstly, postgraduate research-led teaching creates an approachable and less intimidating understanding of geographical research, providing undergraduates with an insight into how research is done in the real world. Secondly, giving the undergraduates the space to lead their learning enables them to critique research and shape what and how they want to learn. Thirdly, the presence of postgraduates in the workshop fostered the CoI and enriched student learning and connections to their peers and the university. Postgraduate Spotlights, therefore, not only encourages student learning around geographical methods and critical thinking in research conduct but also demonstrates how postgraduates enrich Communities of Inquiry in the classroom.

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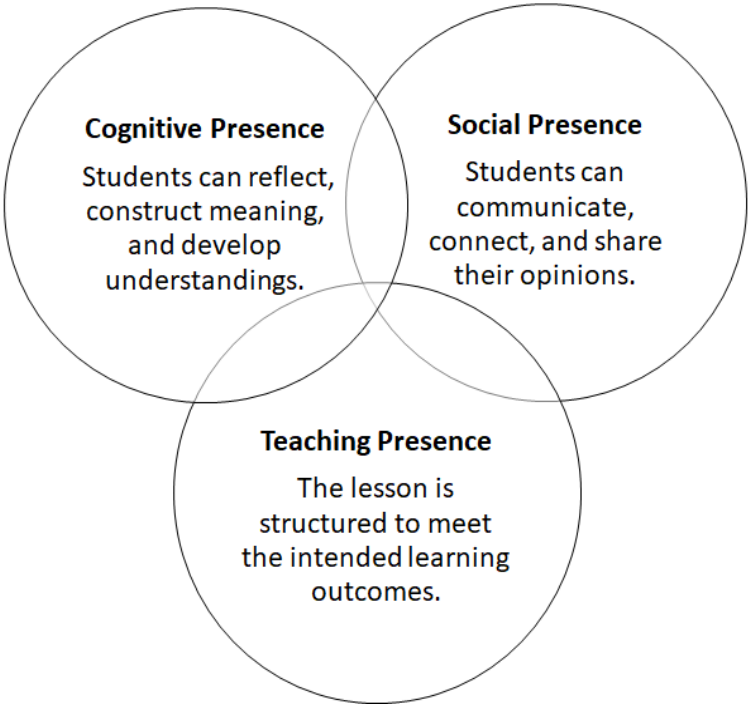

Figure 1: Community of Inquiry framework's presences (after Garrison, 2011 and Tan et al., 2020).

Fostering Community and Collaboration: A Reflection on Collaborative Pedagogy in Hybrid Postgraduate Courses

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Abstract

The interconnectedness of online and in-person students is a vital component of many universities' educational strategies and is comprised of ever evolving technology and application which can prove difficult to balance (Weidlich & Bastiaens, 2018). The purpose of this reflective essay is to challenge graduate teaching assistants and instructors to incorporate more collaborative teaching practices in their hybrid classrooms. Specifically, this reflection will express the positive experiences of one graduate teaching assistant, with a background in primary education, on a hybrid/fusion postgraduate course. It is the goal of this reflection to inform readers about collaborative pedagogy practices and how to use them in higher education. This piece will inform readers on specific methods that were utilized to foster community and collaboration in a hybrid postgraduate course. By expressing the benefits and experiences of collaborative pedagogy for instructors and students, this article hopes to

inspire fellow educators to use a collaborative approach to instruct postgraduate students especially in hybrid or fusion classrooms.

Introduction

This reflective essay focuses on the experiences of one primary school teacher, who transitioned roles to Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA), and their incorporation of collaborative pedagogy within a hybrid learning environment. During the global Covid-19 pandemic it became evident to educators that to better support their students, a collaborative and more engaging personal approach to education was needed (Oraif & Elyas, 2021). It is notable that collaborative pedagogy began long before the incorporation of digital technology in classrooms and would continue without it. However, technology continues to shape the world of education across all disciplines and levels of study and has become a key component of education across all levels of academia. While the historical relevance of collaborative pedagogy will be explained in this article, the focus will remain instead on the use within a hybrid graduate level master's classroom.

To begin, context and positionality are presented, to enlighten the reader on the perspective offered, followed by a review of theory and historical context of current practices within universities. Finally, reflection and commentary for fellow educators will be given along with key aspects and methods utilized in the specific setting. By reflecting on previous research and examining the differences between traditional and modern collaborative pedagogy, this paper hopes to enlighten readers about the challenges and nuances

of collaborative pedagogy, through a single perspective, in higher education. Future implications and final thoughts will conclude the reflection and will encourage educators to elicit collaborative pedagogy practices within their postgraduate and higher education classrooms.

Positionality and Context

To give context to my reflection as a GTA and interest in collaborative pedagogy within higher education, it is important to note my background as a primary school teacher. As a teacher, I was deeply motivated to provide a classroom culture and community that recognized my students' strengths and supported their social learning. As the majority of my students were English Language Learners it was important to scaffold their learning in both academic and social language. I first became aware of, and began implementing, collaborative pedagogy when following the prescribed curriculum and classic teaching styles appeared unsupportive of my students needs both academically and socially. As elementary school comprised my students' formative years of education, I wanted to allow for highly socializing and creative environments with learner-centered and driven methods to govern their education. I state this context as it presents my personal preference toward the use of collaborative learning methods and gives insight to the reasoning behind my curiosities for its implementation in higher education.

Upon the acceptance of the postgraduate teaching position, I knew that I wanted to specifically focus on the challenges and benefits of collaborative pedagogy within a highly technological postgraduate hybrid classroom. I was excited for this challenge and wanted to experience the nuances of developing such a classroom firsthand. It was a goal for me to incorporate and advocate for these practices, as I believe they enhance student learning, regardless of age. There were also similarities between my previous primary students and my 'soon to be' postgraduate students, many of them had been English language learners or considered English as their second language. I wanted to inform my practice on the ways the students participated with technology and how these interactions supported or hindered my perception of their learning or abilities to work collaboratively and engage linguistically. What ways could collaborative learning be advanced for the next course, what seemed to go "right" or "wrong"? How did the adult learners react to this type of instruction?

These questions guided me while I observed and supported students in a hybrid setting. However, it was also necessary for me to first understand the historical and contextual framework of collaborative pedagogy within education to inform my applications more specifically within higher education. In the next section, background and context for the utilization of collaborative pedagogy in education is explored through previous research and is presented to

support the later reflection. It is the hope that by understanding the meaning and uses of collaborative pedagogy, that the reader will find value in this piece's reflection component and build general knowledge on the subject.

Collaborative Pedagogy and Hybrid Higher Education

What is Collaborative Pedagogy?
Collaborative pedagogy is a learner-centered approach to teaching students and is elicited in a learner-driven environment. These learning approaches are members of the constructivist learning theories first developed by Jean Piaget (1971). Piaget proposed that learning was an active process in which learners needed to be engaged in constructing their own knowledge. This new knowledge, he argued, was guided by previous experiences and earlier learned content (Piaget, 1971). Similarly, student-centered education and collaborative pedagogy focuses on the learner's direct participation in the learning task and focuses primarily on the learner's autonomy and independence (Herranen, Vesterinen & Aksela, 2018). This can be accomplished through revisioning the roles and responsibilities between students and educators to incorporate a more balanced power relationship when considering student learning and its outcomes.

Cooperative learning and peer-assisted learning are two

types of active learning strategies found in a classroom with collaborative pedagogy. Peer-assisted learning is defined by Topping and Ehly (2012) as the active learning provided through peers or matched companions that guide instruction and support on a given topic. For example, this could be when teachers assign differentiated leveled tasks or assignments to certain groups in which students work collaboratively in homogenous (same level) or heterogeneous (different level) teams. According to Smith and MacGregar (1992) cooperative learning represents the most intensely structured components (in which lesson components are constructed by the teacher prior to administration) of collaborative pedagogy. Foot and Howe (1998) express that cooperative learning has three parts: 1) Students working in teams towards an obtainable goal; 2) Equal division of labor among members and differentiation of sub-goals thereby highlighting the strengths of individual members and maintaining accountability for each role; 3) The end goal and completion consist of a combined score consisting of each member's contribution.

