Introduction: Volume 4

Kristyna Campbell[1], Lauren B Clark[1], Jesper Hansen[2], Thomas A Lowe[3], Alex Standen[4]

[1]IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society
[2]UCL Arena
[3]Demography, Population Research Centre, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, Urban and Regional Studies Institute, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands
[4]Eden Centre for Education Enhancement, The London School of Economics and Political Science

The Postgraduate Pedagogies Team are delighted to bring to our readers a fourth volume of original contributions to knowledge and reflective pieces, based on the experiences of Graduate Teaching Assistants in Higher Education and those working with them. We have had the pleasure of working with authors on 15 innovative and

inspiring pieces that we hope will spur on celebration, contemplation, and perhaps even some change. We have summarised these contributions below but hope that you will take some time to be immersed in the wide-ranging narratives of our international GTAs and those breaking ground with new pedagogical approaches, and to envision the spaces and communities our GTAs are creating to stabilise their roles and their position within the academy.

Mitchell, Hodeib and Laskowska's article presents a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) training programme, 'Future Teaching Leaders' (FTL), designed to equip MSc and PhD students with the skills necessary for effective teaching. The programme enhances the laboratory-based teaching environment, promoting better student engagement and learning outcomes. The authors reflect on the programme's impact from the perspectives of the project organiser, a teaching fellow, and a recent recruit. The programme has successfully helped GTAs achieve Advance HE Associate Fellowship and Fellowship.

Murphy's reflective essay explores the intersection of queer identity and pedagogy in higher education. The author, a GTA, examines how their queer identity and engagement with queer pedagogical literature has influenced their teaching practice. The essay discusses the challenges of heteronormativity in academia and the potential for queer pedagogy to counter these practices. It also explores the role of queer identity in the classroom and the evolution of teaching practices in response to queer pedagogy. The author argues that this queerer form of pedagogy can lead to more effective teaching and can be adopted by GTAs more broadly.

The authors of *Teaching Together: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Graduate Teaching Assistant Experiences and Pedagogy* explore the institutional challenges faced by home and international GTAs. In this,

they draw on the impact of liminality and the significance of ascribing meaning to relationships within the academy. Through two narratives exploring how relationships with roles are constructed in the GTA position, they consider professional development, supportive environments, and collaboration. The unique conflicts encountered by international doctoral candidates fulfilling roles in the academy provide valuable insight for the academy, with suggestions for how they may be supported to become members in existing structures.

Teaching in a Transitional Space: A Reflection on Modelling Zotero in Tutorials & 5 Tips for Graduate Teaching Assistants when Adopting Open-Source Software is an informative guide to implementing creative and helpful technology in teaching. Hyde-Vaamonde and Dhillon introduce novel ways of offering insight into learning tools to enrich the critical engagement of learning materials to undergraduate students. Through modelling techniques, the authors lean into developing digital literacy and confidence, to prepare and support students in an ever-more technology driven environment. They explore how GTAs can offer insight of the advantages of certain learning tools to students and GTAs alike, through various depictions of useful actions.

In a subsequent article published in this issue, Dhillon and Hyde-Vaamonde reflect on the implementation of two civic engagement initiatives at King's College London using O'Connor and McEwen's (2021) principles of real-world learning. Through exploring two cases this paper offers a framework to support GTAs in designing, implementing and learning from public engagement initiatives which highlight aspects such as interdisciplinarity, sustainability, empowerment and social justice. Some of the key learnings centre on the importance of community-led or -engaged initiatives, setting clear

expectations, having a shared goal, and considerations for fairly acknowledging the contributions of collaborators.

Mutungamiri et al.'s article *Mentoring Excellence: What do the Mentors Gain from Graduate Teaching Assistant Peer Mentoring?* considers the insights and reflections by a group of GTA mentors on their support for other GTAs in their application for the Advance HE Associate Fellowship (AFHEA). Utilising written interviews through a thematic discovery approach, they find that the collaborative support of GTA mentors is required, and such successful support enables mentors to develop their own skills too.

