The University Of Sheffield.

A critical exploration of the cultivation of identities and spaces for agency in practice among Graduate Teaching Assistants in higher education

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

The University of Sheffield
Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education

April 2021

Acknowledgements

Although it is my name on the title page, this thesis would not have been possible without the support and encouragement from a significant number of others. I am grateful to all of them, particularly the following:

To Ahmed, Arthur and Gina, for their generosity in sharing their experiences so openly and their courage in being observed as part of such an unusual project.

To my supervisor Dr Darren Webb, for his kindness and constructive guidance throughout the process of developing this project and writing the thesis.

To my tutor for Part I, Dr Chris Winter, and all of the EdD teaching team, for their thought-provoking comments and building up my confidence around doctoral study.

To my fellow students on the EdD cohort, for our interesting discussions and friendship (mostly over food), as well as my colleagues on the MA Historical Research where it all began.

To the teaching staff I have worked with across the institution and beyond, including GTAs, PGCert participants and others, for continually inspiring, challenging and surprising me as a teacher.

To the Academic Professional Development Team and others I work closely with in my role, especially Sarah Plumb, Kate Richardson, Steven Rowley, Liz Taylor, Keira Borrill, Andy Stork, Briana Chapple, Isabel Andrews, Rachel Bovill and Amy Jeffries, for their enthusiasm and passion for the work they do and the teachers they support.

To my former running club, Steel City Striders, for giving me the confidence to run, the friends at my current club, Hillsborough and Rivelin Running Club, for introducing me to the trails and fells that keep my feet on the ground and my head in the clouds, and my fellow Hillsborough parkrun runners and volunteers, for being such a joyful and welcoming community.

To my wonderful family and friends, Mum, Dad, Chris Judd, Charlene McGoldrick, Richard Moore, Dorothy Moore, Rosie Hunt, Amy Swiszczowski and Michelle Dawson, for all of their love, interest and encouragement in writing this thesis.

To the animals, Finn, Val and Philly (cats) for their judgemental supervision from the shelf above my desk, and to Freya (dog) for her companionship on our walks.

To the four babies we lost during the course of this project, Spring, Winter, Summer and Autumn, for bringing such joy during the short time they were with us.

And to my husband Tim, for his love, patience, support and repeated conversations about verisimilitude. Thank you, for everything.

Abstract

In recent years, Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) have been increasingly employed by higher education institutions to support student learning. As PhD students they find themselves in liminal and precarious positions, balancing conflicting priorities as they forge professional identities. Many institutions offer professional development opportunities to support new GTAs as they embark on teaching. However, in this project I argue that such activity is often based on a deficit model of GTA practice, and can be too narrowly focused on developing their skills and knowledge in a way that socialises them to institutional norms.

This research draws on realist social theory to explore how GTAs forge identities as teachers and cultivate spaces for agency despite the structures and cultures that may constrain them. Its contribution to knowledge and practice is twofold. Firstly, while social realism has been applied to academic identities, there has been little exploration of GTA identity and agency through this lens. Secondly, I adopted a collaborative approach of working in depth with three participants to construct fictionalised composite stories from reflections based on observations of their practice. This not only celebrates the messy, complex, emotional and often contradictory nature of GTA practice, but also deploys a methodology rarely applied to educational research in higher education contexts. While the GTAs I worked with tended to maintain rather than challenge prevailing structural and cultural forces, their experiences nonetheless offer unique insights into the spaces for agency they create through the ordinariness of everyday practice. Through this research I hope to raise critical, unsettling questions for those working in academic development, including myself, about the assumptions we make around GTA practice, the ways in which we could honour the diversity of GTA experiences, and our potential role in empowering GTAs to explore where they might enact agency in their individual contexts.

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

The Researcher: Prologue

She pauses as they start talking amongst themselves[i], lets out a sigh, and smiles. This is why she does this job. Their passion and enthusiasm is contagious[ii], and any nerves that she might have had at the start of the session have disappeared. As always they're quiet at first, but the sound's now beginning to rise, reverberating around the room[iii].

Walking between them, she looks over their shoulders[iv] to see the post-it notes appearing on flipchart paper in the middle of each table, colouring it green, pink, yellow. She pulls up a chair, sitting slightly away from one of the groups. They're talking animatedly about how to engage students in the classroom, in philosophy, in engineering, in medicine, in law[v]; occasionally contradicting each other but mostly weaving a tapestry of ideas on the table[vi]. She looks again at what they've written on the post-it notes. Brilliant. Even with her years of experience, she'd have never thought of some of these herself[vii].

The vibrancy of their conversations gets her thinking. Some of the more experienced academics she's worked with could learn a lot from the people in the room. What happens after this session, when they all go back to their respective departments? Do they even get a chance to try these ideas out in their teaching[viii]? She doesn't know...[ix]

The Researcher: Prologue

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[i] This situates the narrative in the context of my classroom, showing how the idea for the research was drawn from my own practice. My role includes running workshops for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) such as the one described in this narrative, which are all designed to be interactive and include plenty of opportunities for discussion. The reference to the physical space of the classroom reflects my practice at the time of starting this research, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

[ii] The satisfaction and joy I take from my work with GTAs are represented here.

[iii] Even as an experienced teacher, I still feel nervous sometimes. There is often silence before the session begins because most GTAs attend as individuals and know few others in the room, so they tend to be looking at their phones until I get their attention to start. I therefore try to introduce an activity as soon as I can to prompt them to talk to each other. In most cases, my nerves are settled once I can see and hear them actively engaging in the first exercise. I have also paid attention to sound in this narrative. Activities such as this often help shyer participants to engage as they know they cannot be heard over the whole room.

[iv] Usually in these workshops, I monitor participant learning from a distance to begin with to encourage them to talk to each other, avoid disrupting the dynamic of peer learning, and model approaches that GTAs can use.

[v] The participants I work with come from a wide range of disciplines across the institution, which was important to honour in my research.

[vi] While there are some similarities in teaching approaches, the techniques participants use may differ according to discipline, teaching context or student needs, so again I wanted to recognise this diversity in the design of the study.

[vii] I am always amazed at the vast array of ideas that participants come up with, many of which are new to me. By capturing their enthusiasm and creativity in this opening *Prologue*, I foreshadow the focus on agency in my research.

[viii] I wondered how far the thoughtfulness, creativity and passion that I saw in workshops such as this were valued in GTAs' departments, whether there were any opportunities for them to share their ideas with other teaching colleagues, and if they had the autonomy to implement these ideas in their practice. I had the impression from brief conversations with GTAs that some received session plans that they could adapt, whereas others were expected to follow a relatively rigid protocol and simply be on hand to respond to student questions. Some of the permanent academic staff I had spoken to seemed to have a dismissive attitude towards the capabilities, enthusiasm and commitment of GTAs but this contradicts what I generally see in my classroom.

[ix] However, I realised that other than a broad sense of GTA practice, I had little idea about the intricacies and nuances of what they actually did in the classroom, how they regarded their role, how far they were able to enact agency, and what might help or hinder the development of their practice. Despite largely positive feedback on the workshops run by our team, this gap in my knowledge prompted me to question whether the workshops were actually useful for GTAs, how far they aligned with their day-to-day practice, and how my own assumptions might be detrimental to the GTAs I work with. These concerns provided the spark for this research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

> We are our own script writers, since even the smallest print, which spells out our formal role obligations, cannot tell us how to greet our partners, breakfast the children, get down to a day's research, acknowledge God, or let the dog out (Archer, 2000, p.303).

This thesis offers an in-depth, critical exploration into the worlds of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in higher education institutions, specifically focusing on the ways in which they cultivate identities as teachers and enact agency within their classrooms. As highlighted in the *Prologue*, my interest in working with GTAs largely emerged from my academic professional development role in a UK research-led university, leading on the support that our team provides for GTAs. This includes facilitating workshops to support their development as teachers, and devising and directing a pathway for professional recognition primarily aimed at GTAs which has been in place since 2014. My work also supports academics who are new to teaching, most notably as the Director of our PGCert in Teaching for Learning in Higher Education. However, while I have found there to be some similarities in the issues raised by new academics and GTAs, as set out by Winstone and Moore (2017) GTAs occupy a uniquely ambiguous, liminal and precarious space within higher education contexts.

The literature suggests that GTAs carry out a significant amount of teaching in higher education institutions (see for example Gardner and Jones, 2011; Muzaka, 2009; Park, 2004; Park and Ramos, 2002). However, Park (2004) and Park and Ramos (2002) emphasise that compared to other higher education contexts, such as that of the United States, their teaching roles are not as formally recognised in institutional systems and processes in the UK. Their experiences vary, even within the same institution, often as a result of disciplinary differences (Barr and Wright, 2019; Gardner and Jones, 2011). In some contexts, GTAs are PhD students with a specific contract that requires them to teach for a certain amount of time during their doctoral study, whereas in others, the term simply refers to any PhD student who teaches in a higher education institution (Park, 2004; Park and Ramos, 2002). For the purposes of this research, I use the second, broader definition. Although I consider GTAs to be staff in their own right, in recognising that they are in a different position to those who are permanently employed, I refer to the latter as academic staff to distinguish the two groups in this thesis.

According to Park (2004), GTAs are largely seen as PhD students first and teachers second. Gunn (2007) and Raaper (2018) build on this to suggest that as casual staff, GTAs are also frequently marginalised from departmental and institutional conversations. Indeed, GTAs are not mentioned at all in the learning and teaching strategy of the institution where this research was conducted. Like Park and Ramos (2002) I have had conversations with some academic staff who appeared dismissive about GTAs' abilities and commitment to their role, and reluctant to allow them much responsibility and autonomy. As with any role, there may be some GTAs who struggle with teaching, but these prevailing attitudes seemed to be at odds with the passion, enthusiasm and creativity highlighted in the *Prologue* that I witness among the majority of GTAs attending the workshops I lead.

In noticing this discrepancy, I began to question whether I and others in our team contributed to this culture. Having not worked as a GTA myself, I was curious about how far our workshops prepared them for their GTA roles and provided appropriate support for the challenges they experience. I realised I knew little about what they actually did as GTAs, particularly in STEM disciplines which are less familiar to me due to my background in Arts and Humanities. As someone born in the UK who has never studied abroad, again, I recognised that I would never be able to know how it feels to be in the position of the many international GTAs I teach. I started to wonder what assumptions I, and others in my role, made about the GTAs we work with, and how far we perpetuated a particular, potentially detrimental, view of their practice as somehow lacking. As Archer's (2000) quote above illustrates, we all create spaces for agency through the mundane, everyday decisions we make (see also Clegg, 2005). However, there has been little consideration of how this might relate to the practice of GTAs working in higher education, so I was keen to explore this as a possible antidote to prevailing attitudes towards GTA teaching. I begin by considering the context in which both GTAs and academic developers such as myself are working.

Background and context

The rapid change in UK higher education in recent years is a key theme throughout the literature, which highlights how the speed of this transformation has been driven by the pervasive influence of performativity (for example Archer, 2008), marketisation (for example Foskett, 2011, Hall and Smyth, 2016; Henkel, 2005) and managerialism (for example Clegg, 2003, Degn, 2018; Hall and Smyth, 2016). For some, including Foskett (2011), Margolis et al (2011) and McArthur (2011), these influences have developed as the role of universities has become increasingly entwined with narrowly-defined economic growth. The huge expansion of the sector that occurred as a result led to an escalation of higher education institutions focusing on 'students as consumers' and 'value for money' (Foskett, 2011; Hall and Smyth, 2016; McArthur, 2011; Nordensvärd, 2011). This was framed in policy from the introduction of tuition fees arising from the 1997 Dearing Report to the implementation of the Teaching Excellence Framework following the *Success as a Knowledge Economy* White Paper in 2016. However, these policy developments coincided with reduced funding for institutions, so as higher education became accessible to greater numbers of students, not only from the UK but also internationally, the pressures on those teaching them also increased (Chadha, 2013; Foskett, 2011; Muzaka, 2009; Park, 2004). Similarly, the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise in the mid-1980s prompted academic staff, especially in research-intensive institutions, to prioritise research over teaching (Chadha, 2013; Henkel, 2005; Jordan and Howe, 2018; Muzaka, 2009). Archer (2008) takes this further to suggest that these changes reinforced academic individualism over community and collectivities within the sector. The need for greater teaching capacity resulted in a steady growth in the employment of GTAs (Chadha, 2013; Park, 2004; Park and Ramos, 2002). As emphasised by Gunn (2007) and UCU (2018, 2020) these GTAs were often employed on casual or zero-hours contracts to fill in the gaps at relatively low cost.

Against this backdrop of significant change, professional development teams such as my own created specific opportunities to support new teachers, including GTAs, driven further by the requirement following the 2010 Browne Report for higher education institutions to publish the teaching qualifications of their teaching staff (Bale and Moran, 2020; Chadha,

2013; Clegg, 2009; Gunn, 2007; Kahn, 2009). While there was, and remains, understandable reticence towards such programmes among some academic staff, who regard them as a manifestation of managerialism and a wider audit culture around teaching quality rather than genuinely supportive of their practice as individuals, in my experience this has not been the case with GTAs (Clegg, 2003, 2009; Hanson, 2013). Even where they are designed with good intentions however, Behari-Leak (2017) suggests that these activities tend to socialise new teachers into existing institutional structures and cultures rather than valuing what they bring as individuals or addressing wider structural and systemic issues. Academic developers often sit uncomfortably between senior management and academic departments, and are therefore subject to socio-cultural forces themselves that can be difficult to resist (Clegg, 2003; Hanson, 2013). While Clegg (2009, p.408) argues that their positioning allows them to be "immensely influential in transforming the discourse around teaching and teaching quality", in my experience, this feels somewhat over-optimistic in today's climate. Nonetheless, given my work and Archer's (2000) framing of agency in the quote above, academic developers like myself potentially play a role in supporting or hindering GTA practice.

Before considering how these developments informed the focus and research questions of my study, it is worth acknowledging the impact of the recent changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The initial shift to online teaching and uncertainty about student numbers for the 2020/2021 academic year led to many institutions, including the one in which this study was conducted, significantly reducing the work available for GTAs. In one faculty, the decision was made in summer 2020 that GTAs would not be employed at all for at least the first semester of the 2020/2021 academic year in order to save money. Not only did this cause concern about increased workload for academic staff, but it also led to immediate unemployment for the GTAs on ten-month contracts with no possibility of work from September. Furthermore, a general recruitment freeze in the institution meant that potential job opportunities, which might have offered more security for experienced GTAs, were withdrawn. As highlighted in the next chapter, academic precariousness is not new (Archer, 2008; UCU, 2018, 2020). However, I would argue that it has been exacerbated by the actions of institutional decision-makers during the pandemic.

More recently, as student numbers were higher than anticipated, departments have started to recruit GTAs again. Nonetheless, recruitment remains more limited than usual, despite a continued focus on student experience in institutional communications during the pandemic. Many GTAs also face further challenges in the coming months. For European students, the implications of Brexit from 31 December 2020 bring additional complications, particularly in terms of visas. While UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), which provides much of the funding for PhD students, updated its policy in March 2021 to allow further support for doctoral students, "the priority remains for students to adapt and adjust research projects to mitigate the delays caused by COVID-19, where possible, to complete their research to a doctoral standard within their original funding period" (UKRI, 2021, pp.1-2). Although it is too early to see the impact of both changes, the potential financial implications for GTAs who may not have been able to work on their projects for several months are likely to increase the research workload pressures on them to finish before their funding runs out, and there will be additional administrative burdens in navigating visas for GTAs from the EU. These

issues, combined with the reduced recruitment of GTAs, mean that the context in which GTAs are working has changed significantly over the course of this thesis, which is yet to be reflected in the academic literature. While such developments did not necessarily influence my research questions or data creation due to the timing of these activities, I acknowledge how they affected the lens through which I analysed my data in the discussion chapter.

Focus, research questions and theoretical framework

Given the challenges experienced by GTAs and my own lack of understanding about their specific pedagogic encounters, in identifying the focus of my study I was keen to explore how the way they see their role manifests in practice, whether spaces for agency exist for them, and how far they might perpetuate or resist what is expected of them. To encapsulate these points, I developed the following research questions:

1. How do GTAs construct identities as teachers in higher education?
2. How are these identities enacted in day-to-day practice?
3. In what ways do GTAs create spaces for agency in their teaching contexts?
4. What enables or constrains their opportunities for agency?

This study therefore aims to provide insight into the ways in which GTAs construct identities and enact agency through the specific decisions they make in the classroom, while also acknowledging the influence of broader socio-cultural forces around them. To explore these questions in a way that acknowledges Collins' (2019) assertion that GTAs are not a homogeneous group, I worked with three participants from different disciplines and backgrounds, all teaching within a single research-intensive institution. My approach recognises the importance of lived experience highlighted by Akinbode (2013) and interactions emphasised by Ashwin (2008), Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) and Case (2015a, 2015b) in teaching and identity development. In doing so, it draws on Clegg's (2005) theorisation of the mundane to focus on everyday classroom occurrences. Similarly inspired by the use of stimulated recall described by Baker and Lee (2011) among others, I used a combination of observations within the classroom and reflective discussions to create an anthology of fictionalised narratives that represent specific aspects of their practice, as well as drawing on Mahoney's (2007) collaborative way of working with his participants. While Kahn (2017) uses the term 'learning environment' in his study and the nature of learning environments in higher education have changed significantly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as my participants were all teaching in classrooms at the time of the observations, this is the term I use in this thesis.

I have drawn on Margaret S. Archer's (1995, 2000, 2003, 2007) realist social theory to analyse the complex dynamics around identity and agency. For much of this research, I did not have a specific theoretical framework underpinning my work. I had come across Archer's theory relatively early on in my reading through Clegg (2008), but did not see its relevance at that stage of my project. In some ways drawing on theory at a later stage to make sense of the data was beneficial, as it meant I did not have a particular framework in mind when working with the participants in line with Brannick and Coghlan's (2007) definition of the hermeneutic research paradigm. This does not mean our interactions were value-free and I acknowledge the impact of my own position as a researcher throughout this thesis. However,

in focusing on agency when analysing my data, I returned to Archer's work, which aligns with my research questions and my ontological and epistemological stance discussed below. Realist social theory offers a way of considering the structures and cultures that constrain or promote GTA agency while also recognising GTAs as active agents in their own right, and thus avoids the dismissive attitude that I had witnessed in other conversations around GTA practice. I will discuss Archer's framework further in relation to my thesis in the next chapter.