Benefits and Challenges of Collaborative Pedagogy

Collaborative learning boasts many benefits to students as shown through an array of empirical studies (Oraif & Elyas, 2021). Not only do students gain from the social interactions and added perspectives of their peers but they develop a higher level of understanding and thinking as well (Webb,

1982.; Laal & Ghodsi, 2012). It is assumed that quality interactions (as depicted in peer-assisted learning) among peers promote a restructuring of the cognitive understanding of the material and therefore enhances or deepens the learning of the students (Webb, 2009). Importantly for the purposes of this paper, a study comparing university students' achievements after working collaboratively or independently showed that the students who worked in groups showed a higher understanding of the material and concepts (Linton et al., 2014).

It is critical, however, to distinguish that simply forming groups or assigning partners does not automatically add benefit for students' learning. Groups must be formed with intent and have structures in place to elicit equal participation and division of work. However, over-structuring groups could lower motivation and disrupt intrinsic interaction between students (Dillenbourg, 2002). For this reason, some students are opposed to working collaboratively or with their peers in general. As found in Raidal and Volet's (2009) study of university students' opinions of collaborative learning, most students preferred individual forms of learning. On the other hand, when students recognize each individual or group member to be contributing and adding to the collective, collaborative learning is highly effective (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Johnson and Johnson (2009) explain that this accountability within groups minimizes the feeling of "freeloading" which can negatively impact students' preference for collaborative

learning as mentioned above.

Apprehensions to using collaborative pedagogy in higher education also arises from the historical nature of academia and traditional structures of education (Smith & MacGregar, 1992). The hierarchy of power between instructors and students dissipates in a collaborative atmosphere. When learning is no longer solely dependent on the instructor, but is based within a community i.e., classrooms, it holds the same challenges that face any group including shared responsibility and accountability (Smith & MacGregar, 1992). This reason alone may interfere with instructors considering a collaborative approach to teaching in higher education as these issues are more complex than working in a traditionally teacher-led style classroom. Further, issues such as dominant group participants who control the group or conversation, teammates who refuse to engage with the material or obstruct others learning, and overall lack of preparation can seriously impact the success of a cooperative learning activity, putting pressure on teachers with regard to classroom management (Hsiung, Luo & Chung, 2014). However, when students are engaged and risk factors are mitigated, the benefits of higher academic achievement, specifically regarding multilanguage learners/speakers, are great (George, 2017).

Hybrid Teaching in Higher Education

It is important to include further background on the utilization of technology and the adaptation of modern classrooms within universities as this was the setting for this article. As with many universities, the university discussed within the reflection sections offers on-campus, online and hybrid courses with the flexibility of choice of study and location preference for their postgraduate programs. Students can study in hybrid, also referred to as a fusion teaching setting, which allows students to participate from anywhere in the world. Importantly, this aspect of bringing together diverse learners who have little to no previous interaction will become more relevant later in the reflection. While this option has advanced perspectives and collaborative pedagogy within postgraduate courses, it also presents new challenges for dialogue and communication.

Moore (1993) developed the theory of transactional distance and remains a key influential theory governing distance education. Moore posits that as the level of interaction (dialogue and communication) decreases between students and teacher, the learners' abilities to understand content also decreases. Zang (2003) expanded upon Moore's theory, which includes online learning, and expressed that the transactional barriers to learning also include the learning environment and the interaction within. To combat the issues within transactional distance theory, some schools and universities have adopted technology within the curriculum

and thread collaborative pedagogy throughout.

Some postgraduate courses are taught through a flipped classroom model in which students participate in self-directed and scheduled activities. Bishop and Vergler (2013) define a flipped classroom as an educational strategy that consists of interactive collaborative group work in the classroom and computer-based instruction outside of the classroom. This strategy can be expanded by providing interactive collaborative pedagogy within both in-person and online structures. Universities may use technology to support this modernized version of the flipped classroom by utilizing adaptive cameras, table groups with built in microphones and computers that connect students who remain remote or online to those who are actively within the classroom setting, as was the case for my postgraduate hybrid classroom.

A Primary School Teacher's Reflection

Course and Classroom Dynamics
Clarifying that the course, in which this reflection is based, took place in a hybrid class is critical for the next portion of the discussion. This specific course was within the first set of taught classes in a new program in which students experienced a fusion/hybrid learning environment. Students who attended in-person, were predominantly international students with English being their second language. All students were taking the course to fulfil their master's degree

requirements in which this course was an elective or optional course. Students participated in independent learning online for two weeks, then two intensive days of primarily in-person learning (~8 hours each day), followed by a two-week post-intensive portfolio project created independently. Because the students would only have two days to be together it was deemed important for the course organizer and teaching assistant to incorporate as many collaborative activities as possible.

After several discussions on how to best support students, both in person and online, I was offered the task of creating inclusive and collaborative activities for the intensive days. Reviewing the core content as well as the course objectives set a foundation for the intensive day schedule and finding time to incorporate such activities was difficult. However, the course organizer saw the potential benefits for our students and was supportive and generous in sharing the lecture time with me.

It was noted early on that students were not participating in the optional, but encouraged, discussion boards or activities during the pre-intensive weeks. Because of the low engagement leading up to the intensive days, in which some of the content was not fulfilled online, both the course organizer and I restructured the activities to take place during the intensive days. For many of the icebreaker and collaborative activities elicited during the intensive days, previously shared documents with interactive discussions were used and adapted from the pre-intensive content.

Hybrid Collaboration in Action

Upon entering the classroom for the intensive hybrid learning day, it was critical to set up the student desks and begin the online meeting for students to participate remotely. The classroom had 5 table groups each with learning stations consisting of 2 monitors that projected the online students and the learning materials, i.e., the lecture slides, along with microphones and docking stations. In-person students chose a seat at one of the 5 tables, and some logged into the online meeting as well. All students were working synchronously and experiencing the same lecture and materials provided by the course organizer throughout the intensive days.

Launching the first intensive day proved challenging regarding student engagement and overcoming a sense of diffidence amongst students. While this was expected and discussed prior between me and the course organizer it was still surprising and frankly, concerning. Students entered in silence and were immediately on their phones or devices, no chit-chat or familiarity could be noted. As a previous primary school teacher, this was jarring, and the polarity was tangible.

To combat this, a series of icebreaker or get-to-know-you activities were led. “Guess Who "or “Amazing abilities” was the first activity I used to elicit student engagement and foster a sense of vulnerability and community. Students wrote down a secret talent or ability and crumpled up the paper, tossed it into the middle of the room and then I

collected them and put them into a hat. I then drew three random papers and read them allowed, students and teachers had to guess who had written the talent and the correct student was revealed. This activity was used throughout the two intensive days at the start, in the middle and at the end of the day. It was clear that students were apprehensive of the many aspects of this activity when it was introduced the first time. For example, I had to direct and reassure students multiple times, that throwing their papers on the ground was necessary and expected. However, it was observed by the end of day that students were generally having more fun with the activity. Students were laughing and sharing more openly and throwing their papers with more vigor and excitement.

A collaborative learning activity used on the first intensive day had students working in their table groups first independently, then sharing within their table groups, and finally sharing with the whole group. This enabled students to engage with one another and elicited early discussion amongst peers. It also facilitated growth in confidence for students by building their knowledge, scaffolding their processing of new content and affirming through discussion. The repetition of an activity first by internally processing (thinking to yourself), followed by group discussion (low stakes verbal processing) and whole class discussion (articulation high stakes processing) has been shown not only to support students with multiple languages but all students (Bygate, 2001). I had previously used this technique and

witnessed its positive outcomes within my primary students and was pleased that it appeared to have the same effect for the postgraduate students.