Francis (2024), in their paper *Cutting my cloth to suit me: Reflections on curriculum development as a Graduate Teaching Assistant delivering 'foreign curriculums' in seminars,* reflects on literature about GTAs and curriculum development to inform their own personal reflection on being a GTA at a Russell Group university. Despite the growing reliance on GTAs to deliver teaching in universities, GTAs don't seem to be given much autonomy to develop their own curriculum. Francis discusses how they are able to reframe her role as a GTA to shape the informal curriculum to better fit her students by adapting the curriculum to the individual learners, the core concepts that need to be learned, and the context in which they are applying them.

Wang and Lei reflect on their experiences teaching on first-year undergraduate seminars in social science disciplines in two UK universities – one located in a city with more international students and the other on a university campus dominated by home students. The article draws on these reflections to discuss engagement in group discussions, the effectiveness of group work, teaching students to draw on academic sources appropriately, and fostering autonomy while supporting students as they transition into university life, concluding

that individual needs of students and their lived experience need to be considered when using student-centred learning to ensure that students can engage with this approach.

In the article *It's all about balance: GTA reflections on finding balance between teaching, learning, and research,* Bridgeman and Barbas-Marcroft convey an honest representation of the conflicts and nuances encountered by early career individuals in today's dynamic higher education landscape. Employing inter-role conflict theory and inter-role facilitation, an exploration of academic expectations matched with the misalignment of realistic duties carried out by GTAs is offered. The authors sensitively explore the significance of professional development, and access to workplace learning while undertaking doctoral studies but fear that the multi-membership taken on can mean sacrificing the quality or focus of their own research.

The article, *Graduate Teaching Assistant reflections on the complexities of becoming reflexive practitioners,* critically reflects on the GTA role, using Gibbs' reflective model to explore the complexities and demands of the position. It presents reflections on the GTA role: providing student support, marking assessments, and transitioning to module leadership. The article highlights themes of limited autonomy, evolving identities, and the need for resilience.

Stanisz-Lubowiecka's paper discusses teaching strategies and support methods that GTAs can use to create an equal, diverse, and inclusive learning environment. The author draws on their experience as a GTA to propose several strategies that promote more inclusive teaching practices, such as setting ground rules, cooperating with Student Wellbeing teams, and developing accessible learning materials.

Cawley and Cook's article, *'Tea and Pedagogy': Graduate Teaching Assistant-staff support network in learning and teaching practice*, focuses on an informal network/initiative called 'tea and pedagogy' that was created in response to a perceived lack of pedagogical support and community among GTAs and other early career teaching staff. Using reflections from GTAs engaged in these sessions, the article recounts the important role these sessions have in creating a space to share best practice and discuss challenges faced. The ongoing success and potential formalisation of this initiative is also discussed.

In the article *Triple Identities and Resilient Liminality: Reflexive Narratives on Negotiating Identities as an International Graduate Teaching Assistant in the UK*, Yuqi Sun uses an autobiographical method to illustrate their experiences with identity renegotiation in the academy. Through short narratives they convey poignant encounters that impressed upon their relationship with various strands of identity, and how these contributed to their resilience. Taking the experience of a GTA through three different social identities, the author reflects on their relationship with teaching from the position of a migrant community as a novice in higher education.

Chang's article, entitled *How does the transnational cultural learning experience impact Graduate Teaching Assistants' work experience in UK universities?*, considers the author's cross-cultural learning experiences in Taiwan and the UK. The author reflects on the perceptions and expectations of students and teachers in the UK higher education system regarding GTAs. In so doing, Chang finds that GTAs encounter cultural adaptation and shock due to the cultural differences and how each country's culture and individual experience is unique. This reflection emphasises the need for a more nuanced support system to address this diversity.

In *Exploring Unfiltered Student Feedback: An Autotheoretical Reflection*, Mikkilä focuses on a method, 'free-writing elevator feedback', used to collect student feedback that is considered authentically critical and uncensored. The author critically reflects on what the students' expectations have taught them, in terms of their supervisory style and considering their own background and past experience in other Higher Education systems. In this article, Mikkilä also addresses the potential risks and shortcomings of the 'free-writing elevator feedback' method.

Postgraduate Pedagogies Team wishes to congratulate all our authors on their articles. Our board comprises a rich mix of Graduate Teaching Assistants, Early Career Researchers, and Educational Developers, who work tirelessly to ensure that the voices of our fellow researchers are heard. For more information on how to get involved with the publication process, head to our website over at postgradpedagogies.lse.ac.uk.