Significance of the study and contribution to knowledge and practice

This research offers a contribution to knowledge and practice in various ways. In recent years, Archer's (1995, 2000, 2003, 2007) work has underpinned several studies in the context of higher education, for example Ashwin (2008), Baker (2019), Behari-Leak (2017), Case (2015a, 2015b), Clegg (2005, 2008), Czerniewicz et al (2009), Kahn (2009, 2014, 2015, 2017), Kahn et al (2017), and Lundgren-Resenterra and Kahn (2019, 2020). However, with the exception of Behari-Leak's (2017) discussion of academics in a South African university, Kahn's (2009) exploration of new academic identities and Kahn et al's (2012) study around initial professional development for new academics, these tend to focus on student learning rather than teaching, and there is little evidence of Archer's work being applied specifically to GTA practice. Indeed, Kahn (2009, p.197) describes GTA teaching as "relatively limited" as they do not design their own curricula, and identifies a lectureship post as new academics' "first opportunity to exercise significant agency in relation to teaching". In contrast, I suggest in the literature review that the enactment of agency is not necessarily dependent on participating specifically in curriculum design, as the curriculum not only comprises what is written down but also what is enacted through classroom encounters (Apple, 2014).

As Jordan and Howe (2018) highlight, the literature around GTAs, for example Barr and Wright (2019), Drewelow (2013), Muzaka (2009) and Winstone and Moore (2017), is generally centred around a single department or a few cognate departments. Elsewhere, the literature focuses on techniques that GTAs use or others' experiences or perceptions of the effectiveness of GTA teaching, as seen in Chadha's (2013) analysis of a professional development programme. Other studies, such as Bale and Moran (2020) and Park and Ramos (2002), conflate data from GTAs with that from students and staff in their analysis, thus masking the GTA perspective. Collins (2019) adds to this by critiquing the tendency to treat GTAs as a homogeneous group. Even studies which explore issues of identity and attempt to elicit the views of GTAs themselves, including Barr and Wright (2019), Muzaka (2009), Winstone and Moore (2017) and Zotos et al (2020), fall short of deliberately conceptualising GTAs as active agents. Overall in the literature, GTAs are therefore treated as relatively passive, with a focus on the challenges they face rather than how they respond to them. Through my novel application of Archer's work to GTA practice, this research offers unique insights into GTAs as agents who play an active role in constructing their own identities and cultivating spaces for agency without minimising the effect of broader structural and cultural forces. While my aims of creating a co-produced project with GTAs were not fully realised as discussed in the methodology chapter, the ongoing and collaborative approach in this study is innovative in the context of GTA research.

Indeed, this study provides a methodological contribution to knowledge through its use of both observation-based stimulated recall as set out by Baker and Lee (2011), and Rinehart's (1998) fictionalised composite narratives grounded in participants' experiences. Observation is an established research method in school contexts, for example Hohti and Karlsson (2014) and Roller (2016), and composite narratives are often used in storying the experiences of marginalised groups, such as Gillborn (2010), Sikes and Piper (2010) and Solórzano and Yosso (2002). However, as Ashwin (2008) and Cotton et al (2010) argue, both of these methods are novel to the field of higher education research which tends to focus on one-off interviews and questionnaires. Curating a collective of short stories has enabled me to apply Clegg's (2005) theoretical conceptualisation of the mundane to an empirical study of GTA practice, again representing a contribution to methodological knowledge. Finally, in light of Kahn's (2009) appeal for a better understanding of the interplay between structures, cultures and agency among those of us working in academic development, I hope that the findings of this study serve as a contribution to practice by unsettling our assumptions and prompting us to question what we do, actively encourage GTAs to consider issues of identity and agency, and advocate for change for GTAs.

Scope

In light of the authors (for example Jordan and Howe, 2018; Muzaka, 2009; Park and Ramos, 2002; Raaper, 2018) that position GTAs as often marginalised and underrepresented in policy, practice and the academic literature, this study focuses on GTAs themselves. It is impossible to explore GTA practice, identity and agency without acknowledging their interactions with others, especially students and senior colleagues (Ashwin, 2008; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Case, 2015a, 2015b; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Todd, 2001). However, the perspectives of these groups are outside the scope of this study. This research focuses on professional development as a lens for institutional structures and cultures, so other forces acting on GTA practice may be less emphasised as a result. Similarly, although some structures and cultures that GTAs experience also impact detrimentally on others within higher education institutions, the focus of this work is on how these forces affect GTAs specifically. The emphasis on lived experience and the mundaneness of practice set out above means that the narratives naturally draw attention to the teaching techniques that GTAs use in classroom encounters. It is not my intention to critique their teaching approaches or the decisions they make in the classroom, but rather to offer these as grounded examples of the ways in which they construct identities and enact agency. Although there have been debates around identities, liminality and precariousness of academic development itself as highlighted in Clegg (2009), this is not a focus of the study in its own right.

Working with a small number of participants enabled me to explore GTA practice in depth through repeated observations and discussion, each one offering a different perspective of practice. I do not claim that the findings from this study can or should be generalised to all GTAs; indeed, by highlighting the diversity of practice within a single institution my findings in many ways suggest the opposite (Riessman, 2008). As Caine et al (2013), Jacobson and Larsen (2014) and Mus (2012) suggest, narratives can only offer a partial understanding of lived experience within a particular time period. My analysis through a lens of agency and identity is therefore unashamedly incomplete. While it would therefore be impossible to

discuss all aspects of practice raised in the narratives and beyond, they nonetheless offer insight into diversity of GTA experience.

Researcher positionality

My background and positionality has significantly impacted on my approach to this research. I highlighted above how my experiences working with GTAs kindled my interest in this topic, but I have always had a passion for teaching. I started to teach piano at the age of 14 and experienced that difficult process of navigating the responsibilities of my role and cultivating a professional identity as a young teacher. Before my current role, I facilitated workshops for children and families social workers within local authorities. However, in recent years senior managers in my department and the wider institution have explicitly stated that they do not regard me as a 'teacher', which contradicts how I and my colleagues in academic development define our work. As team manager, I therefore see my role as embodying and modelling a teaching identity for others in my own small act of resistance. Although our situations are different and I remain far more privileged in many ways, these questions of how a teacher is defined and how they establish autonomy and agency within their context offer some commonalities between myself and GTAs. From a methodological perspective, my engagement with oral history and storying of marginalised groups through my focus on the US civil rights movement in my undergraduate and Masters degrees has undoubtedly influenced the methodology I have used for this project.

This study took the form of insider research, where the project is carried out "by complete members of organizational systems and communities in and on their own organizations" (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007, p.59). Clegg and Stevenson (2013, p.8) highlight that research into higher education is by its very nature "a form of ethnographic immersion" as the researcher is already embedded within higher education structures and cultures. According to Clegg and Stevenson (2013), this has a shaping influence on how data is analysed, interpreted and reported, yet is rarely recognised in methodology accounts. Similarly, they critique the assumptions that underpin the interpretations of insider researchers, often implicitly and without question (Clegg and Stevenson, 2013). As a result of my position as an insider researcher, like Hanson (2013) I benefitted from my knowledge of internal systems in terms of access to participants, but conversely I potentially did not question institutional norms, practices and assumptions when talking to participants as much as an external researcher might have.

Furthermore, I interacted with the GTAs I worked with during the study in other settings as part of my professional role. There was some evidence of this power dynamic affecting our conversations, with participants making references that suggested they were filtering their comments in order to say what they thought I wanted to hear (Hanson, 2013; Young and Bippus, 2008). Perhaps participants' positions as researchers themselves, albeit in contexts very different to mine, also made it harder for me to disrupt the traditional researcher/participant power dynamic, because they projected their own expectations and experiences of research onto our discussions. In the methodology chapter, I consider how my working role and my role as researcher might have intersected (deliberately, accidentally, or without me realising) and how this might have affected how participants responded to me (positively and negatively) (Hanson, 2013).

My ontological and epistemological stance also influenced my approach, especially in selecting my theoretical framework. Epistemologically, as with Archer's (2000, 2003, 2007) work I believe that knowledge is constructed subjectively so different individuals will experience situations in different ways. I have therefore designed my project in a way that honours the diversity of GTA perspectives, as well as recognising and explicitly highlighting my own positionality, most notably through the character of The Researcher. I refer to data creation rather than collection to more accurately represent the way that knowledge was constructed through conversations between myself and participants (Caine et al, 2013; Hohti and Karlsson, 2014; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Riessman, 2008), and curated through my selection, writing and ordering of the narratives (Quinlan, 2019).

However, while I believe that we construct our realities to some extent, I struggle with the ontological binary that reality itself is entirely objective or subjective. For example, I might construct a regular running route, and as highlighted by Archer's (2000) quote at the start of this chapter I decide when, how often and how fast to run, but the tree roots and stones that litter the path exist regardless of whether I run over them. Similarly, an individual may construct their identity as a teacher in a particular situation, but they still exist physically as a human in the world whether they think of themselves as a teacher or not. Archer's (1995, 2000, 2003, 2007) framework breaks down ontological and epistemological binaries by offering a way of recognising subjective epistemologies alongside aspects of the world that exist in their own right outside of human consciousness.

Structure of the thesis

In this chapter, I have set out the context for my thesis and the environment in which GTAs are working. I have acknowledged my positionality as a researcher which I will return to throughout the thesis to illustrate how it has influenced my approach at different stages. My second chapter offers a detailed review of the literature around academic identities and agency in general, and the potential for those in academic development roles such as mine to socialise GTAs into a particular, and limited, way of teaching without acknowledging what GTAs themselves bring to their practice. I also set out the realist social theory that underpins my work, with a robust explanation of its relevance in light of my research questions and the context in which I and the GTAs are working. The methodology chapter then outlines the rationale underpinning my approach to this research, how I recruited my participants, the ways I worked with them, and the ethical considerations for the project.

The methodology chapter also explains the narrative approach I have taken to representing the data, which forms the basis of the fourth chapter. Here, participants' stories are represented as fictional narratives on the left-hand page, with accompanying analytical footnotes on the right to show how the narratives have been constructed from the data. The reader is invited to either read the analytical comments alongside the narratives, or read the narratives alone as a collection of short stories offering insights into the ways in which GTAs construct identities and spaces for agency in their practice. Chapter 5 draws these findings together across the stories, going beyond the everyday experiences of individuals to consider broader issues and concerns. Finally, the conclusion returns to the contribution of the study, highlighting its key findings, limitations, and recommendations for research, policy and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a significant body of literature around academic identities in general, including Clegg (2008, 2011a), Fitzmaurice (2013), Henkel (2005) and Jawitz (2009), and some work around GTA experiences, techniques and practices more specifically, for example Barr and Wright (2019), Drewelow (2013), Muzaka (2009), Sandi-Urena and Gatlin (2013), Winstone and Moore (2017), and Zotos et al (2020). However, there has been little consideration of how GTAs see themselves as teachers, how these identities influence the ways they carry out their roles, and how far they enact agency through classroom interactions. In this literature review, I begin by exploring academic identities and existing literature around GTA practice. I then discuss the problem of professional development programmes for GTAs acting as socialisation mechanisms that promote and maintain the institutional status quo. Finally, I introduce Archer's (1995, 2000, 2003, 2007) social realist theory to explain why this is an appropriate framework for exploring GTA identity and agency in the context of UK higher education.

Although I have drawn on international literature where possible, this literature review predominantly focuses on studies from the UK and US for two reasons. Firstly, as GTAs are employed in different contexts across the world, their roles, conditions and experiences can look very different even within the same institution, let alone between institutions and across different countries (Park, 2004; Park and Ramos, 2002). These factors, for example the differing levels of formalisation of their role noted by Park (2004), potentially impact on their forging of identities. Therefore, as my study took place in a UK institution, I have concentrated on the UK literature because this is more likely to align with the contexts, structures and cultures that the participants in this project are working in. Furthermore, my experience of engaging with the literature echoed Behari-Leak's (2017) critique that professional development activity tends to be highly centred on the global North. This seems to be particularly the case with the literature around GTAs, which, with the notable exception of Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko's (2018, 2020a, 2020b) work in an Israeli higher education institution, is almost entirely based in the UK, Europe or the US. The literature I have drawn on around academic identity development is more international, including studies from South Africa (Behari-Leak, 2017; Jawitz, 2009; McMillan and Gordon, 2017) and Australasia (Isaacs and Parker, 1997; McNaughton and Billot, 2016), yet this nonetheless suggests a dearth in diversity in terms of the work in this field.

Given that the literature around GTA identities is limited, in the next section I consider how discussions of broader academic identities in the literature might apply to the unique position of GTAs.

Academic identities and GTAs

Louise Archer (2008) highlights that due to the rapid pace of change in the higher education sector in recent years outlined in the introduction, academics have found themselves responding to shifting institutional priorities and pressures within an uncertain context of increased workload. This environment has led to Henkel's (2005, p.163) description of academia as a "site of struggle" between academic staff and those described as 'university managers' who are often regarded as out of touch with practice on the ground (see also

Crawford, 2010; Degn, 2018; Macfarlane, 2005). It is important to recognise that certain groups were excluded from academia on the basis of race, class and gender in previous years (Archer, 2008; Clegg, 2003). However for many (for example Degn, 2018; Giroux, 2006; Henkel, 2005; Webb, 2018), these changes have resulted in an erosion or shift in the nature of academic autonomy, freedom and dissent, prompting fundamental questions around what it means to be an academic.

Despite an increasing focus on teaching practice in recent years, as Dugas et al (2020) and Fitzmaurice (2013) found, institutions, especially those described as research-intensive, still arguably privilege research over teaching. The role of the discipline comes through strongly in the literature, with Clegg (2008, p.335) suggesting that academic identities are "refracted through disciplinary ways of talking" (see also Barr and Wright, 2019; Neumann, 2001; Quinlan, 2019; Roberts, 2015). Those working in academic settings, including doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers, tend to align themselves to disciplinary research communities rather than institutional or teaching-focused communities (Clegg, 2003; Degn, 2018; Henkel, 2005; Jiang et al, 2010; Macfarlane, 2005; Neumann, 2001). Even among studies focused on learning and teaching, such as Barr and Wright (2019), Roberts (2015) and Sandi-Urena and Gatlin (2013), there is an emphasis on disciplinary knowledge and expertise, particularly as a way of establishing teacher credibility. However, the increasingly individualist nature of higher education in recent years highlighted by Archer (2008) has perhaps threatened the creation of academic communities beyond local contexts, especially in relation to teaching.

As emphasised by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), teacher identity is one part of increasingly diverse, complex and sometimes conflicting academic identities, with influences including research work (Fitzmaurice, 2013; Neumann, 2001), professional practice (Jawitz, 2009; Triantafyllaki, 2010), administration roles (Clegg, 2008) and personal characteristics including gender, class, race, age and family (Clegg, 2008) among others. Recent literature has critiqued even these categories as being too general, highlighting the complexity of academic practice and the fact that different academics with different priorities and motivations see the roles of 'teacher' and 'researcher' for example in different ways (Rosewell and Ashwin, 2019). Similarly, how an individual perceives their identity in one situation may be different from another, and equally two different people in similar contexts may cultivate different identities (Beijaard et al 2004; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) reinforce this by conceptualising the forging of professional identities as a fluid and ongoing process of construction and reconstruction, with McNaughton and Billot (2016) highlighting the negotiated nature of identity development. This does not render academic identities meaningless. Despite their fluidity, as Clegg (2008, p.336) argues, identities are not "taken off and put back on again in some superficial way but are lived as deeply committed personal projects". However, with the exception of Henkel's (2005) reference to doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers with regard to disciplinary communities, the literature around changing academic identities has not considered how this process relates to the unique context of GTAs.

A recurring theme throughout the literature is that GTAs are defined as both students and teachers in different contexts (see for example Cho et al, 2011; Collins, 2019; Keefer, 2015; Muzaka, 2009; Park, 2004; Park and Ramos, 2002). As a result, Winstone and Moore (2017)

argue that they are in a unique, transient and liminal position in their institutions. As GTA work tends to be coordinated at departmental level, their roles are often ill-defined (Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko, 2020a; Raaper, 2018). Park and Ramos (2002) acknowledge that the requirements of GTAs therefore vary, even within the same institution. Even among GTAs, conceptualisations of their roles are contentious, with Zotos et al (2020, p.963) finding that "GTAs rarely view themselves as teachers". Various benefits have been identified for GTA work, from financial assistance (see for example Park, 2004) to career progression (Muzaka, 2009; Raaper, 2018), but Park and Ramos (2002) and Winstone and Moore (2017) emphasise that GTAs also face significant challenges in balancing research and teaching priorities. Structures that require them to complete their PhD in a particular time period or lose their funding potentially lead to a greater focus on research as their PhDs progress, or limit their GTA work to that related to their immediate expertise (Jordan and Howe, 2018; Muzaka, 2009; Park and Ramos, 2002).

Due to their recent experience as students, GTAs are seen as approachable and able to show empathy with their own students (Muzaka, 2009; Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko, 2018; Winstone and Moore, 2017; Zotos et al, 2020). Muzaka (2009) and Sandi-Urena and Gatlin (2013) suggest that GTAs also regard subject expertise as important, particularly in establishing credibility and enabling them to respond to students' questions respectively, which was reflected by the student evaluations in Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko's (2018) study. However, at times, the literature is dismissive of GTA practice, focusing on issues including a limited approach of knowledge transmission (Muzaka, 2009), disinterest in theoretical underpinnings of teaching (Chadha, 2013), lower student satisfaction ratings in some areas of practice (Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko, 2018) and perceived lack of prior teaching experience (Young and Bippus, 2008). This is exacerbated by a prevailing narrative in studies such as Drewelow (2013), Kahn (2009), Muzaka, (2009), Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko (2020a), Park and Ramos, 2002 and UCU (2020) that GTAs' agency is limited, as they primarily teach sessions that have been prepared by others, are excluded from the teaching team, and therefore have little ownership over the way the curriculum is designed and taught. Interestingly, some regard this as positive, with Barr and Wright (2019) conceptualising 'support' as the provision of detailed plans, handouts and resources by module leaders, while Park and Ramos (2002) see their lack of involvement in curriculum design as beneficial to managing GTA workloads. There is a strong focus on compliance through broader discourse around 'student experience', which has led to a focus on consistency between GTAs (highlighted for example in Drewelow, 2013), and thus leaves little space for agency.

Some studies, for example Archer (2008) and Clegg (2008), highlight new academics' critiques of neoliberalism and strategies for resisting them, and there is some indication, such as in Raaper (2018), that GTAs also question the expectations others have of them. However, Archer (2008) also argues that new teachers may be more likely to adapt their identities as a result of the precarious, temporary and casual nature of their position and the need to prove their worth. This is potentially exacerbated for GTAs who may also experience pressure from supervisors to prioritise their research over teaching (Winter et al, 2015). Furthermore, as they are seen as students rather than teaching colleagues, GTAs have little influence over, and are often excluded from, departmental cultures (Gunn, 2007; Raaper,

2018; UCU, 2018, 2020; Winstone and Moore, 2017). They may well therefore accept more flexibility and uncertainty in the forging of their professional identities in comparison to senior academics.