Groups were asked to collaborate on a shared document (Google Slides) to provide insight into their views of resiliency. Using photovoice, which is expressed as processes by which people can recognize, represent, and amplify their community through a specific photographic technique (Wang, Cash & Powers, 2000.) students were able to reflect on their personal interpretation of the word 'resilience'. The activity consisted of students searching for a photo online, in their personal devices or through social media and posting it on their group's shared slide. Each student participated and groups completed a collage of photos eliciting a discussion amongst table groups, online students, and the whole class. Online students were provided links to work synchronously with their assigned table group and could share their stories using the interactive large format display. Students immediately began searching for their photos and were keen to contribute to their shared slide. I think having this initial group activity consist mainly of an independent task eased students into the first intensive day.

On the second day of the intensive class, students were given a task that flipped the traditional teacher-student power dynamics. During this activity, the students were asked to perform as "professor for the day" and research and teach their peers about a resource they found relating to the

course, which for this course related to the ideas of resiliency and education. Students were directed to first take time as a group to discuss what topics and type of presentation they would like to expand upon. Depending on the outcomes of the discussion students either worked as a research team, taking on specific roles, or as one entity, working together in real time on the same aspect of research. Groups then presented (taught) their findings to the whole class and justified their findings with prior research.

This flipped-dynamics activity provided students with higher cognitive learning and deepened their knowledge of the content. It also allowed online students to participate equally amongst their in-person peers which limited the transactional distance consequences as described earlier by Moore (1993). This activity also closely corresponded to Foot and Howe's (1998) explanation of peer-assisted learning and brought a level of intensity not witnessed early in the intensive days. It appeared to me, that the accountability of individual students and the equal efforts of the group members enhanced the students' engagement of the activity. This also lessened the earlier apprehensions of participants and uplifted the classroom community as expressed by several students at the conclusion of the course.

Watching the blended table group of online and in-person students work collaboratively was inspiring as an instructor. When creating table groups, I asked students to volunteer to be part of the fusion table that incorporated both in person

and online students. Three students expressed interest and were selected for the fusion group. They included online students and provided an ample voice to their comments and thoughts to the whole group and to the instructors. A leading reservation I had regarding hybrid and fusion classrooms is that the online students and in-person students would not cooperate with one another and instead would isolate themselves in their respective domains. When this did not occur, I was relieved; this created a greater sense of community among all students. Further, students utilized online resources such as Google slides, MIRO, and Jam board and worked synchronously alongside one another online and in person which allowed for more social and educational connections and collaboration amongst peers. Using a mix of pen and paper (which online students could see via the table group cameras), and online platforms (such as Jam board or Google slides) enabled all students to participate. While this was intimidating at first as an instructor, it proved to be a wonderful way to enhance the student voice.

The collaborative activities appeared to be emotionally taxing and awkward for the students at first, but over the 2 days I witnessed students sharing with each other and cooperating as groups to finish tasks and assignments with more ease. In my experience, the shortened intensive timeline for this course had proved the most challenging aspect in relation to overcoming social barriers and facilitating a sense of community. Mckinney and colleagues (2006) suggest that a sense of community rises with time, and it is my opinion that

if allotted more in-person/hybrid scheduled time, collaborative efforts and a sense of community would have risen for this course.

At the conclusion of the intensive days, students were asked to reflect on the activities and learning that took place. Both students and instructors debriefed and shared their thoughts using the four corners technique. The four corners technique is, simply put, a rating system from 1-4 in which 1 is low/negative and 4 is high/positive, with each corner of the room being a selected rating. Online students participated by moving an avatar on Google slides to the corresponding number square while in-person students walked from corner to corner. This was followed by open sharing and a discussion on the rationale for their choice. Students were asked to rate their feelings of community and the activities in which they participated. Students expressed that group work activities made them feel stressed at first but after the initial tension faded, they felt that the learning outcomes of the assignments were worth the time and initial discomfort. Some students also shared that they would like more opportunities to work in groups i.e., for their final projects while others shared that they wanted to work independently as this was the bulk of their final grade. This juxtaposition is inevitable in large groups and finding the balance is key. I think, during the next iteration of this course, allowing students to choose their preferences prior to the intensive days may benefit all parties. Remarkably, students also expressed that their comfort levels in working collaboratively

grew due to the activities and the given time allotment for group work.

Challenge Accepted

When I, a primary school teacher with no experience in higher education, accepted the challenging new position of postgraduate teaching assistant, it allowed me as an educator to evolve my preconceived notions of what higher education looked like. I was able to grow and advance my mindset and support my course organizer in facilitating a shared vision of collaborative education within a hybrid setting. Moreover, enabling students to use their voice and work in groups to elicit new discoveries of content and strengths within themselves was compelling. The kindness, flexibility, and grace which my students offered one another and to the instructors was palpable. While I knew previous research had shown that collaborative pedagogy enhances student achievement and heightens the sense of community, it was truly inspiring to witness it in action amongst adult learners (Oraif & Elyas, 2021). Many educators may find the task of creating and maintaining a pedagogy that includes group work and peer collaboration difficult within a postgraduate course, let alone a hybrid setting, but I would encourage them to take a risk and try it for themselves. The results have shown it leads to higher level thinking and deeper learning for students and may alter educators' perspectives of education as well (Foot & Howe, 1998).

I was skeptical at first, as were the students, to incorporate some of the collaborative pedological approaches shared within this paper. I was fearful that my students would feel infantilized with some of the game-like or informal structures elicited. However, upon completing the two-day intensives, students specifically thanked us for the unorthodox approaches we chose and expressed that they had enjoyed the course's structure more than a traditional style of learning. Students said that they felt comfortable and relaxed by the end of day 2 and that they were less ‘scared’ of the instructors and more open to asking for help. Students shared that they had previously been afraid and intimidated to speak in class or share potentially incorrect answers but that this course had shown them a different side of academia. This feedback motivates me to expand my collaborative approaches within higher education, to take risks in my teaching pedagogies, and to challenge myself to overcome my fears of failure. Maintaining a creative, collaborative, and community-oriented classroom is my continued goal for my own teaching regardless of the student’s age or subject area and I hope that readers and fellow educators within all fields and age ranges take this feedback and challenge themselves to build a more collaborative approach to teaching, specifically in higher education.

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Creating meaning in interdisciplinary dialogues within Global Health: reflections from postgraduate teaching

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Abstract

Interdisciplinary research is often hailed as the way forward for research. Indeed, in a world where problems are increasingly complex, interdisciplinarity needs to be considered more so a necessity than a temporary trend. However, evidence shows that there are still considerable challenges in achieving true conversations between and across disciplines. Where old (disciplinary) habits may be deemed too deeply entrenched, new generations of scholars and students are a spark of hope for the future of interdisciplinary understandings. Yet, the question still begs - how do we do that? In this essay, I reflect on my experiences as a postgraduate teaching assistant and social scientist teaching Global Health to medical students. Inspired by dialogic pedagogy, I explain how I framed theory to be understood as the beginning of knowledge to encourage engaging and productive classroom dialogue. Facilitating such a dialogue required making space for two E's – emotion and

exploration – to guide and shape our discussions which each other, which enabled us to transcend the boundaries of discipline in order to have successful interdisciplinary dialogue that is meaningful in ways that go far beyond a tick box exercise, as well as promoting active learning and critical thinking.

Teaching Global Health as part of medical curriculums has been on the rise in the last few years (Drain et al., 2007; Rowson et al., 2012a). Whilst understandings of Global Health have been changing and shifting, there is a growing consensus around the need for Global Health to move beyond a narrow and reductionist biomedical focus (Rowson et al., 2012b). This shift has been reflected in the Global Health curriculums, which have moved beyond predominant focus on epidemiology, towards a greater incorporation of the social sciences, which allows to explore the social, economic, and political aspects of health that underscore the field (Kasper et al., 2016). Such a shift necessarily requires an interdisciplinary approach, which though lacking a singular definition, can be broadly understood as an approach that combines theoretical frameworks, study designs, methodologies and perspectives from two or more disciplines (Aboelela, 2007). However, its importance needs to be foregrounded by beliefs in its ability to help address complex issues today by contributing to comprehensive understandings (Spelt et al., 2009). Interdisciplinary learning is not without its challenges, particularly as the topics and ideologies covered are not commonly taught in medical degrees (Yudkin et al., 2003) and thus will be new to many students. During my introductory sessions as a GTA teaching a global health course to medical students, I certainly noted student's apprehension regarding how to best tackle this different type of learning material, a trend that has been noted in the literature too (Yudkin et al., 2003).