As highlighted by Jordan and Howe (2018), the emphasis in the literature has tended to be on teaching skills and quality of GTA practice (for example Gardner and Jones, 2011), the design and evaluation of professional development programmes for GTAs (Chadha, 2013), and the benefits and challenges of GTA work (Muzaka, 2009; Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko, 2020a), rather than structural issues of workload and inadequate pay. Even though Park and Ramos (2002, p.50) discuss pay issues, they describe GTAs as "altruistic enough" to do the required work anyway, suggesting an acceptance rather than criticality of pay inequality. In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the insecurity of GTA roles (Raaper, 2018; UCU, 2018, 2020), the fact that GTAs often undertake work that they are not paid for, especially in terms of preparation, assessment and marking (Jordan and Howe, 2018; Muzaka, 2009; Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko, 2020a, Raaper, 2018), and the lack of transparency in selection processes (Park, 2004; Park and Ramos, 2002), which offer a counter-narrative to the financial benefits of GTA work. Furthermore, Raaper's (2018, p.429) Foucauldian analysis positions GTAs as "peacekeepers and mediators" who are balancing the demands of students and the stress of overworked academics resulting from the neoliberalism dominating higher education. This discussion of wider structures raises the question of the influence of institutional cultures on GTA practice, and how far they are socialised into systems that already exist. As an academic developer it is through the lens of professional development that I will explore and critique institutional processes of socialisation, focusing particularly on programmes designed for GTAs.

Institutional socialisation of new academics

According to Holstein and Gubrium (2000), Kahn (2009) and Triantafyllaki (2010), consideration of identity development, agency and teaching practice must also take into account the departmental and institutional context in which individuals are working. One of the common ways in which the dominant values of an institution around teaching are asserted, whether intentionally or not, is through professional development programmes. Colleagues leading these programmes, including myself, may see supporting those new to teaching as our main purpose, yet there is potentially a further aim, which may be implicit or explicit, to align new teachers' beliefs and practices to institutional priorities and expectations (Behari-Leak, 2017; Clegg, 2003; Gardner and Jones, 2011; Trautwein, 2018). This is exacerbated by the fact that many of these programmes are referred to by academic staff, academic developers, senior management and the literature as 'training' (see for example Bale and Moran, 2020; Drewelow, 2013; Gardner and Jones, 2011; and Young and Bippus, 2008 among others). Barr and Wright's (2019, p.150) distinction between training and professional development illustrates the significance of this language:

> Training activities tend to focus on acquiring specific knowledge or skills required for a particular task. Development, on the other hand, is the continuous expansion of skills, knowledge, and abilities aimed at long-term growth and career advancement.

However, I would argue that even this description of development is too narrow. By emphasising career advancement, Barr and Wright's (2019) definition mirrors Martin's (2017, p.8) concept of pedagogy as a "conveyor belt" that builds student learning around a restrictive set of learning outcomes and graduate attributes. When combined with the Browne Report's (2010) requirement for higher education institutions to publish data on teaching qualifications, it also corroborates Apple's (2014) observation in schools of a tension between discourses of support and development and the ways in which teachers' lives are controlled through a culture of performativity. This is reflected in the debate around the effectiveness of making such professional development programmes mandatory, with some, for example Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko (2020a, 2020b) and Park and Ramos (2002), suggesting that this underlines their value and others, such as Kahn et al (2012), arguing that it leads to participants adopting a 'tick-box' approach.

Jordan and Howe (2018) highlight the contradicting opinions among GTAs within the literature of the value and effectiveness of professional development activity. Such activity can include formal programmes (for example Chadha, 2013), peer mentoring (Bale and Moran, 2020) and support from senior colleagues (Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko, 2020b). The design of professional development programmes varies across different institutions, and they are often supplemented by, or seen as supplements to, disciplinary-oriented departmental provision (Barr and Wright, 2019; Park, 2004; Raaper, 2018). Questions have been raised about the extent of such programmes' influence on academic practice, with Chadha (2013) highlighting the tension between generic and disciplinary-based activity. Barr and Wright (2019) agree, arguing that the generic nature of professional development means that it is often ill-aligned to departmental and disciplinary contexts, and therefore fails to prepare colleagues for the reality of practice on the ground. GTAs therefore do not necessarily only learn from such programmes, instead for example preferring to draw in some cases on their experiences as students or in the classroom to inform their approach (McLean and Price, 2019; Sandi-Urena and Gatlin, 2013; Zotos et al, 2020). Concerns of academic developers also do not always align with those of their participants (Clegg, 2003; Kahn, 2009; Kahn et al, 2012). In Bale and Moran's (2020) work around peer-led sessions for GTAs for example, even though GTA facilitators appreciated the freedom they had in interpreting the curriculum set by the academic developer, they would have liked to be more involved in the initial curriculum design. The justification from the academic developer was that this would be impractical due to the "transient nature of the GTA role", yet this is clearly at odds with the views of GTAs (Bale and Moran, 2020, p.162).

Relationships with senior colleagues, particularly in terms of a lack of communication between these colleagues and GTAs, have been highlighted in some studies, such as Muzaka (2009), Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko (2020a, 2020b) and Park (2004). However, there has been little exploration around how GTAs negotiate these relationships, how they adapt their behaviour, and what this might mean for GTAs' own cultivation of professional identities or spaces for agency. Supervisors are, at best, missing from the literature in favour of the module leader and at worst, a negative influence emphasising the importance of focusing on research over teaching (Park, 2004; UCU, 2020; Winstone and Moore, 2017; Winter et al, 2015). As a result, studies such as Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko (2020b) are centred around GTAs' interactions with the module lead rather than their supervisors. Furthermore, as Zotos

et al (2020) argue, while they bring GTAs together, professional development programmes do not necessarily lead to the creation of a community of GTAs. Alternative frameworks have been proposed, such as a teaching circle (Barr and Wright, 2019) and an academic apprenticeship-style model (Gardner and Jones, 2011; Winstone and Moore, 2017), although Park (2004) argues that this would only be helpful for those pursuing an academic career.

The dismissiveness towards GTA practice highlighted in the previous section also extends to professional development. Behari-Leak (2017) offers a challenging critique that professional development programmes in general potentially contribute to the 'othering' of new teachers, if they adopt a deficit model that does not recognise the experiences and values that new teachers bring to the institution. Many GTAs already have some teaching experience, but even those that do not will bring their own nuanced backgrounds to their pedagogic encounters (Collins, 2019; Jordan and Howe, 2018; Winter et al, 2015). The power dynamics inherent in academic professional development are also more likely to be magnified for GTAs, who have far lower status than academic staff due to their temporary and precarious position within the institution (Raaper, 2018; UCU, 2018, 2020; Winstone and Moore, 2017). This is arguably exacerbated for GTAs who come from different countries and education systems.

Although Collins (2019) and Winter et al (2015) are notable exceptions, there is even less literature around international GTAs than GTAs in general and much of it, for example Cho et al (2011) and Park (2004), tends to focus on problems such as language that international GTAs might experience when teaching. Universities attract students and staff from across the world, yet international GTAs have fewer teaching opportunities in comparison to home students (Winter et al, 2015). An example of this is in science and engineering disciplines, where lecturers who have significant teaching experience in their own countries come to the UK to complete a PhD and are only offered teaching opportunities as laboratory demonstrators. While not denying the challenge of navigating an educational system that is different to the one they are familiar with, the experience that international GTAs bring with them is therefore not acknowledged or seen to be beneficial to the department or institution where ironically, significant numbers of students often come from similar countries (Collins, 2019; Winter et al, 2015). Indeed, Collins' (2019, p.10) study involving four international GTAs in a post-1992 institution found that "far from being a 'deficit' in need of instruction, these GTAs bring experiences, styles and content from their home countries to the classroom, actively and creatively developing teaching practices to collapse barriers between themselves and students". This failure to recognise the cultural knowledge that international GTAs bring, which may for example enable them to empathise with international students in a way that would not be possible for GTAs from the UK, underestimates their potential as teachers who could support a richer learning experience for their students (Antoniadou and Quinlan, 2020; Collins, 2019; Winter et al, 2015).

Despite acknowledgement of the issues around compliance, arguably some degree of socialisation is necessary to be part of any community to avoid privileging those who already come with the tacit knowledge to navigate the structures and systems they encounter (Antoniadou and Quinlan, 2020; Collins, 2019; Gair and Mullins, 2011; Gunn, 2007; Lingard, 2007; Park, 2004; Winter et al, 2015). I have some sympathy with Park and Ramos' (2002, p.50) argument that a lack of initial development activity for new academics not only means

they are less supported with their teaching practice as individuals, but also "partly legitimises a lack of support and empathy from other staff within the department". Deeper interrogation by Behari-Leak (2017) and Clegg (2003) however illustrates that by focusing primarily on the individual, these programmes can serve to shape teachers' identities in a certain way that is aligned to the status quo rather than questioning and challenging the structural and cultural processes that influence what they do. A particularly sinister example is the recommendation by Gardner and Jones (2011, p.38) for programmes aimed at GTAs that "Instructional training should align with college or university improvement priorities and goals", problematising, perhaps unnecessarily, GTAs' lack of awareness of these institutional priorities. Similarly, Darling and Staton (1989, p.234) refer to exploring "mechanisms of compliance", uncritically accepting the need for GTAs to conform to institutional norms. This managerialist language, along with their reference to GTAs acting as "service providers" and eventually becoming "partners in the firm" is far more familiar to the business world than the field of education (Darling and Staton, 1989, p.227).

Most models of both socialisation and professional development, for example Chadha (2013), Cho et al (2011), McLean and Price (2019) and Trautwein (2018), offer structured and linear frameworks. As a result, they do not acknowledge the messy and complex process of developing academic identities and enacting them in the classroom emphasised by Antoniadou and Quinlan (2020) and Todd (2001). Such an approach perpetuates the assumption highlighted by Raaper (2018, p.429) that GTAs are simply technicians or "machine factories" 'delivering' a curriculum rather than human teachers able to interpret the curriculum in their own right. This is exacerbated by the tendency of professional development programmes to emphasise models, theories and cognitive reasoning, predominantly from Western sources, and their technical application to practice (Behari-Leak, 2017). The emotional, moral and affective aspects that Akinbode (2013), Fitzmaurice (2013) and Zembylas and McGlynn (2012) highlight respectively as integral to both teaching and identity development therefore tend to be lost in such programmes. At an even more basic level, Bale and Moran (2020) stripped out theoretical underpinnings from their GTA programme to prioritise practical techniques for the classroom, with the pedagogic theory sidelined in an online toolkit. While the inclusion of practical techniques is not necessarily wrong, the affective and cognitive are not mutually exclusive (Clegg and Rowland, 2010; Fitzmaurice, 2013). Focusing solely on practical techniques aligns more to Barr and Wright's (2019) definition of narrow training than the holistic approach to development that will support the cultivation of identity and agency.

Some studies such as Chadha (2013), Cho et al (2011) and Isaacs and Parker (1997) suggest that new teachers themselves simply want 'survival' techniques that will help them to do a satisfactory job in the classroom and align their teaching to the rest of the programme, rather than critically considering issues such as establishing authority and taking on responsibility as teachers or exploring broader structural and cultural concerns. It has been argued by Bale and Moran (2020) that these 'survival' techniques are, to some extent, essential for new teachers so that they can understand how to navigate the cultures around them. Similarly, Sandi-Urena and Gatlin's (2013) study highlighted the challenges, frustration and confusion faced by GTAs who were teaching using an inquiry-based approach in the lab that did not align with their previous experience and expectations. Nonetheless, this raises a

question around whether professional development programmes should promote this narrative of teacher as technician by giving new teachers what they claim to want. I was therefore interested in exploring teaching practice beyond 'survival' techniques while also acknowledging the influence of these broader issues of socialisation, so decided to focus instead on matters of structure, culture and agency. In the next section I introduce Archer's framework which I use as a basis for considering these issues.

Realist social theory as an approach for exploring structure and agency

The first part of this literature review set out a range of key issues around academic identity, the position of GTAs within institutional contexts, and the problem of professional development as socialising new teachers into a particular way of being aligned to institutional priorities without recognising what they bring. However, as Kahn (2009) highlights, with the exception of Clegg's (2008, 2016) work and more recently that of Behari-Leak (2017), much of the literature on academic identities, such as Degn (2018), focuses on how social structures constrain academics without acknowledging the agency of colleagues themselves. Furthermore, very little relates academic identities and agency to the lived experience that has been emphasised by Zeichner and Liston (1996) as being at the heart of teaching. Identifying structural and cultural issues around socialisation alone does not necessarily shed light on how GTAs actively forge identities as teachers, and the spaces through which they might enact agency. Having set the scene for my project, I now explain how adopting a social realist approach as set out by Margaret S. Archer (1995, 2000, 2003, 2007) will enable me to explore the relationships between identity and agency for GTAs as well as possibilities for broader social change.

When writing my research questions initially, I had treated identity and agency as separate concepts. However, Archer's framework not only provides an approach to understanding identity and agency, but also sets out the relationship between them. Archer's (2000, p.3) realist social theory is a critique of what she describes as the "impoverishment of humanity" through both social theories that focus solely on the determining influences of societal structures without acknowledging the agency of individuals and, more recently, postmodern and poststructuralist thinking that reduces the world to language and discourse. She argues for the existence of both a "continuous sense of self" that is "ontologically inviolable", and "epistemologically vulnerable" personal and social identities (Archer, 2000, p.2). The notion of a continuous sense of self enables us to recognise ourselves as the same individual throughout our lifetime even as we change and develop over time (Archer, 2000, 2003). We then also cultivate unique personal and social identities by identifying what Archer (2000, p.10) terms as "ultimate concerns" through different relations with the world: our embodiment in the physical environment (natural); our performative engagement with material culture (practical); and our interactions with others (social). Therefore, while Archer acknowledges that our identities are partially socially constituted, this is not the only factor that influences their construction and her theory recognises the existence of a physical, objective world. Through these interactions, we negotiate and renegotiate our concerns, and it is the configuration of our unique set of concerns that forms our identities at a given time. Although Archer (2000, p.10) describes these concerns as "ultimate", in this thesis I have used the phrase "priority concerns" to emphasise that they are established through this process of prioritisation and therefore subject to change in different situations.

Our priority concerns are not abstract according to Archer's (2000, p.219) framework however, but lead to the creation of "projects" through which we intentionally attempt to put those concerns into practice. It is through these projects that humans are able to enact agency. There is therefore a connection between our identities (the concerns each individual prioritises) and agency (the projects each individual selects in order to live out their priority concerns).

While acknowledging human agency, Archer is nonetheless critical of the assumption that this means that individuals have complete control over what they do. Archer's (2000, p.7) work also recognises the "independent properties and powers" of structures (material systems and processes), cultures (values and belief systems) and individuals as agents. Instead of conflating the agency of individuals and the structures and cultures around them, her approach focuses on the way they "emerge, intertwine and redefine each other" (Archer and Morgan, 2020, p. 184). This interplay between structure, culture and agency is at the heart of Archer's framework, as the effects of structures and cultures can only be activated in relation to something, which, in Archer's (2003) case, is the individual's project. Structures and cultures act as conditioning rather than determining forces that potentially enable or constrain an individual's project at a given time, and their effects are mediated through human agency (Archer, 2003). For example, a teacher may wish to adapt an exercise in the classroom; a project identified from one of their priority concerns around student engagement. This project (**agency**) may be constrained by a highly detailed session plan that does not allow for any extra time to be spent on that activity (**structure**), or an expectation that all teachers should adopt the same approach (**culture**). Alternatively, the **agential** project may be enabled by a **culture** in which teachers are encouraged to share ideas of activities that they have used with their peers, or allocated time to adapt their session plans as part of their workload **structure**. Whether and how their projects are realised, adapted or abandoned, depends on how the individual reacts to the structures and cultures they encounter or perceives they might encounter (Archer, 2000, 2003, 2007). The balance may vary, so in some situations structural or cultural forces may be stronger, whereas in others, agency may play more of an influential role (Ashwin, 2008; Baker, 2019). The following diagram summarises this process so far:

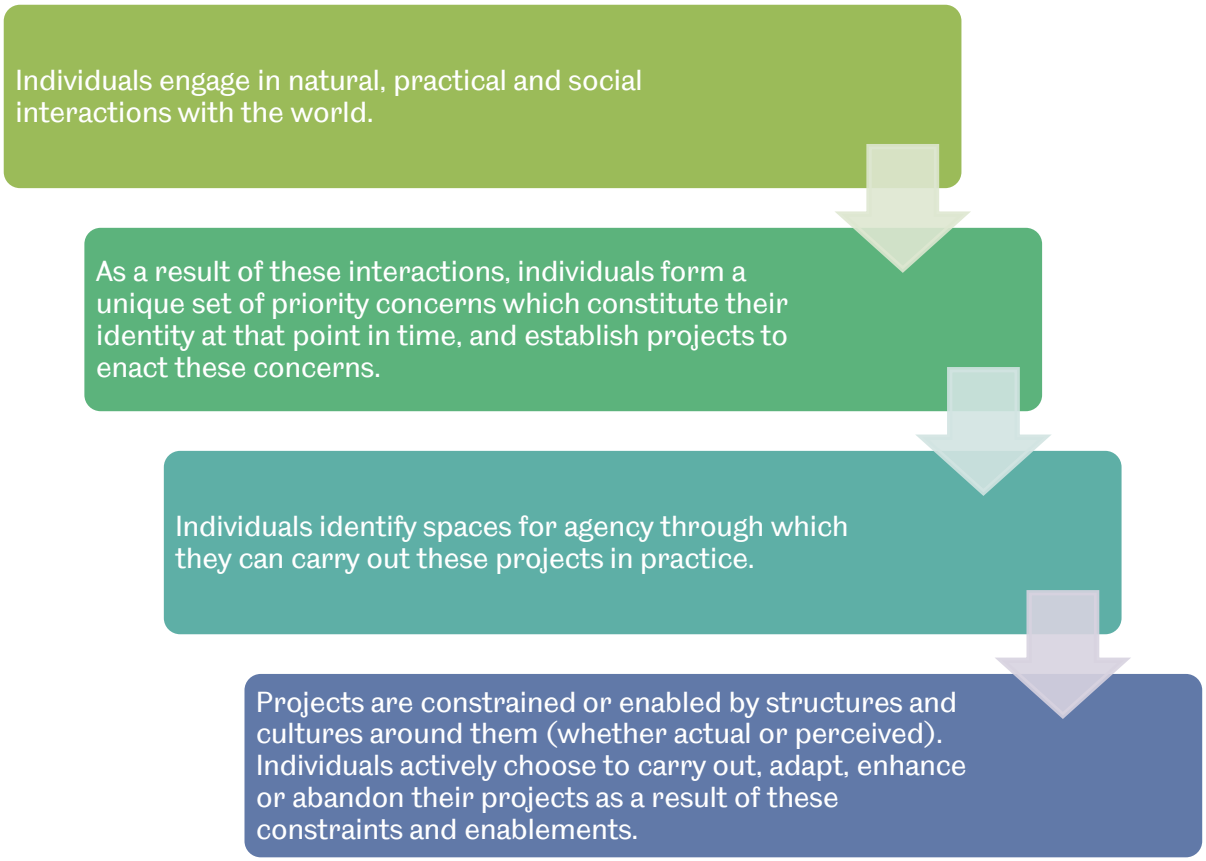


Figure 1: Flowchart to illustrate the relationship between identity and agency in Archer's (2000) framework

According to Archer (2003, p.16), we identify our priority concerns, mediate the effects of structure and culture upon agency and actively decide how to respond throughout this process using an ongoing "real and causally influential" process of reflexivity. Also known as the internal conversation or internal dialogue, this is where individuals deliberately ask questions of ourselves which we then respond to in order to make sense of what is important to us, and how this relates to the environment around us (Archer, 2007). As defined by Archer (2003, p.103), this process can encompass a range of different approaches:

> Internal dialogue is the practice through which we 'make up our minds' by questioning ourselves, clarifying our beliefs and inclinations, diagnosing our situations, deliberating about our concerns and defining our own projects.

As indicated by the terminology, while it will result in visible, external effects through the eventual enactment of projects (indeed, Archer is keen to emphasise that this should not be reduced simply to a discursive process as highlighted by the focus on causal efficacy mentioned above), reflexivity itself is an internal, subjective process carried out on an individual basis (Archer, 2003). For social realists, this internal conversation is hugely important, with Kahn (2017, p.379) arguing that a "close link exists between reflexivity and human flourishing". It is a significant part of understanding identity and agency, because there is rarely a single priority concern, so individuals actively prioritise and subordinate

among “a constellation of concerns” which may conflict with each other and require multiple approaches to achieve (Archer, 2003, p.149). Similarly, there is not one way of enacting priority concerns through projects, or indeed mediating the effects of structures and cultures (Archer, 2003). It is therefore the deliberate and active nature of reflexivity that underpins individual identity and agency as we decide what is important to us, how we might enact these values, what might constrain or enable us in doing so, and how we might extend, adapt or abandon our projects in response (Archer, 2003). For Archer (2003, p.102) this process of agency comprises three stages of active ‘discernment, deliberation and dedication’ in which, through internal conversation, we:

- identify possible concerns (discernment);
- consider their benefits and disadvantages in comparison to other concerns, the enabling or constraining forces of the surrounding structures and cultures and the potential costs of pursuing them (deliberation);
- decide which to take forward and how, while also continually revisiting their prioritisation (dedication). Like identities therefore, agency can be enacted differently in different settings and at different times by the same individual, or in different ways in the same setting by different individuals, as a result of differing internal conversations.

Reflexivity is therefore not only a cognitive process, but also an emotional endeavour as individuals attempt to resolve conflicting priorities (Archer, 2003, 2007). The internal conversation can be fallible and individuals may end up in a worse situation as a result. While Archer (2003, 2007) sets out four different types of reflexivity, I do not intend to use these for my analysis for this study. In her later work, Archer (2007; Archer and Morgan, 2020) acknowledges that individuals often use more than one reflexive mode in their internal conversations, so it feels uncomfortable and unhelpful to try to categories the complexities of teaching into strict boxes. However, the concept of reflexivity is helpful in considering how individuals weigh up the constraints and enablements that might impact on how they enact their projects and find ways to navigate around them, adapt their plans or indeed, change their projects in response (Archer, 2003, 2007).

There has been some critique, for example from Kahn et al (2012) and Kahn et al (2017), that in regarding reflexivity as individual and internal Archer underplays the influence of dialogue with others in how we prioritise our concerns. She has gone some way to addressing this more recently through her concept of collective reflexivity (Archer, 2013). Collective reflexivity is constructed through interactions with others, where individuals engage in their own internal conversations before sharing them with others (Archer, 2013). Those in the collective do not necessarily think the same, but through their interactions they create what Archer (2013, p.152) describes as “relational goods”. Like structures, cultures and agency, these have their own properties and powers, but are more than the sum of the individuals involved and cannot exist without them operating as a collective (Archer, 2013). As with the fallibility of agency, it is important to recognise that relational goods are not necessarily ‘good’ (Archer, 2013). I will return to collective reflexivity later in the chapter when discussing Archer’s work in relation to social elaboration.

Primacy of practice and notions of space in relation to agency

Archer's (2000, p.8) theory is appropriate for my project because at its heart is a focus on what she describes as the "primacy of practice", where although reflexivity is an internal process, the prioritisation of concerns and development of projects directly influences the actions of the individual. As Clegg (2008, p.329) argues:

> Identity is understood not as a fixed property, but as part of the lived complexity of a person's project.

Inspired by Clegg's (2005) theorisation of the mundane and Kahn's (2014, 2017) emphasis on the learning environment as a key site of practice, I wanted to consider the interplay between structures, cultures and individual agency through the everyday and specific pedagogic encounters of GTAs. As seen in her discussion of the internal conversation, Archer's (2003) framework does not conceptualise agency (or indeed identity) as a 'thing' to be obtained or achieved at a particular point in time, but instead regards it as an ongoing process of negotiation and renegotiation of individual priorities and projects conditioned by structures and cultures. This led me to consider how notions of space could offer insight into this process of cultivating agency in practice, which I embedded within my research questions.

Concepts of space are particularly relevant in the context of GTA practice, given the liminal and unpredictable nature of their work. Rao et al (2021, p.455) consider GTAs as "being in a temporary borderland" who find themselves continually crossing borders between student and teacher. This relates well to Archer's (2000, p.2) "epistemologically vulnerable" personal identities which are negotiated and renegotiated, but this borderland position also potentially limits the opportunities for GTAs to enact agency. In defining what is meant by 'space' in this context, I found Massey's (1999, p.264) emphasis on the "open and dynamic" nature of space helpful. For Masset (1999), space does not only refer to the physical environment, but also to social interactions between people and between people and their surroundings. Like Archer's conceptualisation of identities and agency, there is a temporal dimension to Massey's (1999) definition of space as she argues that space is constantly being created and recreated over time, both deliberately and as a result of unintended consequences. In addition, more recent work has highlighted other aspects of space, with Carter et al (2021) emphasising its unstable and political nature and Murray (2012) noting its ideological elements. When talking about space in this thesis therefore, I am referring to the physical, social, political and/or ideological spaces through which GTAs may enact agency at a particular time, including not only what they do but also what they choose to suppress or withhold.

To consider GTA identity in light of Archer's (2000) three orders highlighted above, GTAs bring their embodied sense of self into the classroom (natural), make decisions based on what happens in the classroom (practical) and engage in interactions with students and others both inside and outside the classroom (social), all of which are shaped by, and will shape, the way they view themselves. The definition of space I have articulated above aligns with and builds on this by including not only the physical space of the classroom and the social interactions that GTAs have with their students, senior colleagues and other GTAs, but also the political conflicts they find themselves in with departmental cultures and structures (including those which are tacit or unwritten) and the ways in which their ideological beliefs

and values may influence how they approach their teaching. As noted earlier, all of these elements may be different not only in different situations but also at different times. Combining ideas of space with a social realist approach therefore allows for detailed consideration of the ways in which the interplay between structures, cultures and individual agency manifests at a particular time and in a particular context.

If, as Archer (2000, 2003, 2007) argues, identity is embodied as well as material and social, the emotional, moral, physical and affective aspects of forging a professional identity as a new teacher must also be taken into account (see also Akinbode, 2013; Ghaye, 2007; Quinlan, 2019; Zembylas and McGlynn, 2012 among others). While focusing on students, Kahn's (2014) acknowledgement of uncertainty in learning and teaching, even if it is not always conceptualised negatively, is potentially exacerbated for GTAs who according to Keefer (2015) already experience imposter syndrome and confusion as they struggle to establish their identity through their doctoral research. However, if expression of emotions is discouraged or delegitimised in departmental or professional development contexts, participants may choose to either suppress what Akinbode (2013, p.70) describes as "undesirable" emotions, such as those of struggle and frustration, or, as Ghaye (2007) suggests, reshape them into an 'acceptable' narrative of overcoming adversity. A focus on the mundane decisions that teachers make in the classroom can enable exploration and validation of emotional and embodied aspects of identity construction through examination of specific interactions.

Archer's realist social theory is therefore important for my project because it brings together the elements of identity and agency in my research questions rather than treating them as two separate concepts. In doing so, Archer's framework allows for the exploration of the interplay between structures, cultures and individual agency in relation to teacher identities and practice on the ground, and acknowledges the mundane, affective, interactional and embodied aspects of teaching. This is supported by notions of 'spaces' for agency, including those which are physical, social, political, historical and ideological, which are especially important given the liminal nature of GTA experiences (Winstone and Moore, 2017) and the borderlands they occupy (Rao et al, 2021). As argued in the introduction, through its application of social realism my research adds a significant contribution to the literature and to academic development practice around supporting GTAs. However, Archer's work is not about understanding the relationships between human beings and society as an end in itself, but creating this understanding to bring about social elaboration and potential change. In the final section of this literature review I highlight how this approach enables consideration of the ways in which the forging of GTA identities and cultivation of agency contributes to the reproduction and transformation of society.

Realist social theory and social change through the morphogenetic approach

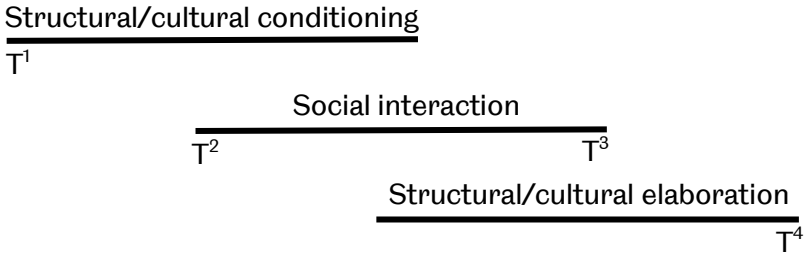
Archer (2003, p.52) argues that reflexivity does not only impact on the behaviour of the individual:

> It is our deliberations which determine what we will make of the constraints and enablements which we confront, what opportunity costs we are prepared to pay and

whether we consider it worthwhile joining others in the organised pursuit of change or the collective defence of the status quo.

For Archer (1995, p.15), human agency is part of a process of struggle to maintain (morphostasis) or transform (morphogenesis) existing social systems, the latter of which she describes as "elaboration". Rather than being passive victims of social forces therefore, through their internal conversation individual agents continuously shape and are shaped by the structures and cultures around them, and social elaboration cannot happen without their actions (Archer, 1995). As highlighted in Archer's (2003) quote above, individuals cannot cultivate elaboration on their own, but do so by forming collectivities. A focus on the mundane as conceptualised by Clegg (2005) recognises where individuals and groups perpetuate or transform existing structures, whether they are aware of this or not, and the nuanced and fallible ways in which they engage with this process. In my original research questions I had planned to focus on individual GTAs' 'resistance' to expected norms. However, through the process of engaging with Archer's framework, I realised that this was a narrow interpretation of what it means to cultivate agency. Acceptance and maintenance of the status quo is in itself agential and elaboration does not only occur as a result of resistance but is far more nuanced (Archer 2000). Similarly, I had also focused on agency of individuals in my initial research questions rather than the ways in which individuals may form collectivities to facilitate social reproduction or change. In the final part of this literature review, I explore Archer's morphogenetic approach and apply it to the context of GTA teaching in light of these changes in my thinking.

While recognising that groups may actively maintain, perpetuate or reinforce the status quo through removing or obscuring possible alternatives (morphostasis), when thinking about social elaboration Archer (1995) uses a three-stage model to explain the morphogenetic approach. This is indicated in Figure 2 which I have adapted from her work. As with Massey's (1999) definition of space, key to this model is the notion of time, represented by T^n. Structures and cultures exist before those who interact with them, social interaction between groups then happens, and as a result the structures and cultures are transformed. Following this, the structures and cultures at T^4 become the 'new' T^1 and the cycle starts again. Below I will explain each stage in turn.



(adapted from Archer, 1995)

Figure 2: Archer's morphogenetic cycle

Structural/cultural conditioning

Individuals are born into structures and cultures, which already exist as a result of previous interactions, as Primary Agents, that is, "collectivities sharing the same life chances" (Archer, 2003, p.118). At this stage, Primary Agents are unable to articulate their needs or organise for change, but nonetheless have an effect on society by virtue of existing as a group. Although societal structures and cultures do not necessarily determine what happens to individuals within a particular group, they may lead to different groups having different vested interests, and therefore tendencies towards social maintenance or social change depending on whether the status quo is advantageous to them (Archer, 2003).

Social interaction

While structural and cultural systems exist in their own right, and may contain their own internal synergies and contradictions, elaboration cannot occur without the involvement of active agents, and this requires a return to the collective reflexivity explored earlier in this chapter. At this stage, Archer (1995) argues that Primary Agents come together to form collectivities of Corporate Agents around particular interests. Unlike Primary Agents, Corporate Agents are aware of what they want from the structures and cultures around them, can articulate it, and can organise to pursue it. Where structures and cultures reinforce each other and benefit Corporate Agents, and where change may threaten their privileged position, Corporate Agents may prioritise maintaining existing structures, even if that means making small compromises to do so. Similarly, those in power may not necessarily be averse to change (Archer, 1995). As highlighted by Lundgren-Resenterra and Kahn (2019) therefore, collective reflexivity can be either performative or emancipatory. However, there is rarely one single group of Corporate Agents. Archer (1995) suggests that different groups may prioritise different aspects of the structural and cultural systems around them, perhaps creating conflict between contradictory ideas or institutions, or introducing new possibilities and alternatives that create discussion, debate and compromise. Through this process, cultures and structures themselves change, either as groups put forward their own ideas or as they bring in new ones to be integrated into existing systems.

Structural/cultural elaboration

If elaboration is successful, existing structures and cultures may be transformed or new ones may be introduced, and these then form the new T^1 for the next generation of Primary Agents. However, the outcomes of this process are often unpredictable and, due to the complexity of social interactions described above, are unlikely to align exactly with what any group intended (Archer, 1995). Indeed, as our actions are fallible, social change may not be positive or beneficial to the group whose interactions led to this elaboration (Archer and Morgan, 2020). The cycle therefore begins again as groups engage in further attempts to achieve the desired change.

Figure 1 set out above can therefore be extended to include the morphogenetic cycle as follows:

Figure 3: Flowchart to illustrate how the interplay between identity, agency, structure and culture leads to morphostasis or morphogenesis in Archer's (1995, 2000) framework

GTAs and the morphogenetic cycle

Archer (2003, p.355) herself acknowledges that "the personal powers of the agent are more effective in generating self-change than societal change". Given their liminal and precarious position in the institution, lack of influence over departmental structures and cultures and the general rise in individualism over community in higher education, GTAs may struggle to articulate their needs and organise as collectivities to cultivate morphogenesis. Like the students in Kahn's (2017) study around employability, they may therefore remain working as Primary Agents within prevailing systems. However, it is too dismissive to suggest that this means they can only engage in morphostasis. I moved away from a sole focus on resistance because as noted in Antoniadou and Quinlan's (2021), Archer's (2008) and Degn's (2018) studies, resistance is only one possible course of action among many taken by academics in response to changes in higher education. Archer (1995) also highlights a range of ways in

which Corporate Agents uphold or transform society. This might take the form of outright conflict of ideas, but it may also be through the integration of new, innovative ideas.

This is not to say that resistance may not be part of structural and cultural elaboration. Indeed, Clegg (2008, p.240) refers to "covert resistance" as a form of elaboration, where individuals may find ways to enact projects within institutional cultures that impact on others but without leading to the morphogenesis of the whole system itself, and this is helpful when thinking about the position of GTAs within higher education. They may also draw on more than one approach to cultivate social elaboration. Collins (2019) for example offers insight into situations where international GTAs draw on their natural identities, backgrounds and cultures to adopt alternative teaching approaches that challenge societal assumptions, which seems to suggest that they drew on both the innovation mentioned by Archer (1995) and Clegg's (2008) covert resistance. GTA agency therefore may not necessarily lead to macro-level social change, but may nonetheless have a morphogenetic influence on the students and colleagues they interact with at classroom level, and it is important to recognise the nuances and significance of such agential actions.

This raises the question about what spaces for agency might exist for GTAs. As suggested by Gair and Mullins (2011) and Todd (2001), the curriculum arguably acts as a force that socialises individuals into a particular way of being in many cases. For some GTAs it may therefore act as a constraining structure. However, it also potentially brings opportunities:

> Thus, do not think of curriculum as a 'thing', as a syllabus or a course of study. Instead, think of it as a symbolic, material and human environment that is ongoingly reconstructed. This process of design involves not only the technical, but the esthetic, ethical and political if it is to be fully responsive at both the societal and personal levels (Apple, 2014, p.151).

Conceptualising curriculum as praxis, a contested, negotiated and unstable set of ideas that is enacted by educators through local pedagogic encounters, albeit within particular constraints, opens up possible spaces for agency to transform existing structures and cultures (Apple, 2014; Hall and Smyth, 2016; Margolis et al, 2001; Martin and Brown, 2013; Todd, 2001). Considering the enactment of curriculum beyond what is written down allows for Kahn's (2014) unpredictability, uncertainty, fallibility and messiness in learning and teaching processes, as well as the incorporation of morality, kindness and affect in ethical pedagogic interactions between students and teachers emphasised by Akinbode (2013), Clegg and Rowland (2010), Ghaye (2007), Todd (2001) and Zembylas and McGlynn (2012) among others. For Clegg and Rowland (2010), this focus on the affective elements of curriculum may also be subversive of bureaucratic and uncaring institutional norms. As Collins' (2019, p.8) study shows, while GTAs may have been given curricula they also found space to interpret it for themselves, finding "subtle ways to make their own meanings within, and (partially) challenge the structures in which they are located". While such spaces may be "at the margins" according to Webb (2018, p.101), focusing on mundane interactions offers the opportunity to explore where GTAs may start to enact agency through pedagogical encounters in the classroom and begin to contribute to broader social elaboration (Giroux, 2006; Martin and Brown, 2013). Their agency may of course uphold particular structures and

cultures, but this potentially opens up the classroom as "the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (hooks, 1994, p.12).