An additional challenge in teaching Global Health is that, in many ways, it is not a neutral field of research. While 'health' might at first glance appear like a logical and positivist area of research, by virtue of its common association with the biomedical sciences, Global Health as a field is guided by the quest for health equity and desire for social justice (Abimbola, 2018). This ultimately assumes a normative approach, and complicates health by embedding complex and layered issues, such as power and politics, in the quest of health for all (Whitehead, 1991; Braveman & Gruskin, 2003; Ooms, 2014). I was keenly aware that this was something I had to carefully consider and integrate when facilitating seminars in order to create value in interdisciplinary teaching that goes beyond just superficially engaging in it because it is a trend that is heavily pushed for right now (Jacob, 2015), particularly in the backdrop of growing disillusion in relation to interdisciplinarity (Albert & Paradis, 2014; Callard & Fitzgerald, 2015).

To facilitate meaningful interdisciplinary seminars, I opted for an approach inspired by dialogic pedagogy. Dialogic pedagogy draws its roots from the writings of Paulo Freire (1970) on critical pedagogy, which posits that learning is best facilitated through dialogue and requires a reconfiguration of classroom dynamics and hierarchies by removing the authoritarian role of the teacher. The authoritarian teacher, as per the 'banking model of education' (Freire, 1970), represents an expert figure whose role it is to fill up students ('empty vessels') with knowledge. Dialogic pedagogy's transformative potential lies

in replacing these structures with a problem-posing approach that encourages an active reshaping of one's own understandings of reality and creation of new truth (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011; Skidmore & Murakami, 2016). In practice, a more horizontally organised classroom is in many ways a logical choice that intuitively suits GTAs, who themselves occupy a liminal role through their dual identity as both teacher and student (Anderson, Lowe & Patsiarika, 2022). It can also help mitigate some common concerns faced by GTAs around their abilities as educators, such as a lack of competency, knowledge or professional identity (Archer, 2008; Muzaka, 2009, Feezel & Myers, 1997; Cho et al., 2011; Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2020) which are alleviated when their authoritative expectations are removed. Yet, creating and fostering empowering environments for transformative learning requires a transformation within teachers themselves (Freire, 1970; Fernandez-Balboa & Marshall, 1994; Cranton & King, 2003) wherein their self-view shifts from conveyors of knowledge to active agents of change (Lysaker & Furuness, 2012). This may be a considerable impediment to GTAs, given the notorious lack of training and support of GTAs (Sharpe, 2000; Park & Ramos, 2002; Green, 2010; Cho et al., 2011) and challenges prevail regarding their abilities to adopt social justice oriented pedagogical praxis, including dialogic pedagogy, within the systemic constraints of the neoliberal university (Madden, 2014).

In the next sections, I reflect on my experience teaching first-time interdisciplinary learners in a higher education setting,

using the case study of a Global Health course. I discuss the two key elements that have guided my teaching experience, which are 1) seeing theory as the beginning of knowledge, and 2) allowing the two E's, emotion and exploration, to guide classroom dialogue. This paper seeks to contribute to the literature by reflecting positive outcomes of dialogic approaches to interdisciplinary teaching and suggesting applied conceptual anchors for prompting meaningful dialogues in these settings that can be particularly effective for GTAs. While this seeks to serve as an impetus for GTAs to consider the transformative impact this can have on their praxis, there is also an acknowledgement of the difficulty to maintain these efforts authentically over time given the lack support and pedagogical communities (Madden, 2014). As such, this paper is a call for action and further research on the relationship between dialogic pedagogy and interdisciplinarity, and how best to support and empower GTAs to navigate this as part of their praxis.

Theory as the beginning of knowledge

To foster and encourage dialogue, I framed theory as being the *beginning of knowledge*, instead of the whole of knowledge. Students were challenged to not accept theory as *sine qua non*, but rather as an opening for the comprehension of a topic. This removes the bounded limits and prescriptions of dialogue that restrict the possibilities of discussion when theory is used as a narrow framework for

discussion, and reflects the reality of our messy lives in which the relationship between theory and reality is not always straightforward. Theory served as a discussion starter, upon which I encouraged students to bring in other forms of knowledge, such as their everyday knowledges (Silseth, 2018), to contextualise, complement and challenge theory. Rather than undermine the value or importance of theory, students are invited to view theory for nothing more or less than what it is - this approach helped students to situate theory and assess its validity, applicability, strengths and limitations. It helped to create an environment for students to be active learners, by encouraging them to make connections between new information and what they already know (Morss & Murray, 2005) and engage in meaning-making through dialogue (Vygostky, 1987; Wells, 2007). This allowed a 'deep' approach to learning (Morss & Murray, 2005), as the primary purpose of theory moved away from a mere utilitarian one, in the sense that it served to be strategically or superficially used to make a point in an essay or exam even when it is not the best fit. This approach aligns with Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) view of a transformative critical pedagogy, which they argue is one that problematises knowledge - which I seek to do through presenting theory as not being the 'be-all and end-all' - which makes learning relevant to students - I seek to encourage their own forms of knowledge and interest to be brought in.

The concept of 'poverty' is often a central theme in introductory Global Health modules, as was the case in ours.

How initial theories are introduced and presented is important as it sets the tone for the style of teaching – therefore it was important to not impose one central definition of poverty. Besides the mainstream monetary definition of poverty (such as $2 per day), it is common practice to introduce alternative understandings that are more encompassing and multidimensional in nature. Sen's capability approach (1990, 2005) is often presented as a popular contender, but students frequently struggle to grasp it fully and thus resort to the mainstream approach due to its easy applicability. This essentially just fulfils a tick-box exercise that assumes students should have developed critical thinking by virtue of presenting them with multiple choices from which they need to make an 'informed choice' to pick one. Instead, I invited students to contribute their everyday knowledge about what a meaningful life means to them and how that might be achieved, irrelevant of how this related to the theories they had read. By building confidence in their own knowledge, students found it much easier to make sense of various aspects of Sen's theory such as functionings and capabilities. A deeper comprehension and attenuated fear of imperfect theory application shifted student's demonstration of critical skills from one that criticises (for example in the form of a superficial regurgitation of an online summary, citing generalised commentary such as 'lack of applicability') to one that critiques, through the location of an analysis of self and society that directs attention to aspects of power, inequality, oppression and domination (Braa & Callero, 2006).

Particularly in the context of interdisciplinary learning, where there might be an inclination to adhere to learning theories diligently and abstain from being critical, perhaps out of hesitance or intimidation, this can be bridged by problematising theory and minimising its authority in the classroom.

The two E's

Reflecting upon how I sought to establish dialogue in an interdisciplinary classroom, I found myself guided by what I refer to as the two E's – Emotion and Exploration. Creating space for emotion and exploration in our dialogues made a fundamental difference because it enabled us to talk *to* each, as opposed to talking *at* each other from the comfort of our own disciplinary bounds without crossing them. Emotion and exploration are counter to the ethos of a traditional authoritative format of learning in which students are nothing more than passive agents, in no small part because of their perceived subjective nature. I argue that they deepen our possibilities of knowledge, because they renegotiate what we understand as truth and to what end we see it to serve us, as well as creating a community of learning.

Emotion:

The dominant notion, rooted in positivist traditions, that knowledge production and consumption need to be value-

free and neutral in order to be rigorous implies that there is no room for emotion in academic discussions. Emotion is often seen as undesirable because it is portrayed as an impediment to logical thinking, and its impulsive and intuitive nature as unreliable (Parkinson et al., 2005). However, I believe that allowing emotion to be felt as part of the dialogue and going in so far as letting it shape it, was a crucial part of the learning experience in this module. bell hooks (2003) argued for the importance of nurturing love and emotional growth in the classroom, particularly in humanities (and I argue that this holds true for interdisciplinary teaching too) where objectivism does not provide a useful basis for learning. She describes objectivism as merely a mask for disassociation, as it promotes the retention of content like a script rather than encouraging a critical understanding of it. In Global Health specifically, Finnegan and colleagues (2017) discuss the indispensable need to foster solidarity in teaching, which requires highlighting uncomfortable failures and tensions. A focus on the glossy aspects and good intentions of Global Health, paired with a lack of critical appraisal of 'successful' intervention (success often being measured in terms of metrics and criteria set by donors) is devoid of emotion, hindering to foster any sincere sense of solidarity. As such, I view emotion in interdisciplinary learning to be productive and generative.

As we made space for emotions, the richness of our dialogue grew as it spanned from frustration and indignation to hope and enthusiasm. Feeling and voicing emotion gave depth to

the understanding of the course material. In the context of a seminar on 'Trade and Global Health', we discussed the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS agreement) and its effect on creating an impediment to access of vital life-saving antiretroviral medication (ARV) for HIV/AIDS for thousands of people across low- and middle-income countries in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Forman, 2016). The expressed frustration and shock prompted many follow-up questions and searching up of information to make sense of the how and why. It encouraged them to read between the lines and understand the nuance of a topic like trade that may initially appear to be dry and uninspiring, by asking about the lived realities and implications of policy. Rather than merely looking at the logic behind a trade agreement implemented by top-down actors, they wanted to see other points of view – of those that had experienced the devastating outcomes of these agreements and those that had fought to reverse the agreements. Understanding that things are not always as they seem allows the construction of a counter-hegemonic perspective which problematises dominant ideologies, as is sought to be achieved through the praxis of critical pedagogies (Braa & Callero, 2006).

Exploration:

The second E that guided my approach to creating an environment conducive to interdisciplinary dialogue, was Exploration. I understand (intellectual) exploration to be the

ability to not feel restricted by perceived (disciplinary) bounds influencing what is deemed acceptable to say, which allows the freedom to pursue and develop discrete thoughts into ideas. Allowing students to thread new theoretical grounds should be inviting, rather than intimidating. Much of the success of meaningful interdisciplinary teaching lies in enabling this and is in line with theories that posit that active learning is promoted by encouraging students to create new connections and articulate them out loud (Michael, 2006). While simple in theory, its practice is much harder given the dominant tendencies for teachers to limit themselves to relaying scripted information, as the banking model of education elucidates (Freire, 1970). This is particularly relevant today in the backdrop of a neoliberal climate that some deem so threatening to critical thought that it prompts calls for a 'resistant curiosity' in pedagogy (Tadajewski, 2023). These tendencies are so ingrained that even when educators explicitly aim to adopt a dialogic approach, they often slip into the role of 'truth knowers' that control discussions in a way that renders them monological (Alexander, 2008; Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013). In my experience, I found that establishing trust early on was necessary in order to avoid such dynamics and lay the groundwork for exploration – a large part is making space for people to come as they are. This required managing expectations, by communicating my awareness of the new nature of these theories, and that I valued their thoughts and opinions more than the neat use of a theory. As our familiarity with each other and the course materials grew over the course of the module, so did their

disposition towards being explorative, which naturally fostered active engagement.

One way I did this is through case studies, which both helped to break the abstract nature of theory by understanding its real-life relevance, as well as allowing students to tailor the learning process to their interests. In our seminar on Gender and Global Health, I suggested students look into examples of microfinance as a case study for understanding the outcomes of gendered interventions (Garkikipati et al., 2017). Students grew perplexed at the continued popularity of these interventions as they were peeling back the layers and uncovering the negative outcomes that some of these intended 'gender empowerment' interventions had. It led them to interrogate the popularity behind the business model of microfinance – which could have been perceived as digressing away from the central seminar theme (on gender) as a result of exploration. Some rabbit holes, for example, consisted of delving into biographies of individuals that had made big profits from launching microfinance businesses. However, such 'deviations' from the theme always ended up being productive to the learning process, and students, more often than not, circled back to the initial topic on their own. They established connections by drawing back to theories from previous seminars, such as power in global health and health financing, which created an appreciation of the interconnectedness of the various topics. Much of the essence of interdisciplinarity revolves around building a bigger picture by way of understanding these

interconnections, though that is usually difficult to achieve without overloading or overwhelming students who are new to interdisciplinarity. This is achieved organically here because exploration allows that in a manageable way, that does not force critical thinking onto students without giving them the necessary tools.

Conclusion

A dialogic approach in interdisciplinary teaching can be extremely useful in creating meaningful dialogue that encourages a deep understanding of learning material. Particularly for GTAs, who might be grappling with questions around authority and credibility in the classroom, promoting non-hierarchical and open dialogue is an option that is well-suited and organic. As an anchoring point to guide dialogic practice, theory was framed as *the beginning of knowledge*, which made interdisciplinary dialogue accessible for students who are for the first time engaging with a new area of study, but also promoted deep learning as it effectively helped to create connections and meaning-making by bringing in other (more familiar) forms of knowledge. To enable this, I made space for the two E's, emotion and exploration, to navigate our dialogue. Allowing emotion to guide our dialogue enabled a more organic exploration of the topic, often generating a great level of analytical depth in the process. Similarly, welcoming exploration and curiosity drove learning and meaning-making further. The result of this was

meaningful interdisciplinary learning and dialogue, which did not lose sight of the essence and complexity of the themes as often happens in interdisciplinary discussions when the different disciplinary backgrounds talk *at* each other instead of *to* each other.

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Teaching Critical Thinking: A Framework for Graduate Teaching Assistants

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Abstract

This paper argues that Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are uniquely positioned to model a learner-centred approach to critical thinking, mentoring undergraduates in the intellectual, emotional, and social skills necessary to develop as independent learners. Adapting Jenny Moon's pedagogical model (2005), the paper adopts a whole-person approach, taking the view that critical thinking is not limited to intellectual skills of analysis, logic, argument, and presentation. It also encompasses the emotional and social attributes required to learn with and from others. Moon combines all of these approaches in a framework which defines critical thinking as; 1) working with complex ideas, 2) offering evidence, 3) demonstrating understanding of how knowledge is constructed, 4) situating that knowledge in context, 5) representing the thinking process and conclusions with clarity and precision and, 6) demonstrating self-reflexivity.

In my experience, critical thinking is rarely taught as a set of competencies that sit alongside, but separate from, subject knowledge. This paper focuses on developing these skills in classroom-based settings, adapting Moon's (2005) approach to create an inter-disciplinary framework, linking lesson planning to learning outcomes. These learning outcomes build on students' unique life experiences, encouraging experimentation, building self-confidence, self-reflexivity, awareness of broader social contexts, and the social implications of knowledge. In academic settings (and wider society) where so much cultural capital is invested in performative self-confidence as well as examined "knowledge", this paper argues that, paradoxically, critical thinking skills are best acquired in settings where undergraduates can learn to *enjoy* the risk of uncertainty, experimentation, and the accompanying vulnerability this requires. This liminal space which GTAs are all too familiar with, ideally positions GTAs to mentor undergraduates through this developmental process.

Introduction

This reflective paper describes my early experience as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) and mature postgraduate student returning to education after a long hiatus. More by luck than judgement I found myself on the Associate Teaching Programme (ATP), the University of Lancaster's development programme for GTAs, at the same time that I started teaching. As a new GTA I benefitted from the support of both my ATP Tutor and my academic supervisor, who is also an enthusiastic and thoughtful teacher. In conversation with colleagues, it became apparent the support I received is, sadly, not a universal experience amongst GTAs. The happy circumstances of my introduction to teaching allowed me to reflect on my early pedagogical practice, and specifically my new role supporting students in developing their own critical thinking skills.