Curriculum does not only refer to that which GTAs teach, but also the curriculum which underpins academic development programmes, both formal and informal. In the same way that teachers are not passive technicians delivering a curriculum, as Apple (2014), Margolis et al (2011) and Giroux (2006) suggest, learners are not passive recipients of that curriculum either. This is also the case for GTAs engaging with professional development activity. Academic developers therefore also need to embrace the messiness of teaching practice and allow space for GTA agency in their classrooms:

> At the same time as pedagogy demands that its subjects 'learn to become', in practice there is a great deal of uncertainty and unpredictability to the pedagogical enterprise. People bring a host of idiosyncracies and unconscious associations that enable them to resist, transform and create symbolic attachments which pedagogy cannot predict or control (Todd, 2001, p.436).

Todd (2001) places emphasis on what learners (in my case, GTAs) bring to the pedagogic encounter rather than shaping them in light of particular expectations, and the role of the teacher (here, academic developer) as an Other who can build on their existing knowledge and experiences. As Martin and Brown (2013, p.382) suggest, we all may be complicit in upholding existing deficit models through "pragmatic acquiescence and even consent", including academic developers and GTAs themselves. If academic developers question our own identities, acknowledge the structural and cultural forces influencing how we design and teach our curricula, and use our own classrooms as spaces for unpredictability and resistance, we may start to model a way of being for new teachers that is grounded in Giroux's (2006, p.31) political and moral practice of developing critical citizens who can contribute to social transformation:

> Pedagogy at its best is about neither training nor political indoctrination; instead it is about a political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills and social relations that enable students to expand the possibilities of what it means to be critical citizens while using their knowledge and skills to deepen and extend the possibilities of living in a substantive and inclusive democracy.

Realist social theory can therefore not only highlight spaces for agency among GTAs, but also allow for an exploration of how their agency contributes to morphostasis and morphogenesis within their teaching context. In doing so, the application of Archer's (1995, 2000, 2003) theory can challenge those who potentially perpetuate existing inequalities, including colleagues in academic development, to advocate for broader structural and cultural elaboration as a collective.

Furthermore, a move towards morphogenesis also requires the "re-imagining and reworking of identity, knowledge and representation" (Martin, 2017, p.2). One way of considering this is through exploration of future or ideal selves, both individual and collective (Lauriala and Kukkonen, 2005). These are less well acknowledged in Archer's (1995, 2000, 2003, 2007) earlier work other than in relation to how they impact on present concerns, and while she discusses utopias in her 2019 article, this is more focused on the morphogenesis of

structures and cultures than individual agents. Notions of future selves in UK higher education tend to be embedded within the employability agenda (Clegg, 2011b; McArthur, 2011). However, while Clegg (2008, p.339) emphasises the ways in which identities are enacted through engagement with the real world, she also argues that higher education institutions are "imaginary spaces as well as lived and experienced ones" and that "[i]n the negotiation of identity these imaginaries are important". This is particularly relevant for GTAs who are often experimenting with new identities as they take on teaching roles (Winstone and Moore, 2017). By emphasising the aspirations and ideals of new teachers rather than existing structures and cultures, the focus of academic development shifts from survivalist approaches to teaching to the emancipatory and transformative potential of higher education set out by Giroux (2006).

Conclusion

In exploring the literature around academic identity, socialisation and realist social theory, several issues have emerged. Academic identity is complex, and GTAs occupy a unique, liminal and precarious position within the borderlands of higher education institutions (Rao et al, 2021). Archer's (1995, 2000, 2003, 2007) work offers a way of making sense of this complexity by highlighting the links between identity and agency, the interplay between agency, structure and culture, and the ways in which individual agents mediate the influences of structures and cultures on their projects through internal conversation. My intention is not to erase or minimise the inequalities that disempower GTAs within institutions, nor to place entire responsibility on GTAs for the way they teach, but instead to explore the physical, social, political, historical and ideological spaces through which GTAs are able to construct their identities as teachers and enact agency in the classroom. Furthermore, Archer's (1995) framework offers insights into how individuals reproduce or work towards transforming the structures and cultures around them by forming collectivities. To support GTAs in this process requires academic developers to think critically about our own assumptions and how we might create spaces for GTA identity and agency. This is encapsulated in Todd's (2001, p.435) recognition of the power of pedagogy to bring about social change, and her call for ethical pedagogic interactions between students and teachers:

> On the one hand, it [pedagogy] touches on the hope that people can think differently, can change the way they relate to each other, and can form new understandings of themselves and the world that makes possible the very act of teaching and learning…On the other hand, the demand for 'learning to become' carries with it a great burden – for, if pedagogy is about the becoming of the subject then it can become a tool for the most oppressive ends.

The importance of practice and lived experience comes through strongly in the literature, both around teaching practice and realist social theory, yet as Ashwin (2008) argues, in higher education there are very few studies that incorporate methodologies that allow this to be examined. To inform the methodology for this project that could enable the exploration of practice on the ground, I looked at research conducted in educational settings beyond higher education. The way in which these have influenced the methodology for this study will be explored further in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

My methodology for this project was framed by two underpinning principles, both of which attempt to respond to challenges raised within the literature review. Social realism emphasises identity and agency as being lived out through interactions between individuals and the world. The methods I used therefore focused on the classroom as an arena of practice (Kahn, 2014). Secondly, as casualised staff, GTAs are a diverse group who have been typically marginalised from institutional discourses and academic research around higher education classroom teaching (Gunn, 2007; Raaper, 2018). In addition, having never been a GTA myself, I was acutely aware that as a more experienced teacher I would be imposing my own values and perceptions on the findings, analysis and representation of their experiences to some extent (Byrne, 2017). To avoid marginalising them further, I therefore wanted to develop a methodology that could foreground multiple GTA perspectives in ways that were meaningful for them, while also explicitly incorporating my critical perspective as researcher.

Initially I aspired to adopt a methodology of co-production, as its focus on knowledge creation among marginalised groups through lived experience seemed ideally suited to my research questions (Bell and Pahl, 2018). Furthermore, the emphasis within Bell and Pahl's (2018) co-production on social justice and transformation beyond the structures and cultures that already exist seemed to align well with realist social theory. The implementation of this approach within my project was far from simple however, due to the time limits of my thesis, the practicalities of GTA teaching, and the myriad competing demands on GTAs shown in the literature review. I therefore cannot claim a methodology of co-production, but its ethos of considering power dynamics and establishing trust has influenced the approach I have taken in this project (Bell and Pahl, 2018).

In this chapter, I outline the rationale underpinning my methodology. After offering a brief overview of the methodology for context, I discuss how I recruited my participants, the methods I used for data creation and analysis, and the adaptations I made at each stage due to unforeseen events and the changing nature of the project. Finally, I explore the ethical considerations for the project.

Rationale for the methodology: stimulated recall

Despite Clegg's (2008) definition of identity as being lived out in the world and Kahn's (2014, 2017) focus on the learning environment as a key site of practice, Clegg and Stevenson (2013) note that very few empirical studies in higher education utilise methodologies that explore day-to-day teaching practice, instead using self-reporting methods such as questionnaires and interviews. While these can be helpful in exploring the ideas, motivations and conceptualisations that participants see as shaping their teaching practice, as they are based on individual perceptions participants can be unaware of, or find it difficult to critique, broader structures and cultures (Ashwin, 2008). Argyris and Schön's (1996) work discusses the discrepancy between what teachers say they will do in the classroom and what they actually do. Even where teachers attempt to adopt certain approaches in principle, these may not turn out as they expect as seen in Ellsworth (1989) and Lal's (2000) accounts of their practice. Although Winstone and Moore (2017) and Collins (2019) offer a strong argument for the richness of their data gathered through activity-based methods, these are

one-off snapshots of what GTAs were prepared to share at a single point in time (acknowledged as a limitation in Zotos et al, 2020). Some participants may reflect on their practice over a longer period through such interviews and activities, but this is not purposefully built into the methodology design so is dependent on the responses and interpretations of individuals (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Where temporal aspects have been considered, for example in McLean and Price's (2019) discourse analysis of new academics' assessments on a professional development programme or Trautwein's (2018) interviews of participants 9 and 21 months after the end of their programme, these are still removed from the day-to-day practice that is central to realist social theory.

From a practical perspective, interviews cannot take place during teaching sessions, because this would prevent the teacher from doing their job, so they have to be conducted retrospectively and away from the classroom setting (Roller, 2016; Rowe, 2009). Cotton et al (2010) suggest that participants themselves may not be aware of what is happening in the classroom, may see everyday occurrences as unimportant, and may post-rationalise or struggle to remember elements of their experience. Excluding the classroom space from the research means that the subconscious, nuanced and mundane encounters within teaching sessions that Clegg (2005) regards as sites of teacher agency are rarely acknowledged, and therefore easy to miss. As Ashwin (2008, p.152) highlights, a focus on the mundane therefore ties in with social realism:

> Studying specific incidents can give us a sense of a particular configuration of structural and agentic factors, configurations that we can compare over time and between situations.

This is especially relevant for GTAs, who, as raised in the literature review, may not have much influence over curriculum design but may nonetheless enact agency in the classroom itself.

Reliance on interviews alone therefore did not seem to be the most appropriate method for gaining insight into the practical, lived experience underpinning my research questions. As a result, I turned to the wider educational literature to explore alternative approaches for researching classroom teaching. Microteaching (where participants teach a short session to their peers in a safe space before receiving feedback) is popular in developing schoolteachers and increasingly used in professional development in higher education as seen in Bale and Moran (2020), Brent et al (1996), Golightly (2010) and Roller (2016). However, from a research perspective, classroom practice has been observed far more in other education settings, for example Hohti and Karlsson (2014) and Roller (2016), than higher education. Few reasons have been given for this – perhaps observations are less common within higher education practice outside of professional development programmes, or university teachers are (understandably) less willing to be observed in the climate of perceived threats to academic freedom and increased performativity set out in the introduction.

Nonetheless, as my research questions focus on practice, observations allow for an exploration of specific pedagogic interactions on the ground as well as more general influences on teaching, the combination of which is at the heart of social realism. They move

beyond solely relying on the participant's interpretation, memory and awareness of practice to include aspects that they may not notice or may see as unimportant, drawing on both recurring elements and those that are one-off and specific to a particular situation and time (Cohen et al, 2011; Jones and Somekh, 2005). However, while Cotton et al (2010) claim that observation can limit bias by positioning the researcher as objective and detached, I was conscious of how my decisions about what I chose to observe and what I ignored, as well as situations that I simply did not notice, were influenced by my own epistemological and ontological stance (Ball, 1984; Cohen et al, 2011; Jones and Somekh, 2005). Furthermore, I recognised that if I observed participants without allowing them to share their perspectives of what was happening, only my interpretation would be represented. I was therefore keen to incorporate some opportunities for participant reflection, which, unlike observation, is identified by Chadha (2013) as common in professional development in higher education and according to Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) supports identity creation and enactment in practice.

I therefore selected a stimulated recall approach, as seen in Baker and Lee (2011), Rowe (2009) and Triantafyllaki (2010) where an artefact acts as a prompt for discussion with the participant, because it offered the potential to bring together the benefits of both interviews and observations. In my case, the observations acted as the 'artefact'. Inspired by Hampshire et al's (2014) and Mahoney's (2007) studies, I incorporated stages before the observations to establish rapport with participants and explore their backgrounds, and afterwards to enable them to influence the analysis and interpretation of the data. Finally, drawing on Caine et al's (2013) and Riessman's (2008) work, I adopted an approach of narrative analysis throughout my research design to represent participants' lived experience, value their diverse experiences and offer insight into the interplay between individual agency and the structures and cultures around them. My methodology comprised three stages:

1. Concept mapping
2. Observations and reflective discussion
3. Narrative analysis and production of fictional narratives

In light of my attempt to bring in elements of co-production where possible, I was keen to build flexibility into the project design to allow participants to shape it, so did not attempt to 'fix' all aspects of the methodology at the outset (Ball, 1984; Bell and Pahl, 2018). I therefore outline below not only my planned approach for each stage and the rationale underpinning it, but also how it was adapted as the project progressed. Firstly however, I discuss the recruitment of my participants, which provided thought-provoking insights into the experiences of GTAs from the beginning.

Participant recruitment

Although my research questions refer to GTAs as a collective, in recognising through the literature review and my informal discussions with GTAs that they are not a homogeneous group, I designed this project to be open to a diverse range of participants. Rather than trying to draw out generic themes across a large number of participants, it seemed more appropriate to work with a small group in depth to explore the nuances and complexities of their practice encapsulated in my research questions. Given the anticipated variety of

influences on how they perceived their role and agency, I planned to adopt purposive sampling, as seen for example in Clegg (2008), Kahn (2009), Kahn et al (2017), Rosewell and Ashwin (2019) and Winter et al (2015), to deliberately select participants from a range of backgrounds, disciplines and teaching contexts, as well as different genders, ages and nationalities. The design of my project therefore reflected my values in foregrounding and valuing the diversity of teaching identities and experiences that are often overlooked in the literature and higher education learning and teaching discourses.

As my research questions were around the development of identity, I wanted to work with those who were new to teaching. However, as set out in the literature review and from my conversations with GTAs I was aware that the routes to becoming a GTA and the experiences they brought with them were varied. There are many GTAs for example who have taught in their home countries or other educational settings (for example schools or colleges), yet whose stories are rarely heard. I therefore defined 'new to teaching' as those with less than two years' experience teaching specifically in UK higher education, which offered a boundaried definition while allowing for diversity of experience. Furthermore, this reflected the temporary position of GTAs within the institution, in theory giving time for them to participate in the whole project before completing their PhD.

Unlike ethnographic approaches to observation in other educational settings, such as Hohti and Karlsson (2014), Roller (2016), Rowe (2009) and Triantafyllaki (2010), GTAs teach at specific times during the week, so I would be dropping in for individual sessions. As a single observation would only provide a limited snapshot of the participants' teaching practice, I wanted to observe each participant several times to create data and reflections from different teaching encounters. This was not an attempt to achieve the 'reliability' and 'objectivity' that Baker and Lee (2011) and Cotton et al (2010) strive for, as any number of observations would still only provide a partial view of teaching practice, but instead would allow me to explore the different spaces where opportunities for agency might occur, as well as any change that might happen over time (Hohti and Karlsson, 2014). Even though the sessions could be in different contexts, on different modules and with different student cohorts, the requirement for GTAs to be teaching several times excluded those with limited teaching opportunities. While I did not wish to devalue their experiences as teachers, in order to explore the different ways in which teaching identities and agency inform classroom interactions in the depth needed to respond to my research questions I therefore set a requirement that participants taught at least three sessions during the study period.

I emailed the institutional GTA list in early December 2018 with an open invite to participate in the project if they met the above eligibility criteria, but received no responses. This could have been for several reasons, for example that GTAs felt they did not have anything to contribute to the research; that they were uncomfortable with the prospect of being observed; or that they simply did not have their teaching timetables for the next semester at that point. While I had planned in time to establish the trust with participants that was seen as so important by Hampshire et al (2014) and Mahoney (2007) once they had signed up, like Mahoney (2007) at this point I realised that it needed to be there before the project started. I was due to teach a series of face-to-face workshops for GTAs in late January and early February 2019 which, while close to the start of the semester, nonetheless allowed me to build some rapport with potential participants.

Following promotion of the project at those workshops, I received three responses from eligible participants. Although this number was lower than anticipated, their demographic data was as diverse as I would have selected if purposive sampling had been necessary:

Table 1: Participant demographics

	Gina	Arthur	Ahmed
Gender	Female	Male	Male
Nationality	South Asia	UK	Middle East and North Africa
Faculty	Science	Social Sciences	Engineering
Teaching context	Laboratory, Level 1 undergraduate (one module, one lab per week)	Seminar, Level 1 undergraduate (one module, one seminar repeated four times in a single day with different cohorts per week)	Computer laboratory, Level 2 undergraduate (one module, two labs total) and postgraduate taught (two modules, two labs total for one and four labs total for the other)
Approx numbers of students taught in a single session	60	9-12	100
Teaching experience	None	Had taught in the University the previous semester, and in a college while completing a PGCE	Had taught for six years in his home country

It is important to acknowledge the voices that are missing from this list, and therefore may not be represented in this study. There was no representation from the arts or medical faculties. Similarly, some GTAs are employed to teach academic study skills or research skills in transdisciplinary workshops open to students from across the institution, whereas all of the participants in my project were teaching in their discipline and department. Finally, while I am aware through informal conversations that project supervision for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students is sometimes conducted by GTAs, none of the participants in my study engaged in this type of teaching.

The flexibility I had built into the project meant that I was able to respond to the different contexts in which the three participants were teaching. In the next sections I discuss how I approached each stage of my stimulated recall methodology, and adapted them in light of the needs of the individual participants and their students.

Concept mapping

I began with a concept mapping session (see Appendix 1 for full session plan), where I introduced the project, set expectations around the separation of my 'day job' and my role as researcher as highlighted by Brannick and Coghlan (2007), and answered participant questions. The main part of the session comprised a guided concept mapping exercise aimed at helping participants to explore the complexities of their identities, and identify potential structures or cultures that might interplay with agency in light of Archer's framework (McMillan and Gordon, 2017). Their ideas would act as a prompt for further discussion later in the research process. Originally, I had planned to meet with participants as a group. However, because they signed up near the start of the semester, had limited teaching opportunities and availability, and my availability was also limited, it was impossible to find a time when we could all meet before the pilot observations. I therefore met with them individually, which meant that the sharing of alternative perspectives between participants in different disciplines and the establishing of a community of learning that I had hoped for was not possible.

Unlike McMillan and Gordon (2017) who created concept maps for participants, I asked a series of open questions to prompt participants to make the map for themselves. While my influence as a researcher could be found in my questions, this concept mapping stage meant that later discussions and analysis could at least in part be informed by how participants saw their roles, rather than solely relying on my preconceptions from my experience of working with GTAs (Bell and Pahl, 2018; Hohti and Karlsson, 2014). I asked for example "What word/words would you use to describe what you do at the University?", which acknowledged that participants may not regard themselves as teachers and enabled them to identify how they would like their teaching role to be described. I needed to continually prompt participants to write down their responses on the flipchart paper, as they tended to answer my questions verbally, which perhaps guided their concept maps more than I had initially hoped. I chose not to audio record the concept mapping, because I was concerned that recording them would be detrimental to establishing the necessary rapport before I observed them (Hampshire et al, 2014; Mahoney, 2007). However, I also took field notes of anything that was not captured in the concept maps that I read out to participants before they left the room to check that I was not misrepresenting them (Baker and Lee, 2011; Bell and Pahl, 2018).

Observations and reflective discussions

The second part of my stimulated recall methodology was to carry out observations, which were designed to encapsulate the primacy of practice and diversity of teaching experiences at the heart of my study. To offer them some control over the experiences they wanted to represent, participants selected the three sessions to be observed. Observations took place over a single semester, as the GTAs had no guarantee of teaching beyond this timeframe and two were likely to complete their PhDs before the end of my project. The observations also had to fit around the requirements of my full-time job where the new senior management team was far less supportive of my project than the previous team, which restricted my availability (Clouder et al, 2020). Due to the unique nature of each participant's teaching context and the potential that Baker and Lee (2011) identify for them to see observations as high stakes or judgemental, I followed Baker and Lee's lead by conducting a pilot observation with each GTA. This enabled me to familiarise myself with the rhythms of the teaching

environment, and the teacher and students with the process of being observed (Baker and Lee, 2011; Cohen et al, 2011; Jones and Somekh, 2005).

The pilots enabled me to consider the elements to focus on with each participant, establish trust, and identify ways of mitigating issues that might occur in the physical space of the classroom (Baker and Lee, 2011; Ball, 1984; Mahoney, 2007). These ranged from the significant (for example, I tried to 'hide' behind students at the back of the room, but Arthur found this distracting and asked me to sit at the front) to the trivial (such as the lack of space to store my handbag during Ahmed's lab sessions, and where to stand in Gina's lab so I did not block the equipment stores!). Each pilot was followed by a short debrief with the participant in which we discussed what had and had not worked, and how I should approach future observations. Through the debriefs I also provided limited guidance for participants where appropriate, such as reassuring Gina that she did not need to explain to me what was happening with the experiment (Baker and Lee, 2011; Blease, 1983).

One of the most interesting and valuable methodological findings that came out of the pilots was around how others in the sessions responded to my presence in line with Baker and Lee (2011) and Blease's (1983) experiences. Although student behaviour may have changed as a result of the observation, I was keen to limit disruption to their learning experience (Baker and Lee, 2011; Blease, 1983; Cotton et al, 2010; Rowe, 2009). I assumed this would primarily be an issue for Arthur's seminars rather than Gina or Ahmed's lab classes. However, wearing one of the spare demonstrator lab coats (which were a different colour to those worn by students) when observing Gina caused confusion among students, who then asked me for help. After discussion with Gina we agreed that I did not need to wear a lab coat for future sessions. Furthermore, each of Gina's lab sessions was introduced by a lecturer, and as I had worked with most of them in my professional role, it was natural for them to come up and talk to me during the observation. I therefore had to find ways of politely refocusing on the observation. I was conscious that my presence may cause participants themselves to behave differently, either as a result of nerves or to 'impress' me, but they also 'used' my insider status (Baker and Lee, 2011; Jones and Somekh, 2005; Rowe, 2009). Although I should not have been surprised given my role, I was unprepared for all three participants to ask me what I thought of their teaching after their pilots. To avoid them misinterpreting a decline to give feedback as them having done something 'wrong', I provided brief, constructive feedback as a 'benefit' of taking part, but only when they specifically asked me.

All three participants selected sessions from a single module for the observations. Originally, I planned to observe sessions from different weeks to allow time for the reflective discussions after each, and this happened with Gina and Ahmed. However, in the debrief after the pilot, Arthur commented on the way that he adapted his sessions throughout the day depending on students' responses to his teaching. As GTAs including Arthur are often employed to teach large core modules with repeated seminars, I agreed to observe different sessions on the same day followed by an extended reflective discussion because it seemed a valuable opportunity to explore the implications of this particular teaching situation. Furthermore, I had to adapt to the changing circumstances of Gina's teaching. She emailed me the day before her first observation to say that while the lab leader was still happy for me to observe, she would be invigilating an assessment rather than engaging in the type of lab demonstration work that I had observed in the pilot. Similarly, her final lab session, which we

had planned that I would observe, was cancelled at short notice, so I only conducted two observations of her practice. As with Arthur, I decided that these were experiences of GTA teaching worth exploring rather than silencing.

Initially, I intended to give participants the choice of whether to record the observation through video or written notes. I had been keen to explore the use of video because, while not removing researcher bias, it can offer the opportunity for the observer (and participant) to return to the setting more than once thus enabling more in-depth discussion of complex teaching practices through different lenses (Roller, 2016). This removes the reliance on participant and researcher memory, allowing for exploration of situations that may not have been immediately drawn out in the moment, and potentially providing the participant with more control about what was discussed (Brent et al, 1996; Cohen et al, 2011; Roller, 2016; Rowe, 2009). However, unlike in Roller's (2016) study, observations in general, let alone video observation, were not widely used in the institution where the research was taking place. I was therefore concerned that video recording might be anxiety-provoking, especially for GTAs at such an early stage of their career (Rowe, 2009). Furthermore, in contrast to schools where a teacher stays in the classroom all day, for example Hohti and Karlsson (2014) or microteaching where the sessions are 'set up' for this purpose, such as in Bale and Moran (2020), teachers in higher education teach in the rooms that are available to them. The time needed to set up recording equipment would therefore be too disruptive, and for Gina and Ahmed's large classes it would be impossible to pick up both the one-to-one interactions between GTAs and students and the dynamic of the room as a whole (Cohen et al, 2011).

I therefore decided not to offer the option of video recording to participants, and turned towards methods of recording observations via written notes. Although I could see the value of Cho et al (2011) and Roller's (2016) structured tools, in light of my commitment to an ethos of co-production and social realism's focus on the mundaneness of practice, I was reluctant to impose a formal framework onto the observation so instead adopted an unstructured approach (Cohen et al, 2011; Jones and Somekh, 2005). My notes had to be handwritten as both Gina and Ahmed moved quickly around the large labs, and my tablet with keyboard would be too unwieldy. Inspired by Fashanu's (2017) use of cartoons, I complemented my use of the written word with diagrams that illustrated particular relationships, configurations of students, and the positioning of participants in the room (Appendix 2). Each participant also shared with me examples of materials such as workbooks, session outlines and slides which I cross-referenced with points raised in the reflective discussions.

The observations however, were only part of the methodology I adopted. Baker and Lee (2011, p.1441) define stimulated recall as:

> a type of retrospective verbal report, in which participants receive a stimulus – typically a segment of an audio/video recording or a written transcript of a particular teaching event involving the participant – and then attempt to recount their cognitions (i.e., thoughts or decision-making rationale) at the time the event took place.

Following each observation, I planned to send each participant typed notes that would act as this stimulus before meeting with them to discuss the session in line with Baker and Lee's (2011) definition above. These reflective discussions were important in ensuring that I worked, at least to some extent, collaboratively with participants to make sense of what I had observed and understand their perspective on what had happened during the sessions (Baker and Lee, 2011). However, Arthur's schedule meant that he needed to meet directly after his session, and Ahmed wanted to meet as soon as possible so that what had happened in the classroom would be fresh in his mind. It was therefore not feasible to send typed notes before the reflective discussions, so I used my unstructured, handwritten notes and the concept maps to write out a list of key words and phrases on flipchart paper. I provided a short verbal explanation of what had prompted each word or phrase at the start of our meeting and invited participants to refer to them during the reflective discussions. This approach may have compromised the co-production ethos that I aspired to by leading the participants to focus on some aspects of the session and omit others based on my observations, assumptions and knowledge (Ashwin, 2008; Clegg and Stevenson, 2013; Cohen et al, 2011). However, this would have been the case even if I had shared fully typed notes as planned, and the use of words rather than full sentences or detailed description potentially enabled more flexibility in how participants interpreted them.

Nonetheless, I also attempted to mitigate some of these issues through the way I facilitated the reflective discussions themselves. In exploring narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlight the spectrum of approaches to interviews, from a structured, researcher-led strategy where the researcher has identified questions in advance, to a participant-led approach where participants are given space to reflect in their own way. Indeed, Rowe (2009) argues that for stimulated recall, it is important for the researcher to relinquish control in the discussions to allow participants to interpret the stimulus in a way that is meaningful to them and so that the conversations can act as a springboard for exploration around broader concerns. Furthermore, according to Cohen et al (2011), structured interviews are better suited to exploring comparisons between participants, whereas unstructured discussions are more appropriate for highlighting the diverse, individual nature of teaching practice that I was so keen to focus on for this study. As a result, while I had the list of words and phrases that acted as a stimulus, my questioning approach was relatively open, beginning with a prompt along the lines of "Tell me what happened in the session". I then let the participants speak, occasionally asking for clarification or more information about something they had said that was particularly interesting in relation to the observation in line with Cohen et al's (2011) reference to prompting and probing questions, but mostly letting them take the conversation in a way that suited them. Participants referred to the lists to varying extents, with Gina going through the prompts in order and Arthur barely mentioning them at all. Although in my case the observations were used as prompts for the discussions, as found by Baker and Lee (2011) and Rowe (2009), in practice the conversations with all three participants were wide-ranging and also incorporated issues that they were experiencing beyond the classroom.

In line with Archer's (2003, 2007) emphasis on the ongoing nature of the internal conversation, the discussions after each observation allowed for participants' changing perspectives on their teaching over time, rather than one interview which would have

provided a snapshot of their thoughts at a given moment. While there was a risk that both I and the participants overlooked something important or gave a particular issue too much weight, as set out by Ashwin (2008)these discussions enabled both exploration of the specific incidents, and the broader influences that might be affecting a particular decision. The reflective discussions were audio recorded to allow me and the participants to engage fully in the discussion and to inform the analysis and production of individual narratives. As with the concept mapping I took additional notes of insightful comments made by participants outside of the recording and checked them with participants before they left the room.

This section has outlined the first two stages of my stimulated-recall methodology. The third stage was to establish a robust framework for analysing and representing the data.

Narrative analysis and production of fictional narratives

In thinking about the most appropriate way to analyse my data, I found Caine et al's (2013, p.575) rationale for narrative analysis to be helpful:

> we see experience as lived in the midst, as always unfolding over time, in diverse social contexts and in places, and as co-composed in relation.

By highlighting lived experience, this definition of narrative analysis has clear parallels with the focus on identities and agency and framework of realist social theory underpinning my study. As noted by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), Beijaard et al (2009), Holstein and Gubrium (2000) and Tamboukou (2008) among others, narratives are one of the key ways that individuals and groups construct our identities and make meaning of experiences, and offer the opportunity to represent internal conversations. They can take a variety of forms, from Akinbode's (2013) journal entries to the use of poetry by Byrne (2017) and Quinlan (2019). Actively valuing diversity of experience was central to the ethos framing my project, so it seemed more suitable to prioritise an analytical approach based on narrative over thematic analysis initially, as thematic analysis would break up the different elements of the story, obscure differences and oversimplify the nuances of teaching (Cohen et al, 2011; Riessman, 2008). Having created the data with participants, I listened to each recording all the way through, cross-referenced them with my observation notes and other materials, and made a list of the possible stories that could be drawn from each, which I shared with participants for approval before starting to write. I then conducted the auditory equivalent of a 'close reading' of the stories I had identified. I listened to each several times, writing out the key elements of the text by hand and annotating them with analytical comments, both in terms of their content, meaning and the way they were told but also any broader thoughts that I had as I was listening to them (Appendix 3) (Riessman, 2008). Finally, I listened to each recording again to ensure that I had not obscured any wider points from the discussion as a whole. This process ensured that the stories remained intact at this stage.

In recognising that "life is magical, complex and multifaceted", the representation of experience in my study is set out through an anthology of short stories with accompanying footnotes offering contextual analysis, which are displayed in the next chapter (Rinehart, 1998, p.201). By creating fictionalised composite stories inspired by ethnography and critical race theory, for example Gillborn (2010), Sikes and Piper (2010) and Solórzano and Yosso

(2002), I hope to evoke meaning that can provide insights into the diverse ways that GTAs construct identities and find spaces for agency in mundane classroom encounters, while also acknowledging the structures and cultures that enable and constrain them at different times and in different situations. While I explored the possibility of adopting a post-qualitative approach to data analysis given the nature of the anthology, this was not designed as a post-qualitative study from the start, and adopted observation and discussion rather than post-qualitative and experimental methodologies (St Pierre, 2014). Indeed, given this project unashamedly centres on human identity in the context of lived experiences, it seemed more appropriate to return to Archer's realist social theory as a basis for analysis.

Caine et al's (2013, p.575) focus on "experience as lived in the midst" struck me as especially relevant for my project. As participants had developed their identities and practice in some form before the project started, and will continue to do so after it concludes, an anthology of short stories allows for the creation of narratives *in medias res* (Caine et al, 2013; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The anthology therefore respects the fact that participants' lives are not experienced in the clear and coherent way usually seen within academic writing (Taylor et al, 2011). For Byrne (2017), narrative analysis encourages the representation of the messiness and complexity of human identities, agency and learning and teaching discussed in the literature review. In doing so, narrative offers connections where appropriate but also leaves space for non-linear (Taylor et al, 2011), emotional (Kara, 2003; Mahoney, 2007; Quinlan, 2019; Sherwood, 2020), embodied (Summerscales, 2010; Tamboukou, 2008) or confusing (Hohti and Karlsson, 2014) aspects of participants' lives. Reading through the anthology once I'd written the stories, I also felt it was important to include the points in time where I met the participants, in order to introduce them in a way that highlighted that I was entering their worlds (Richardson and Lockridge, 1998).

Similarly, the anthology also fits in with my epistemological beliefs based on Archer's framework that different individuals may have different priority concerns in different contexts at different times, because it allows for "rival musings and interpretive openings" (Gallagher, 2011, p. 52). Setting out an anthology of short stories therefore offered me the opportunity to highlight multiple experiences and perspectives in the non-hierarchical manner advocated by Byrne (2017) and Taylor et al (2011) which is especially relevant to the heterogeneity, complexity and contradiction in academic identities discussed in the literature review. When I started the project, I had hoped that narrative analysis would enable me to foreground the diverse voices of GTAs as a marginalised group, and to a certain extent storytelling can do this (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). However, as argued in Caine et al's (2013) work, narratives are crafted through interactions between participants and researcher. Mus (2012) speaks of the challenge of "ventriloquism", where the researcher selects and composes narratives that back up what they wish to say in the name of 'giving voice' to marginalised participants. It is therefore more appropriate for me to talk about representing their experiences rather than 'giving voice' to them.

As Hohti and Karlsson (2014, p.558) highlight, "fictitious characters and landscapes can function as stages for important processes of 'real', lived worlds". Due to my ontological and epistemological standpoint, while I wanted to ground the narratives in Clegg's (2005) mundaneness of practice and illustrate both individual agency and surrounding structures and cultures, like Mus (2012) and Rinehart (1998) I am not claiming to represent facts, events

and people as they really happened but as a meaningful representation of experience. Tamboukou (2008) suggests that even when participants are involved in the construction of stories, they will leave out details and tell the narrative from a particular perspective, whether intentionally or without realising, at a particular historical time and in a specific context. My choice of an anthology to show different aspects and perspectives of teaching therefore explicitly recognises that the stories can only ever be partial (Caine et al, 2013; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Gallagher, 2011; Jacobson and Larsen, 2014; Mus, 2012; Riessman, 2008; Sherwood, 2020). This does not mean that the stories are simply made up, as they are based on the ways in which participants make meaning out of their experiences (Rinehart, 1998). Indeed, if, as Mus (2012, p.145) argues, "every qualitative account is a fictionalisation of the subject", storytelling may be more honest than other research methods as the nature of its construct is explicit and it does not claim to be more representative of reality than it actually is.

Narrative analysis does not mean that all interpretations are equal however, so a key question that emerges from using fictional approaches in research is that of ensuring rigour (Riessman, 2008). One way of achieving this rigour is by establishing trustworthiness through verisimilitude, that is, believability, credibility and coherence within the narratives underpinned by systematic methods of data collection and analysis (Jacobson and Larsen, 2014; Riessman, 2008; Rinehart, 1998). This is a particular challenge given the complex, contradictory and unpredictable nature of both teaching practice and identity development, so it was important for me to ensure that verisimilitude did not undermine the authenticity of participants' accounts by sanitising some of their inconsistencies (Caine et al, 2013; Riessman, 2008). However, the two are not mutually exclusive and I believe that this messiness in fact adds to verisimilitude in my context rather than weakening it. Responding to Hohti and Karlsson's (2014) provocation that as a researcher it would be easy to select the accounts that 'fit' a particular narrative I want to tell, I was conscious to also include those which are contradictory, divergent or challenging.

I have therefore established rigour in the development of these narratives in two ways. Firstly, inspired by Gillborn (2010) I have included footnotes for each story to demonstrate the depth of analysis underpinning its creation. The footnotes have three main purposes. Firstly, as Kara (2013) and Gillborn (2010) both suggest, while the primary focus of these stories is to represent meaning of experience, there is still an important aesthetic element to using stories within research in that the narrative needs to be readable to avoid detracting from this meaning. Footnotes allow for the inclusion of details of interest that provide useful context to support the analysis, but are not necessary to the story as it stands and may disturb the aesthetic of the narrative. Secondly, drawing on the notes that I had made during the initial analytical stages described above, they offer detailed analysis of the individual stories using Archer's framework to highlight:

- The role of natural, practical and social interactions in the ways that participants construct their identities, including emotional and embodied aspects of practice, as well as any indication of their "continuous sense of self" (Archer, 2000, p.2).
- The internal conversations and prioritisation of particular concerns and projects that are constituted through such interactions, and how these play out in mundane

classroom practice through specific incidents and broader influences (Archer, 2003, 2007).
- The interplay between individual agency enacted through these projects, the structures and cultures enabling and constraining them, and how GTAs adapted, enhanced or discarded their projects as a result of enablers or constraints (Archer, 1995, 2000, 2003, 2007).
- Any ways in which GTAs either perpetuated prevailing norms (morphostasis) or contributed to the elaboration of social systems (morphogenesis), recognising that morphogenesis as described by Archer (1995, 2000) was likely to only take place through collective action.

Thirdly, while recognising that the footnotes cannot offer all possible interpretations of the narratives, they nonetheless highlight where there might be multiple meanings to the story and therefore acknowledge the interpretive fallibility of my single perspective as researcher (Byrne, 2017). Initially, I tried to frame the footnotes as commentaries on each story. However, the nature of these tended to be more general, so it was difficult to show Gallagher's (2011, p.52) "rival musings and interpretive openings" as well as the nuances and shifts within individual narratives without the commentaries appearing inadvertently contradictory. They also seemed very similar in style to the discussion chapter, whereas the footnotes focused squarely on the internal analysis of the individual texts themselves, allowing for key themes across the anthology to be brought more explicitly out in the next chapter.