In the first half of this paper, I argue that GTAs are ideally positioned to mentor students through the process of engaging in their own learning and developing their critical thinking skills. I start by making the case for critical thinking generally, then offer a broad definition of what it entails and thus why GTAs are uniquely positioned to support students in this process. In the second half of the paper, I introduce Jenny Moon's (2005) work and then my own iteration of her framework. This framework has helped me in lesson planning, thinking through the needs of each student in my class, as well as responding to the unexpected opportunities

and challenges that arise in classroom discussions. Using this framework in preparation for each class has helped me hold subject knowledge and the development of critical thinking skills as separate but equally important learning outcomes. And by making these critical thinking outcomes explicit, I argue we can help students overcome some of the anxieties associated with expressing an opinion, developing an argument, and responding to alternative perspectives.

The case for critical thinking

Surely the most important outcome in higher education is to develop critical thinking skills regardless of academic discipline; to consider "what is said and what is not said; what is included and what is excluded, who is represented and who is omitted from the dominant discourse." (Pratt & Collins, 2000) A process which empowers students "to take social action to improve their own lives and the lives of others" (Pratt & Collins, 2000). Brookfield describes it this way: "As soon as you understand critical thinking to be linked to action you enter the realm of values, because you have to ask the questions, "Action for what?" and "Whose actions do we want to support?"" (2012: 15).

The Teaching Perspectives Inventory (Pratt & Collins, 2000), quoted above, offers five pedagogical attributes of which just one; *transmission*, commits the teacher to developing their own subject and pedagogical skills. The remaining four;

apprenticeship, developmental, nurturing, and *social reform*, adopt a holistic approach to teaching, building self-confidence through emotional development and social engagement. In this regard, I consider both teaching and learning to be moral endeavours where, one hopes, right thinking leads to right action.[5]

What is critical thinking?

When I started teaching, I kept a reflective journal as part of the Associate Teacher Programme (ATP). In my journal, I wrote:

Critical thinking (like learning to write) is a skill often assumed but less often taught. Reflecting on my own education, I learned to write but was never formally taught grammar (it was out of fashion in the 1970s). I haven't been taught to think critically either. Even though I think I do it, I don't know how I do it and I feel ill-equipped to teach others. As critical thinking is assessed in exams and essays, I want a framework to help plan lessons and develop the independent thinking skills of my students. This seems just as important as subject "knowledge" and providing "objective" critique of students' essays.

[5] I paraphrase the Buddhist Eightfold Path here in recognition of how deeply my approach to teaching has been inspired by the work and social activism of bell hooks (2010). Appreciating the philosophical root of hooks' ideas has helped me to better understand her expansive discourse, refuting tidy separations of the individual and social, material and spiritual, secular and religious.

Like Hastie in the first edition of this journal, I noticed "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" (2021: 39). If we mistakenly assume critical thinking is instinctual, then we compound that mistake by judging students on writing essays and passing exams, without building social skills and confidence in classroom settings where students can experiment without fear of judgement.

My ATP tutor directed me towards Moon's (2005) paper on the Advance HE website. Moon starts with the question "How can students engage in critical thinking if they don't know what it is?"

Moon (2005) describes how some educational theorists focus on component processes, skills and abilities (Kneale, 2003; Paul & Elder, 2004), for example training in logic (Sweet & Swanson, 2000). This skill-building approach is consistent with a *sequential* or programmatic approach as students develop increasingly complex and sophisticated cognitive structures (Cottrell 1999; Pratt & Collins, 2000). However, Meyers (1986) and Brookfield (1987) caution against a didactic approach, instead advocating for an engaged pedagogy which recognises knowledge is *situated*, and that the development of critical thinking skills is therefore sensitive to students' complex needs and lived experience.

Moon (2005) combines both sequential and situated approaches in a framework which defines critical thinking as; 1) working with complex ideas, 2) offering evidence, 3) demonstrating understanding of how knowledge is constructed, 4) situating that knowledge in context, 5) representing the thinking process and conclusions with clarity and precision and, 6) demonstrating self-reflexivity, which Moon describes as metacognition.[6] Critical thinking is, therefore, a dialogical process that involves argument, analysis, and self-reflection. It requires engagement, risk, and vulnerability. As a social process, taking risks and being open to opposing ideas provides a self-reflective opportunity to learn something about oneself, thinking through how knowledge is constructed in dialogue with others. Whilst some students thrive in seminar-settings, others clearly do not. Students have told me they live in fear of being "forced" to participate, even though they acknowledge the "threat" is imagined and not real in most cases.

For teachers, I suggest the problem is three-fold. Firstly, critical thinking requires grappling with complexity. It is therefore difficult to teach. Secondly, we don't pay sufficient attention to the pedagogical skills required to teach critical thinking skills. Either we wrongly assume that critical thinking skills are fully formed by the time students reach university,

[6] Moon's complete definition (2005:12) can be found in full in their article listed in the reference list.

or that undergraduates develop these skills instinctively through the process of engaging with progressively more complex material. Thirdly, critical thinking cannot meaningfully be taught in a vacuum; it lives within the container of subject knowledge. This, therefore, requires some dis-entangling on the part of the teacher; helping students to understand critical thinking as competencies that sit alongside subject knowledge.

Before I introduce Moon's (2005) framework for critical thinking, I describe why I think GTAs are uniquely positioned to support undergraduates actively engaging and taking control of their own learning outcomes.

Post Covid-19: The increasingly important role of GTAs

I started teaching at the same time that students returned to the classroom after the Covid-19 pandemic, but one of my colleagues has described "major ramifications" based on her experience teaching either side of the lockdown. As she describes it; "Covid-19 essentially destroyed student confidence when it came to critical thinking. This is a brand-new generation of… [students]. My 2022/2023 class have been overwhelmed with the project of critical analysis and providing evidence" (reproduced with permission, GTA in International Relations, Lancaster).

The effect on mental health from the social isolation and shift

to online learning (Akpınar, 2021), along with other global insecurities have clearly affected the post-Covid classroom. A recently published cross-sectional survey of (mostly) British undergraduates reported "a large number of students were still experiencing reduced mental health and wellbeing" because of the Covid-19 lockdown, and "it is also possible that returning to in-person teaching and learning could have *further* impacted students' mental health and wellbeing" (Liverpool et al., 2023: 3). In this journal, Wilson has argued that GTAs can "promote a culture of good mental health by incorporating a human element into their roles" (2022: 38). Conscious of the background anxiety and the lost classroom time, how does one create the necessary conditions of trust for students to successfully engage in the social process of learning *with* others?

The evidence suggests that instructor type matters. As "student satisfaction is now a major driver of the Teaching Excellence Framework" (Bell and Brooks, 2019: 227), linked to individual faculty and department performance goals, I believe the GTA's unique position, as neither faculty nor undergraduate, provides us with a relational and pedagogical benefit for the students we teach. Rather than being a poor-substitute for better "qualified" (and better paid) staff, I argue GTAs offer *complementary* pedagogical skills,[7] enhancing laboratory and classroom based-learning.

[7] A point also made by Hastie (2021)

A recent survey of law undergraduates described GTAs as "more invested", "attentive", and "more accessible" (Ball, Joyce & Mills, 2020). The students surveyed by Kendall and Schussler (2012) characterized their GTAs as "relaxed", "engaging" and "relatable", in contrast to their "confident", "knowledgeable", and "formal" professors. In this journal, Elliott and Marie (2021) have argued that GTAs can positively disrupt knowledge hierarchies where students defer to "experts". Drawing on Haraway's work (1988) challenging institutionalized, hierarchical, or totalized "objectivity", Elliott and Marie (2021) argue that because "knowledge is situated [we are] … answerable for what we learn" (2021: 74). Critical thinking is dependent on stepping outside knowledge hierarchies, recognizing our *situated-ness* largely drives what we know, what we accept to be true, and what we value to be important. This requires that uncertainty is also valued, even though this is counter-intuitive in an environment where we are so often judged on a performative self-confidence and examined 'knowledge'. How can GTAs contribute to a learning environment where undergraduates *enjoy* the risk of uncertainty and the accompanying vulnerability this requires?