To begin with, I had intended to ask participants to write the narratives themselves, or at least hold a series of sessions where we could write them together. However, in our discussions and as highlighted in the literature review, it became apparent that they were already juggling multiple commitments, and expecting them to engage in additional labour in writing the narratives, albeit in the spirit of co-production, risked exacerbating the inequalities and pressures that I hoped to critique through this work (Bell and Pahl, 2018). To mitigate this to some extent, and inspired by Byrne's (2017) and Mahoney's (2007) approaches, I adopted an ongoing, collaborative approach to constructing, analysing and verifying the narratives with input from participants at several points rather than simply inviting them to comment on a finished product. As well as sharing the list of story ideas for participants to comment on as mentioned above, once I had created the narratives, I sent them to participants as editable documents for comment. I also shared the footnotes with them so they could challenge my interpretation of the narratives. While Cohen et al (2011) highlight a range of challenges with this type of verification, including participants changing their minds, misremembering certain events, feeling embarrassed or disagreeing with the researcher, I did not see this as problematic. In fact, my interactions with participants enabled me to gather additional unanticipated data about how things had changed for them since the initial observations which I subsequently incorporated into the narratives in light of Caine et al's (2013) quote above, leading to the generation of narratives that were accountable, responsible and ethical.

Of course, this approach is not perfect due to the power dynamics that inevitably exist. In discussions with all three participants, there was evidence of what Hampshire et al (2014, p.221) describe as "reverse interviewing", that is, the participant asking questions of the

researcher as part of a dialogue. More often than not, as for Hanson (2013) this took the form of participants asking me whether they had answered my questions or whether I needed anything more from them, suggesting that they were keen to conform to what I was expecting and that there was an element of Riessman's (2008) 'performance' in the discussion. As highlighted by Mahoney (2007) when reflecting on his collaborative approach, and Bell and Pahl's (2018) discussion about the inevitability of a power imbalance between researcher and participants, my position as researcher or other commitments on their time may have meant that participants felt less able to edit my words. The suggestion by Byrne (2017) that interpretations are culturally specific means that my construction of their experiences may have been different to theirs. Nonetheless, this approach represents an imperfect attempt to work collaboratively with participants and incorporate their perspectives into the research to some extent alongside my own.

My epistemological values of knowledge as being constructed from different perspectives, mean that unlike some researchers' desire to create space between themselves and their participants (see for example Hanson, 2013 and Rowe, 2009), like Hampshire et al (2014) I do not believe it would be possible, or indeed, ethical, for me to remove myself as researcher from these narratives. The stories were "co-produced in a complex choreography – in spaces between teller and listener, speaker and setting, text and reader, and history and culture" (Riessman, 2008, p.105). As researcher, I became part of the participants' lives in the context of this project, so if the stories are to illustrate the ways in which they made meaning from their experiences, it seemed appropriate that I should be represented in some way (Byrne, 2017; Hampshire et al, 2014; Sikes and Piper, 2010). In listening to participants' stories, I recognised my own feelings of anger and frustration as well as pride and admiration.

Furthermore, as researcher, I curated the anthology as well as creating the individual stories themselves, so I was an active presence in the development and selection of these narratives and the exclusion of others through my own internal conversation (Quinlan, 2019). In analysing the data to create coherent narratives, I drew together, storied and restoried elements from the observations and reflections as noted above, and this process set out by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) was mirrored at the level of the anthology itself. This happened in two stages. The first was around the selection of the stories. Researchers make decisions about what to include and exclude throughout the research process, and the curation of the anthology was no different (Byrne, 2017). Having written the short stories and accompanying footnotes, it became clear that there would not be sufficient space to include all of them within this thesis. In the case of my thesis, selecting the stories to include was partly done as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) through collaboration with the participants. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) speak of a tension between the voice of the participants, the perspective of the researcher, and the needs of the audience when creating narratives. In line with Quinlan's (2019) approach, I therefore created a series of criteria that echoed the three factors highlighted by Clandinin and Connelly (2000):

- Participant preferences - I went back to each participant and asked them to identify any of the stories that they felt it was particularly important to include
- Research questions - I returned to the research questions I had set out at the start of the project, to ensure that the stories selected offered meaningful insights into the themes of identity and agency

- Aesthetics and coherence of the anthology - I looked back at the stories to identify where themes might overlap between narratives, and where a particular point raised in one story could be integrated into another without significantly disrupting its meanings. While recognising that, like the stories themselves, the anthology would only be a partial representation, I wanted to ensure I included as broad and diverse a range of experiences raised from the discussions as possible.

Secondly, as highlighted by Quinlan (2019), the arrangement of the selected stories creates a particular meaning that would be different in a different configuration. For ease of analysis and coherence for the reader, some are grouped according to the themes of the stories (for example those focusing on assessment are grouped together). I followed Quinlan's (2019) process of ordering and reordering the stories in multiple ways, and reading them as a set each time to ascertain the meanings that were being created from each particular arrangement. This process of reordering continued throughout the writing of the discussion chapter as I applied Archer's framework to analyse the stories, until I settled on the order that seemed to work best in terms of both meanings and aesthetics. As a result, the order presented in this thesis is only one of many different representations of the narratives as a collective.

This brings me to the question of how to represent the "chorus of contrapuntal voices" that contributed to the development of the narratives in a way that openly and explicitly acknowledges my role without obscuring the experiences of participants (Riessman, 2008, p.137). To address this issue, following Jacobson and Larsen's (2014) recommendation I have included The Researcher as a character in her own right to represent my role and perspective in the research. Unlike most other characters, she is deliberately not named to decentre her authority, but references are made in the footnotes to instances where the narrative came out of a question that I had asked (Ashwin, 2008; Clegg and Stevenson, 2013; Riessman, 2008). As noted above regarding my use of footnotes, this approach also enabled me to highlight where my interpretation was different to those of the participants and comment on dynamics that participants were unaware of, adding the criticality and rigour foregrounded by Riessman (2008) without privileging one perspective above the other as encouraged by Taylor et al (2011).

While the stories may have been constructed through dialogue between the researcher and the participants, the interpretation of the reader also needs to be acknowledged. As with the creation of stories, the ways in which readers respond to narratives are influenced by their own socio-cultural and historical context, so different readers may interpret them differently, and indeed, the same reader may also have different interpretations at different times (Kara, 2013; Riessman, 2008; Rinehart, 1998). While Mus (2012) critiques the possible distortion in meaning that could arise in the reader's interpretation, and as researcher I may be able to offer context that the reader is unaware of, arguably it is not the role of the author to define what meaning the reader constructs. Indeed, such a 'coercive' approach that tells the reader what to think may be less likely to engage them in a way that potentially prompts social change (Delgado, 1989). To acknowledge this tension between different interpretations and allow for multiple layers and meanings to be created, I have deliberately set out the stories so that the reader may simply read the narratives as they stand on the left hand pages of the following chapter without looking at the analytical footnotes if they choose.

Narratives for social change

The fictional approaches I have drawn on in representing my data are common within ethnography and critical race theory in which storytelling, like the realist social theory and notion of space discussed in the literature review, is an inherently political act occurring in a particular cultural and historical context (Delgado, 1989; Marston and De Leeuw, 2013). Literature around critical race theory (for example Delgado, 1989; Richardson and Lockridge, 1998; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002) suggests that as well as enabling individuals and communities to make meaning about what has happened to them, storytelling has the capacity to challenge and resist existing assumptions, meta-narratives and dominant power structures to create social change beyond the text itself. This is especially relevant in the context of GTAs as a marginalised group. Indeed, Delgado (1989, pp.2414-2415) advocates not only for the way in which stories can help to build communities among marginalised people, but also their destructive potential:

> stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital, ethics. Counterstories, which challenge the received wisdom, do that as well. They can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live…But stories and counterstories can serve an equally important destructive function. They can show that what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel. They can show us the way out of the trap of unjustified exclusion. They can help us understand when it's time to allocate power. They are the other half – the destructive half – of the creative dialect.

Mirroring Archer's (2000, 2003) emphasis on change through Corporate Agency, the power of the stories in my research is not necessarily in the individual narratives, but in the complex and nuanced picture that is built up through them as a collective. Despite my commitment to narrative analysis as a way of foregrounding the diverse experiences of individuals, and Ashwin's (2008) emphasis on the value of specific incidents, having curated the anthology of stories I realised that the impact of broader structural and cultural forces might be lost or downplayed through this approach. In the footnotes, I looked for examples that might give some indication of broader morphostasis or possibilities for morphogenesis, but given Archer's focus on agency leading to social change it seemed important to draw these out further. While my initial approach had been one of narrative analysis, narrative and thematic approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Rodriguez-Dorans and Jacobs, 2020). Following the construction of the narratives and footnotes, I therefore incorporated a further layer of analysis on the narratives and footnotes themselves to identify key themes across the collective, returning to the raw data to verify these themes. This resulted in a discussion chapter that highlights areas of "convergence and divergence" and acknowledges possible alternative meanings to complement the focus on the mundane in individual narratives (Riessman, 2008, p.191). Given Riessman's (2008) focus on the importance of robustness in narrative analysis, this discussion chapter also provides rigour and critique of the ideas represented in the anthology. To offer theoretical structure, I therefore return to my research questions and Archer's framework as articulated in the literature review. The resulting structure is set out at the start of the discussion chapter. As highlighted by Riessman (2008), I acknowledge that this critical analysis comes from my perspective as a

researcher, and other readers may analyse the narratives in different ways or identify ideas that are not raised within the limited scope of this thesis.

Having explained the methodology and analytical framework for the project, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of its ethical implications.

Ethical considerations

Unlike literary fiction where characters are created and remain within the text, the participants I work with have lives beyond it so as a researcher I am accountable to them to represent their lives ethically (Caine et al, 2013; Jacobson and Larsen, 2014; Narayan, 1999). In light of Hanson's (2013) discussion of academic developers experiencing tension between their research and professional roles, I was concerned that participants would either see me as 'performance monitoring', or assume that I would assess them more favourably if they participated. Both of these concerns could have affected their motivations for joining the project, what they were willing to say and how they portrayed themselves. I therefore emphasised in our initial meeting that I would not assess any of their work to separate my professional role from my role as a researcher. I also explicitly raised the discomfort and anxiety that GTAs may experience in being observed at such an early stage of their career as emphasised by Baker and Lee (2011) and Rowe (2009). Furthermore, it was important to acknowledge the possible resentment and powerlessness they may feel towards senior colleagues who they perceive as taking teaching less seriously, and the potential for this project to surface issues that might cause them to become disillusioned with teaching in higher education. The rapport and trust recommended by Hampshire et al (2014) and Mahoney (2007) that I established with them through the concept mapping and reflective discussions was designed to go some way to mitigating issues that might arise here, and offer an opportunity for them to discuss these frustrations with me as a teacher positioned outside their department.

Given I worked with a small group, issues of confidentiality and anonymity were particularly important. I emphasised in the participant information sheet that confidentiality would be maintained "unless you disclose any harmful practices to me or I witness any harmful practices that require reporting to protect others" (see participant information sheet in Appendix 4). Pseudonyms, chosen by participants, have been used throughout this thesis to protect anonymity. The institution remains anonymous, and I have used generic disciplinary areas (social sciences, engineering etc) and geographical regions for the international GTAs rather than the names of individual departments and specific countries to maintain anonymity for participants working in smaller departments. For the same reason, I informed relevant faculty learning and teaching senior leads rather than Heads of Department about the research and asked them to raise any objections with me (see Appendix 5). My collaborative approach of maintaining an ongoing dialogue with participants and the use of composite stories meant that I could remove or change identifying features that might compromise anonymity (Jacobson and Larsen, 2014). Having said this, as my project focused on GTA lived experience, I had to make sure that I did not dilute or alter the meaning of those experiences, and so I informed participants that absolute anonymity may not be guaranteed in the information sheet, concept mapping session and throughout my interactions with them during the project (Bell, 2011).

Detailed information about what the project would entail was provided in the initial email I sent to participants (see Appendix 6) and again at the concept mapping meeting to ensure they understood the implications as far as they could at that stage. However, due to the interactional nature of teaching practice noted by Ashwin (2008) among others and the use of classroom observation, it would be impossible to talk about teaching with participants without referring to the students they were working with. As well as an information sheet and consent form for participants, I therefore created a version for students as 'indirect' participants to explain the project and emphasise that they had a right to withdraw without this affecting their assessment results or their experience on the module that was being observed (see student information sheet in Appendix 4). This information sheet and consent form also requested that students maintain the anonymity of the participant, although participants were aware that this could not be guaranteed (Cotton et al, 2010). I also intended to introduce myself at the start of the pilot observations so students knew who I was and why I was there.

However, while Arthur was keen to use the student information sheets and consent forms, Gina and Ahmed were very reluctant. Compared to Gina and Ahmed's brief conversations with individual students in the context of a large class, Arthur's session was heavily reliant on students speaking up in the class, so it was important to reassure them that they would not be judged (Baker and Lee, 2011). In contrast, Ahmed and Gina felt that the paperwork would actually make the project more intrusive in terms of whether students would ask questions and their ability to answer them. The pilots were helpful in negotiating different ways of gaining context-appropriate informed consent with students. Arthur and I decided to use the information sheets and consent forms as planned; Gina asked students if they were happy for me to listen in to her conversations with them as she was one of my "test subjects" (her words, reflecting the scientific discipline she is based in); and Ahmed added the following note to his existing presentation slidethat was displayed throughout the session:

> Sarah Moore is observing Ahmed as part of a research project. If you would prefer her not to observe Ahmed's conversations with you, please let her know.

My thesis will be embargoed for three years to protect myself and the participants, who should have completed their PhDs and either be in a more secure role at this institution or working for an alternative organisation by the time the thesis is published (indeed, two of them are already in this position) (Hanson, 2013). Finally, I hope that this work may be published in future, and to honour their role in co-creating it I would invite participants to be named as co-authors. It will be up to them whether they choose to waive their anonymity, and I will negotiate this with them if the opportunity for publication arises.

Conclusion

This chapter has set out the three-stage process I used to work with participants to explore their identities as teachers, how these identities were enacted in the classroom, and the possible spaces for agency within their teaching practice. Based on the findings in the literature review, I have identified two key principles underpinning my methodology in terms of taking into account the primacy of practice, and honouring a diverse group of teachers who have typically been marginalised. I have also explained the rationale underpinning my

approach of narrative analysis in relation to social realism as a framework, and the way I have tried to harness the power of the narratives as a collective to highlight possibilities for broader structural and cultural elaboration. I have outlined my approach to acknowledging my presence as researcher and my influence on the research in light of the contrapuntal nature of the discussions and my own positionality. While constraints in this project mean that I cannot claim to have adopted approaches of co-production as fully as I would have liked, I hope that by working with participants in the ways described above and taking a flexible approach to the project where appropriate, I have foregrounded their perspectives alongside my own as far as possible.

The anthology of stories set out in the next chapter are based around events and characters that I observed during the teaching sessions and discussed with participants afterwards. Gina, Arthur and Ahmed are all pseudonyms chosen by the participants and are based around the three GTAs I worked with, but details that might have enabled them to be identified have been omitted. As seen in Kara (2013) and Sikes and Piper's (2010) works, other minor composite characters and some of the dialogue and description of settings have been created to evoke meaning and represent experiences articulated by participants. The narratives are deliberately written in the present tense so the reader experiences each story alongside the participants, and to represent the fact that Gina, Arthur and Ahmed were often reacting to situations in the moment rather than adopting a strategic approach to their practice; a dynamic which itself impacted on their ability to enact agency. At times, I have incorporated words or phrases that participants themselves used in our discussions, which are identified in the footnotes. Although Archer (2003) emphasises the first-person nature of the internal conversation and Byrne (2017) writes in the first person to highlight that her poetry belongs to the participants, in my case the narratives are told in the third person to explicitly recognise that they are my interpretation and representation of participants' internal conversations, and to balance descriptions of the individual characters and events with wider structural and environmental issues. The Researcher is similarly written in the third person within the narratives, but the analytical footnotes refer to me in the first person to acknowledge my positionality in line with the rest of this thesis.

The narratives in the following chapter are written to appear on facing pages, with each narrative on the left-hand side and the accompanying analytical footnotes on the right.

Chapter 4: The Narratives

The Researcher: The Participants

Carrying her tea to the quietest corner of the café, The Researcher waits for Gina to arrive. It was Gina's choice to meet for the first time here, and The Researcher's happy enough to oblige[i]. Gina walks in a couple of minutes later, beaming as she sees The Researcher and apologising unnecessarily for being slightly delayed by her research work[ii]. Lively, humorous and self-deprecating, Gina describes herself as a junior researcher[iii]. She speaks passionately about her subject, her research[iv] and several issues that The Researcher with her privileged position[v] had never had to consider, including the different ways that men and women are seen in the lab[vi] and the comparison between Gina's home country and the UK[vii]. The Researcher makes a note of these points in case they come up later.

Five minutes into their conversation, and The Researcher's struck by the thoughtful, methodical[viii] way that Arthur answers her questions. Quietly confident[ix] although occasionally self-critical[x], he speaks at length[xi] about his teaching and seems acutely aware of the broader context around him. At times he expresses some dissatisfaction with the way teaching is organised in the department, especially as an outsider[xii], which is perhaps down to his previous experience as a teacher elsewhere[xiii]. As he's talking, she can hear footsteps reverberating on the wooden floors outside the classroom[xiv]. It doesn't seem to bother him though. Maybe he's used to it. She smiles as he explains why he volunteered to join the project. "Participation karma". She'll have to pay that forward at some point.

Ahmed was the last participant to sign up to the project, but four days later she receives a call to say that he's arrived at her open-plan office. She meets him in the room she's booked, a stark, white space with no outside windows, but at least they can talk there[xv]. He discusses his teaching enthusiastically and with a detailed knowledge of his subject that's far beyond her rudimentary understanding[xvi]. She wishes she'd recorded the conversation rather than asking him to write down his ideas[xvii], but at least there will be some notes to refer back to once the observations begin. As a lecturer in his home country, he had a certain status which doesn't seem to be mirrored through the opportunities available as a GTA in the UK[xviii]. To her, his expertise should be valued more, but Ahmed seems accepting of his place[xix].