Drawing on work by Cook-Sather and Felten (2017), Elliott and Marie (2021) assert that the GTAs' unique position can create a learning environment "of mutual trust, respect, inclusivity, responsibility… where students can build up their knowledge, creating, resisting, and imagining alternatives… GTAs' liminality helps them to understand the difficulties of

students, while also sharing some of the understandings and positionality of more experienced academics." (2021: 76)

As an important sidenote to the main thrust of this paper my own liminal position as a GTA is worth identifying. I am a returner to education after a long hiatus, pursuing (several) careers and raising a family in the intervening decades. I am a white, middle-aged man who *looks* like a career academic amidst the existing hegemonic structures. I am sensitive to how I look, and the degree to which this endows me with a false authority, despite being a begin-again student with a noticeably atrophied ability to remember anything these days. Thankfully, during seminars students happily finish my sentences when my memory fails me, and they appear to enjoy helping me out!

Being white, male and in my 50's, I am deeply conscious of the barriers to participation I may unconsciously reinforce, and how this affects the teacher-student relationship I seek to develop. GTA colleagues and other early career scholars, particularly younger women, have relayed their experience of feeling like invisible and unequal partners in the collaborative learning endeavour. In this journal, Zingaretti and Spelorzi focus on the multi-factorial reasons for international students' experience of exclusion; language, originating culture, skin colour, and socio-economic background, but also argue GTA's can "play a unique role in implementing the

'small culture'[8]… [with] plenty of opportunities to establish a real connection" (2022: 87).

In the second half of this paper, I suggest a pedagogical approach that can build on GTAs' relational advantage, developing a more collaborative and inclusive framework for classroom learning.

A learner-directed and partnership approach to building confidence

Whilst it is possible to develop critical thinking skills introspectively, Brookfield (2012) argues that students learn best in small groups. They like it when teachers model the process and find it helpful to ground critical thinking in case-studies and scenarios. Brookfield emphasizes how we learn most from the unexpected 'aha' moment and the 'disorientating dilemma' (Mezirow, 1991, 2000) when we are forced out of our comfort zone. However, fear of the unknown – the disorientating dilemma – makes it hard for students (and teachers) to take risks, often leading to a grim 'present but not engaged' atmosphere. How then, can we build group cohesion, trust, and playfulness, as well as individual confidence, to take advantage of the learning opportunities small group learning offers?

[8] Zingaretti and Spelorzi draw on Holliday's work (1999) defining a successful classroom as a 'small culture' which creates an inclusive, comfortable and safe learning atmosphere for all students.

The lesson-planning framework that follows, adapted from Moon (2005), has helped me structure learning outcomes to focus on both subject knowledge *and* social learning activities, building group cohesion and individual self-confidence. By being transparent about my teaching goals: introducing subject knowledge *and* developing critical thinking skills, I hope to develop trust and engagement with the process. Early feedback suggests it offers a partial antidote to the awkward silences and down-turned faces most of us experience as new teachers. It is built on the principle, advocated by both Brookfield (1987, 2012) and Moon (2005), that the more students can shape their own learning experiences the higher their engagement will be. As opportunities to shape classroom activities are introduced incrementally, students' confidence develops, leading to students shifting their view of teachers as "expert holders of knowledge to partners in the construction of knowledge" (Moon, 2005: 11). As most GTAs are actively engaged in the critical thinking project of our own research, we are ideally situated to operate from the perspective of and be seen by our students as *partners in the construction of knowledge* in this developmental process.

A developmental framework for critical thinking

Moon (2005) provides a "tentative set of descriptors for [the] progressively increasing capacity of students for critical thinking and its representation in writing" (2005: 38). The

model builds on Magolda's theoretical framework (1992, 2001) tracing the development of critical thinking through four stages, namely:

Absolute knowing – where students adopt 'right' versus 'wrong' positions.
Transitional knowing – where students adopt more fluid positions about what can be known and what might not be known.
Independent knowing – where students may take a position that everyone has the 'right' to their own opinion.
Contextual knowing – where knowledge is seen as constructed, and where teachers are, at this stage, seen as facilitators and partners in the process.

I have adapted Moon's (2005) descriptors developing a framework which I use to help me internalise the skills I hope to teach, and for planning classroom activities. It is a framework, not a checklist, and cannot be used programmatically. Instead, the framework adopts a constructivist approach (Biggs, 2003) acknowledging that "because we all have different knowledge bases, with discrete connections between those knowledge elements, each of us has to scaffold our own learning for ourselves" (Morss & Murray, 2005: 14). This means that learning outcomes cannot be directly correlated with classroom activities because every student is at a different stage (see above) and that critical thinking does not take place in a vacuum: it is situated within the subject. I discuss this further

in the following section.

Introducing this framework to students at the beginning of a course alongside subject goals, may help develop a partnership approach to learning but I stress that it cannot be used programmatically. For the teacher it needs to be internalised, used instinctively and playfully, and can only become this way through regular practice. The current version is shown below:

From Absolute to Transitional Knowing

Framing classroom activities around:	***Learning outcomes:***
Introducing concepts of evidence, evaluation, judgement, and conclusions	Being precise and clear
Relating critical thinking to everyday life using case-studies involving everyday tasks in which we seek evidence and make judgements	Defining key concepts, verbally and in writing
Establishing democratic frameworks for discussion; ground-rules for disagreement, modelling disagreement, and encouraging disagreement	Being able to draw a conclusion from verbal and written evidence
Discussing different theoretical approaches to the same subject	Being able to introduce an argument
Discussing how knowledge is 'produced' (publications, media	Expressing personal opinions
	Being able to summarise the main points of an argument
	Describing sources of evidence
	Understanding referencing as an acknowledgement of other people's work

distortion, expert agreement, common usage, etc.)	
From Transitional to Independent Knowing	
Framing classroom activities around: How knowledge is constructed (i.e., by following the history of one line of research thinking) Disciplinary language and style – the manner in which knowledge is produced, including peer review and sources of distortion Over-arching narratives and assumptions in research that have led to distorted judgements/conclusions Disagreements between experts Case studies where they assess evidence and make a judgement Teaching in which issues of real uncertainty are discussed Making judgements that have direct significance for themselves or others	***Learning outcomes:*** Developing self-confidence understanding and using disciplinary norms Drawing conclusions effectively Demonstrating critical thinking in writing, using straightforward disciplinary material Evaluating the evidence, argument, and conclusions of one scholar (i.e., "critically examine the argument of….") Constructing arguments Reflecting on strengths and weaknesses in their own writing Seeking evidence creatively, not just using academic references Acknowledging the source of their ideas in written

	arguments, referencing appropriately
<u>From Independent to Contextual Knowing</u>	
Framing classroom activities around: Recognising and challenging assumptions Responding to challenges A general attitude of questioning Focussing on methodology and theoretical models Using method to establish context and evidence in building an argument Taking responsibility for personal judgements Taking responsibility for gaps in knowledge and personal learning objectives	***Learning outcomes:*** Evaluating the evidence, argument, and conclusions of multiple scholars (i.e., in a literature review or a "compare and contrast" essay) Developing original positions and situating their position within existing scholarship Understanding referencing as a means of judging the quality of a piece of work

Figure 1: Lesson planning framework for developing critical thinking skills

In the next section, I provide an example of how I am currently using the framework in my own academic discipline, along with recent student feedback. In my concluding remarks I propose future refinements and circle back to how this model supports GTAs making a unique contribution to the teaching skill-mix.

The model in practice

The intention is to provide an engaged and supportive learning environment which focusses on emotional and social development as well as an intellectual shift to active learning. Evoking bell hooks (2010); to learn from the heart as well as the head. My own process is to shape classroom activities around opening questions which invite group participation and encourage group cohesion. For example, against classroom activity 4, I might ask “How do we want to work today? Do you want to agree some ground rules for this activity?” Or for classroom activity 19, I might ask “Are there any ideas, concepts or arguments that we have not covered in our discussion today?”. Similarly, I might ask them to work in pairs to summarise learning outcome vi), summarising the main points raised by their peers in the group discussion.

I have found this model helpful as a guide to assessing the needs of the group, if not each individual student. In practice, development through these domains is not straightforward. As new subject knowledge is introduced, we move forwards and backwards, encountering setbacks, and ‘aha’ moments in each class and with each new subject area covered. I acknowledge each student is somewhere in their own process, bridging from absolute to transitional knowing, or from transitional to independent learning, and from independent to contextual knowing. The more students engage with the process, the more likely they are to make incremental progress.

Central to this approach is relating academic knowledge to personal experience, scaffolding more abstract theoretical constructs to judgements formed in everyday life. One of my GTA colleagues rejects the *tabula rasa*, or blank slate approach, that assumes no innate "intelligence". She translates this to mean that based on students' life experience "they already know the answer." She structures seminar questions to encourage her students to have confidence in their own voice, building trust slowly but also, occasionally forcing individual students out of their comfort zone with a disorientating dilemma. Her approach to learning outcome v) expressing personal opinions, is to "offer a student a question, and if I need to wait three seconds to five minutes, they will, without fail, give me an answer of their own" (reproduced with permission, GTA in International Relations, Lancaster). This approach could undermine trust, but she actively champions the young women in her classes, working against socially constructed feelings of invisibility that were part of her undergraduate experience. The difference in our age and gender allows her to engage her students in a much more direct way. An approach that would potentially have the opposite effect if I deployed a similar strategy.

Our approaches are different not just because of who we are but also who we represent: the middle-aged man and the woman in her late twenties. Nevertheless, we share the same goals: encouraging our students to relate the "abstract"

learning goals to “concrete” life experiences, and, as Zingaretti and Spelorzi describe it, creating opportunities for “deep learning… when students engage with materials in a personal way” (2022: 77).

I offer an example from my own field, Indian Philosophy, which may seem “abstract” to outsiders:

Concepts of Self and Soul are radically different between different Indian philosophical schools, but this has provided the perfect introduction to critical thinking. I have not yet encountered a student who has not already developed a sense of identity, can conceptualize how this knowledge is constructed, and can identify life experiences which shape their perspective. They can relate their own sense of self to different philosophical arguments for and against an ontological Self. This allows students to identify different epistemic frames which determine how knowledge has been constructed. (from my ATP Journal)

I ask students to write a short piece (200 words) at the beginning of the module on their own beliefs about the Self. I invite them to relate this directly to life experience and/or construct a metaphor based on life experiences. End of module essay questions are framed around concepts of Self or Indian epistemology which gives me a sense of how their thinking and self-confidence as independent learners has developed over the course of the module. Specifically, I look for those instances where a student has moved from quoting

others to an engaged position speaking with their own voice, developing their own argument supported by appropriate evidence. One of my students offered this feedback:

"Seminars had a sense of creative engagement and collective discovery… engagement was encouraged by Nick's suggestions of informal, optional tasks to complete in our own time, with the promise of thoughtful feedback if shared. I found that these tasks really enabled me to escape the rigidity of academic practice and to consider the topics on a personal level. This made them real, bringing the subject to life before applying academic rigour to them. A further aspect… was his open reflection on the learning process itself, something I have found to be conspicuously absent during my time at university. Covering topics such as how to prepare for seminars, the connection between thinking and writing, and how to improve writing quality made a real difference... More than any other course I have taken, Nick's seminars paradoxically gave me the experience of coming to think independently through collective engagement." (2nd year philosophy student)

Conclusion

In this paper I have outlined a pedagogical checklist, based on Moon's (2005) framework, that can help students understand and develop critical thinking as a set of intellectual, social, and emotional skills that sit alongside subject knowledge.

Because these skills require an openness to taking risks and the vulnerability this requires, I have argued that GTAs, who are mostly postgraduates and sit somewhere between student and faculty, are uniquely positioned to mentor students through this process in a supportive environment that models independent learning and a partnership approach.

As I grow more confident in my teaching abilities, I have started to introduce the framework to students, along with Moon's definition of critical thinking at the beginning of the module, encouraging students to engage with the double vision with which I am holding the module goals: course content *and* the development of their critical thinking skills.

Previously I have only asked for feedback from students at the end of the class, separate to the formal evaluation (which most don't complete). In future classes, I plan to ask them to identify their individual learning goals framed around classroom engagement, independent learning and writing skills alongside the early writing assignment. I will follow this up with a mid-term and with an end-of-term review, asking them to critique their original piece of work. How has their thinking changed? Where are they seeing progress? And where do they need help against their original learning goals? As I continue to teach, I would like to work with other GTAs who are interested in developing this aspect of their pedagogical skills; to test my prototype framework, reflect on student feedback, and offer a wider range of subject

examples. I accept Indian philosophy is its own little niche!

I have argued that GTAs are uniquely positioned to teach critical thinking skills, and this may improve student learning outcomes. I believe that building pedagogical expertise in critical thinking allows GTAs, and professionals involved in educational development, to advocate for the unique contribution GTAs make to student experience and learning outcomes. My own experience is that institutional support for GTAs varies widely and there is a need to promote awareness of, and participation in, programmes like the ATP. GTAs should insist they have access to professional development programmes. Professional educators should appreciate postgraduates may not have been exposed to theoretical frameworks for critical thinking and should ensure this is a core competency of GTA training.

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Elisa Stafferini

25 lines

1st Prize

Elisa Stafferini is an art historian and PhD student at the Warburg Institute where she is working on a thesis entitled “Women in Arms: female warriors in Italian art 1500-1700”. This project focuses on the ethical and political allusions of armed women in sixteenth- and seventeenth- century Italian painting.

Her academic interests focus on early modern art and visual culture, iconography and iconology, gender and politics, war studies and the interrelations between word and image. Her studies in art history build on a lifelong passion for the arts. She started experimenting with abstract painting after a trip to Castelluccio di Norcia. Each year for several weeks between May and July, the plateau of this Italian town in Umbria fills up with colourful flowers, creating a spectacular landscape. This work is inspired by the mosaic of colours of that scenery.

https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/people/elisa-stafferini

Lucy Hulme

The mindfulness doodling of a teaching assistant

Runner-up

Lucy Hulme is a Mancunian, originally from the Bury / Bolton area. She completed an MSc in health psychology at the University of Manchester, where she currently practices as a part-time PhD student and Graduate Teaching Assistant. Hulme has taught at the University of Manchester since January 2022 and teaches on the psychology BSc she once participated in. She told the journal, “I love teaching and feel so lucky to be able to give back to the institution that helped put me on this career path”. She explains that when the teaching workload begins to pile up, her favourite mindfulness activity is to colour in colouring books, where she senses the satisfaction of colouring with bright colours and creating something beautiful and original.

https://research.manchester.ac.uk/en/persons/lucy.hulme-4-postgrad

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Gail Flockhart

Out of the Blue - Experiments in Fluidity

Runner-up

Currently researching for a practice-based PhD at the University of Plymouth, Gail Flockhart is a contemporary arts practitioner-researcher using photographic, film and mixed media, to explore modes of self-representation in women's art. In her recently published work, Flockhart investigates the relationship between photography and autobiographical memory looking at how art practice - enacted or envisioned through a performative creative process - can help us re-think the enduring legacies of trauma (Flockhart, 2023). Drawing on lived-experience, personal narrative and embodied or 'situated knowledges', Flockhart seeks to disclose the unconscious ontologies of selfhood that underpin subjectivity, through exploratory art- working. Contextualised through critical posthuman perspectives that support the notion of an embodied, embedded and relational self, Flockhart's wider doctoral project asks how trauma's effects might be affectively expressed through embodied forms of art and how a posthuman methodological approach might inform such an enquiry. Flockhart is currently working with textiles and discarded knitwear looking at the affective potential held by personal artefacts, in particular, a knitted

childhood teddy-bear. Exploring the ways affective aesthetic encounter can help us negotiate our histories and the past as an always-already present condition, Flockhart re-imagines the 'self' in fluid, shape-shifting forms that navigate the subjective boundaries of becoming.

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