[i] Gina chose to meet me in the same building as her department. As this conversation was not recorded, I agreed to meet in public, but booked private rooms for our reflective discussions.
[ii] While I was unconcerned by the delay, Gina's need to balance often unpredictable research and teaching priorities was apparent from our first meeting.
[iii] Gina saw herself primarily as a junior researcher. She regarded a teacher as an expert so was reluctant to describe herself in this way, instead preferring the term demonstrator when I questioned her further around how she conceptualised her teaching role.
[iv] Gina spoke passionately about her research, and her practical interactions with her subject gave her a level of expertise that potentially offered space for agency.
[v] My internal conversation and reflexivity is shown through the character of The Researcher.
[vi] This foregrounds Gina's awareness of broader cultural forces and her commitment to feminism discussed in *The Outreach*, through which she seemed to position herself as resisting dominant societal norms around gender.
[vii] The intersection of Gina's natural, practical and social interactions is illustrated through the differences between the culture she had grown up in and her recent experiences in the UK. Gina generally saw the UK higher education culture as better than that of her home country, especially in terms of support for students, but the influence of her home country can be seen in later narratives.
[viii] This represents the affective aspects of our discussions, and is indicative of the way identities are formed through natural, embodied interactions with the world and manifest in social interactions with others. Noticing Arthur needed space to collect his thoughts before responding, I deliberately left silence after each question, thus reflecting these embodied aspects back through our conversation.
[ix] Arthur's quiet confidence was also embodied in his interactions with his own students.
[x] Arthur recounted a negative practical interaction where he was concerned that a joke he had made with a student had led to them feeling self-conscious, which seemed to contribute to the shaping of his identity.
[xi] The detail with which Arthur spoke about teaching suggested a well-formed internal conversation.
[xii] Arthur was studying for a PhD at a different institution. He said that others, especially senior colleagues, questioned why he was teaching there as he was not studying in the department. The resulting feeling of being an outsider was constituted through the combination of his social identity and the culture of the department, but potentially offered space to resist departmental norms.
[xiii] He emphatically described himself as a teacher, perhaps because he was not a PhD student in the department so this was his only role at the University. Arthur had practical experience teaching in further education and in another department during the previous semester.
[xiv] The focus on sound illustrates the natural environment of the building in which Arthur taught most of his classes as discussed in *The Module*.
[xv] Despite my suggestion to identify a neutral space, Ahmed came to my office for our discussions. Mostly comprising labs, there were no rooms that Ahmed could book in his teaching building, which highlights a potential structural challenge faced by GTAs.
[xvi] Ahmed's enthusiasm was illustrative of the emotional aspect of teaching and embodied in the way he spoke quickly, almost without taking a breath. I wanted to allow space for him to tell his story in a way that felt authentic to him, which often included reference to the intricacies of his subject rather than the process of teaching. The role of disciplinary expertise was a recurring theme.
[xvii] This reflects my own internal conversation as the research progressed. Ahmed seemed much more comfortable talking so I had to interrupt the flow of conversation to remind him to write down key points, which may have steered the discussions in this first meeting more than I would have liked.
[xviii] The discrepancy between Ahmed's status in his home country and in the UK is highlighted here. Ahmed talked in depth about the progression routes available to teachers in his home country that acted as enabling structures in cultivating his identity through practical interactions, from demonstrator to teaching assistant or lecturer assistant to full lecturer, the position Ahmed had held. In the UK he was only eligible to work as a demonstrator, due to institutional structures around work for PhD students and the cultural expectations and perceptions of GTAs.
[xix] My response to his description of his role was different to Ahmed's more pragmatic approach, and narrative techniques offer the opportunity to show these side-by-side.

Arthur: The Session Plan

It's Tuesday, so Arthur's just received the four-page session overview[i] for this week's seminars that sets out what they[ii] want him to teach. The notes have been written by Kerry this time. He opens up the document and starts to read, frowning. It's different from the other teaching he's done, where he'd had some input into the sessions. She clearly has a plan of how she's going to approach the seminar and what she expects him to do, but he can't quite work out how he's going to deliver it from the informal notes he's been sent[iii]. It must be even more frustrating for the other seminar tutors as most of them have more teaching experience than he does[iv].

He brings out the notes that he's made, and opens up PowerPoint so he can create his slides as he goes along. There are four 'big' questions over the first couple of pages, with some bullet points underneath each one. He writes each big question at the top of a separate slide. He's going to have to do something with these though, they just won't work as they are. Students don't engage with questions like this if left as the tutor-led discussion he's supposed to run[v]. A variety of activities is needed here perhaps: something to get them thinking at the start and check what they can remember from the lecture; a short discussion in pairs followed by whole group feedback for the second question; and then maybe the fourth question lends itself to being split up into subsets so each group looks at a different aspect. He's not quite sure how the third one fits in, so he'll need to come back to that later. It's more like a list of points that students should be mentioning so it'll probably need reframing as a question to get them thinking. He could touch on it in the discussion around question two depending on what comes up[vi]. Or he could just skip it. It doesn't fit with what he wants to do and anyway, they've said he can leave out questions if he wants[vii]. He looks at the handouts. Right, there's some useful extra information in them. Maybe it's best to give them out at the end or put them online.

Guiltily, he stops for a minute. Perhaps he should just go through the session according to Kerry's plan[viii]. OK, no, maybe he won't be following it exactly as it's laid out, but it's still influencing what he'll be doing in the seminar, and it's not going to be that different to what the other seminar tutors are doing[ix], right? He'll work on his alternative plan and send it to her anyway. He doesn't want to bother her too much[x], but it's always worth checking. Now, what's he going to do about that third question…

Arthur: The Session Plan

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[i] As a result of the prevailing culture and structural hierarchy, Arthur received the session plan two or three days before he was due to teach, which restricted his agency in devising alternative activities to those provided due to lack of time. While the level of detail in the plans could be interpreted as a prescriptive, constraining force, it is mentioned here to represent Arthur's recognition of the amount of work done by the module leaders to produce the plans.

[ii] He spoke of the structural and cultural divide between the module leaders who designed the sessions and the seminar tutors such as himself who taught them. In our discussions he referred to "the things I'm sent", emphasising that this was one-directional rather than consultative, although he recognised that this differed depending on departmental context (see *The Marking*).

[iii] Arthur used the phrase "what I'm expected to do" several times, suggesting the influence of social interactions on his identity. While the module leaders' vision of how the seminars would run might appear to be a constraining force, Arthur's agency comes through more strongly here as the phrase "how **he's** going to deliver it" indicates a sense of ownership and responsibility over the session. While Arthur used the term "deliver" to describe what he did, as this narrative illustrates his teaching was far from an automated 'delivery' of a static curriculum. This section also highlights his frustration about the lack of communication and direction from module leaders.

[iv] Arthur was employed as a Teaching Assistant (TA), a role at the pay grade above a GTA that was being piloted in his department, and became a Contracted Teaching Assistant (CTA) the following year. He is referred to as a 'seminar tutor' in these narratives to reflect this different role, although he may be included in the more generic 'GTA' grouping in the discussion chapter when highlighting similarities between his experiences and those of Ahmed and Gina. He had taught in a further education setting previously, and said that most of the other tutors had previous teaching experience or qualifications that had contributed to their recruitment for this more advanced role. However, in one of the comments on the narratives he reported feeling frustrated that his expertise had been valued more in further education than at the University, and he believed that the department was missing an opportunity by excluding seminar tutors, and the experience they bring, from discussions about curriculum design. Here, the identity he had constructed through practical experience and the potentially enabling structure of TA role in supporting his project of designing an engaging session was constrained by departmental cultures.

[v] While he had been provided with slides in a different department, Arthur had not been given, or been asked to create, slides for this module. However, the fact that he developed his own slides and activities suggests that his departmental culture did not prove to be a constraining force for this level of agency. Arthur acknowledged that he had freedom to do what he thought would be engaging for the students. This implies that agency and ownership were encouraged to some extent, both in the way the session plans were structured and the culture within which he was working.

[vi] This section highlights the mundane decisions that Arthur made in actively adapting the session plan to better support student learning and represents the internal conversation underpinning those decisions, thus enacting agency through the praxis of curriculum.

[vii] This reinforces Arthur's agency in making choices about the content and approach of the seminar, enabled by the culture created by the module leader. Underpinning his adaptation of the slides was a strong personal identity that prioritised engaging students over following the materials that were sent to him as they stood.

[viii] Arthur mentioned a few times that he felt guilty changing the session plan given the amount of work Kerry had done to create it, therefore reflecting the emotional aspects of practice created by the intersection between culture and agency.

[ix] Arthur's internal conversation here justifies the changes he made and the values he prioritised. While his recognition of the need for some conformity in the session plans may have led to an adaptation of his project by influencing the changes he made, nonetheless his decision to compromise indicates a degree of agency.

[x] In a comment on an initial draft of this narrative, Arthur said that he would now email his alternative session plan to Kerry to check she was happy with it. Rather than acting as a constraint, agency was strengthened in his decision to legitimise his project through utilising the existing structures of the module leader and in his claim that they were usually supportive of the plan he proposed.

Ahmed: The Troubleshooting

He looks at the handout the student is referring to which includes step-by-step instructions for this part of their task[i]. OK, it's the old one, but that's not a problem, he's here to help[ii] and this is a quick question to answer. He points to the slide he's put up on the screens[iii] around the room showing the correct instructions and directing students to ask the GTAs if they have any issues. Most of them do notice the slide, but there are always a few who miss it. Students had faced similar problems last year, because the software upgrade had been installed just before the start of the semester so the handouts were immediately out of date[iv]. He'd fed this back to The Module Leader who'd republished a small updated handout[v] for this semester. But the instructions on the new version aren't as detailed, so students tend to prefer the previous one despite its errors[vi]. Maybe The Module Leader needs to say something in the lecture[vii] to let them know the handout is out of date.

It's confusing anyway, for GTAs as well. Jiang, one of the other GTAs, had asked him[viii] about the handout earlier in the session, as he wasn't sure whether one of the steps was correct. He likes working with the other GTAs. There's no leader, so as peers they cooperate and help each other out. He knows from previous experience that senior teachers can get quite defensive but in this module, where it's just the GTAs in the room, it's more peaceful[ix]. As PhD students[x], GTAs are much more willing to learn[xi].

However, not all of the GTAs have relevant experience with this topic and even those that do may not have used the software, at least not since all of the updates have happened[xii]. So sometimes he'll go over and stand with them. Some people might be critical of his behaviour, but GTAs don't take it personally[xiii] as they all accept it as helping the student.

He'd reassured Jiang that the instructions were fine. At this level, students just need to get to an acceptable level of accuracy[xiv].

Ahmed: The Troubleshooting

[i] Although the handout might be considered relatively minor in the context of teaching, the focus on the mundane brings it to the fore as a key structure shaping Ahmed's practice. Its role was heightened by a culture in which there was no whole-class verbal introduction to this session. Students were expected to access the handouts online and follow the instructions on them at their own pace. While designed to be enabling of student learning, the structure of the handout potentially acted as a constraint for Ahmed's agency in that it set out the task so explicitly.
[ii] Helping and supporting students was integral to Ahmed's identity, developed through both social interactions with students and practical interactions around how he measured his success. He frequently described interactions with students as "not a problem" and regularly, as here, prioritised helping students over other concerns (in this case, judgement about them using the older handouts).
[iii] Despite the structure of the handout, Ahmed found space for agency in realising his concern of helping students. He was not asked to create slides, but thought that doing so would pre-empt issues and explain what students should be working on. He therefore developed a couple of clarifying slides to accompany every session I observed based on his previous practical experiences of the module. The room was perhaps an enabling structure as the equipment was there to present slides.
[iv] The upgrade mentioned here shows the interplay between changing structures outside of Ahmed's control and his priority concern of helping students.
[v] In Ahmed's narratives, The Module Leader is not named to reflect their distance from the GTAs. Beyond an initial briefing between the GTAs and The Module Leader, there did not seem to be any communication while the module was running unless instigated by the GTAs, and The Module Leader did not attend the sessions run by the GTAs. This suggests that GTAs were marginalised from teaching discussions and the structures did not support GTA agency beyond helping students with their questions.
[vi] Students had access to previous handouts containing more detailed instructions, and often chose these over the updated version. From this perspective, the structures of the two handouts may have inadvertently prompted Ahmed's agency because they required clarification to support student learning.
[vii] Ahmed's suggestion is grounded in the existing structure of the lecture. Unlike the earlier feedback he had given around the handout, he did not suggest this to The Module Leader. Taken together, these illustrate how GTAs responded differently to different situations as a result of their internal conversations.
[viii] This represents the role of social interactions in not only cultivating identities among GTAs, particularly for Ahmed establishing a role amongst his peers, but also maintaining existing cultures of what is expected of them through building consensus.
[ix] "Peaceful" was Ahmed's term to describe this environment, reflecting affective aspects of teaching.
[x] The influence of social interactions on Ahmed's identity is seen here. He was adamant that the GTAs considered each other to be equals. However, while Ahmed identified as part of the GTA group as a PhD student, this community tended to reinforce rather than challenge the status quo.
[xi] Ahmed spoke several times about the structural and cultural hierarchies that manifested through the defensiveness of senior colleagues. Although he said that The Module Leader in this narrative was more open to feedback from GTAs, his experience of previous senior colleagues contributed to his internal conversation around how he interacted with The Module Leader.
[xii] Disciplinary expertise was an important factor in forming Ahmed's identity as a GTA. It is also possible to interpret this as a social interaction, in that Ahmed conceptualised his own position in this narrative in relation to others' (lack of) subject expertise.
[xiii] While he was keen to emphasise that GTAs considered themselves equal, I observed other GTAs deferring to Ahmed's knowledge and expertise in the classroom. He never openly criticised other GTAs for not having the same level of subject expertise, instead regarding this as a failure of the recruiting structures. Although he described his actions here as a "bad habit", and it is difficult to know whether the other GTAs were happy with him standing next to them, again this reflects the way he prioritised the need to help students over any judgement he might receive for his actions.
[xiv] Ahmed's project of teaching within the session aims seemed to align with his priority concern of helping students.

Arthur: The Hovering[i]

He slides the table out, picks up his chair, and moves it into the centre of the horseshoe. He'd started doing this sort of by accident[ii], but from here Arthur can hear the detail of their discussions. The group in front of him are really getting into this question, and he can tell from their answers that they've obviously done the reading. He listens. Yep, they're fine, they're raising the points he wanted them to. It's not helpful for him to disrupt their natural conversation right now as he sometimes does with a carefully-placed question[iii]. When he first started teaching he'd make a real effort to interact with each of the groups, but following Amir's feedback he does that a lot less now and just gives students the freedom to talk[iv].

He makes a couple of notes about what they're saying in case he wants to highlight them to the whole group. He'd seen Kerry do this when he observed her earlier in the module, pausing, pen poised, to record student ideas[v]. Actually, that point Ellie's just made would tie in nicely with what they covered last week[vi].

The group on the left. He's never quite sure what to do with this group. They all seem hesitant of what they're meant to be doing and none of them really want to talk. They've been making notes so it's not as though they're disengaged. But it's difficult, this is a class and a discipline that relies on discussion and he can appreciate the frustration from other students who feel they're carrying the group[vii].

His attention diverts to the group on his right. Without turning towards them, he begins to listen into their conversation. Good, they're talking about the topic he's raised. He waits. A minute passes, and he stays seated, between the groups[viii]. No, now the group to his right are talking about which bar they're going to go to first tonight. Maybe they'll get back on track. He waits. They continue. OK, he'd better get up and hover closer to them. That's as far as he goes in terms of telling them off[ix] but it tends to do the trick. He prepares himself to get up and move nearer to them.

One of the students in that group looks at the screen at the front of the room. "Anyway, that's tonight. So…question three…"

He relaxes. No need to move this time. He goes back to listening in to the conversation of the middle group.

It's been five minutes since he started them off on this discussion. They all seem to be making progress. He should move on now.

Arthur: The Hovering

[i] Arthur himself used the term "hovering" to describe his embodied approach in this narrative.
[ii] These mundane acts of classroom choreography highlight the way his agency is enacted through Arthur's embodied positioning of himself within the room, and his internal conversation reflecting on approaches that he'd tried out as a result of circumstance before adopting consciously to enact his project.
[iii] Arthur's agency in both his questioning but also his silence was deliberate and purposeful. His targeted questioning was partly as a result of practical experience – he had found that if he gave students a list of questions, some would just go through the list and then assume they were finished – and his prioritisation of drawing out more detailed responses.
[iv] He described his previous approach of talking to each group in turn and trying to contribute something to the discussion himself as making an effort, indicating the relationship between his internal conversation and his classroom practice. This seemed to have been shaped by cultural factors in terms of his understanding of what he thought the department expected him to do, which were then challenged through his social interaction with Amir during a reciprocal teaching observation as part of his application for professional recognition. Therefore, while departmental cultures may have acted as constraining forces on his approach in the classroom, cultures and structures at an institutional level may have actually enabled him to establish agency. The representation of his internal conversation here highlights the way he mediated these forces by prioritising opportunities for students to talk over his understanding of his role conditioned through departmental cultures. It also indicates how Arthur adapted his approach to better realise his concern of engaging students. However, although showing some agency, Arthur's actions do not necessarily constitute conscious resistance but are more likely to indicate the evolution of his teaching practice within the existing context.
[v] The interaction between enabling cultures, constraining structures, and social and practical constitutions of identity and agency is again reflected here. Arthur's social interaction with Kerry and practical observation of her teaching has directly influenced his own practice. Although it took a while for him to arrange the observation due to her commitments (structural constraints), the fact that she was willing to be observed suggests a culture that supported the forming of his identity as a teacher.
[vi] This focus on seemingly mundane decision-making represents the ongoing nature of Arthur's internal conversation, in this case during the session itself.
[vii] Arthur was acutely aware of the tension in his project between his keenness to adhere to the discussion-based culture of his discipline and department, the social pressures he felt from the other students who wanted discussion to be prioritised, his concern of encouraging students to speak in class, and his belief that students engage in different ways. Through this conflicted internal conversation he tried to reconcile his own emotions and concerns with those of his students.
[viii] Agency does not necessarily equate to action. Returning to a focus on the mundane, here Arthur chose not to act immediately, yet in consciously making that choice he deployed agency as a result of reflexive internal conversation.
[ix] This is representative of Arthur's uncertainty about the parameters of his (possibly indirect) authority, which may be due to a lack of practical experience in dealing with such situations, cultural constraints and expectations of his role that discourage authority, or a reluctance on his part to embody authority that meant it was a subordinate priority for him.

Gina: The Lab Exercises

They seem to like this one. Today's session is full of different, short exercises, and there's a real energy[i] in the room. Some of the student groups are already on the fourth experiment which is good, and they'll be ready to start on the PCs soon[ii]. That activity tends to take more time though, getting to know the software and working out what they need to do. Of course, the software doesn't always work in the way you want it to so you have to sit there troubleshooting with the student[iii]. And if it's really bad, the lab leader too[iv].

There are four demonstrators in the room today, running round checking[v] how the pairs of students are getting on. Different groups have started on different parts of the experiment, so she's having to keep an eye on who's done what.

"Hey, how are you getting on?"

"Fine, yeah, fine."

"OK, well, keep going, quickly, quickly.[vi]"

She drifts towards the next group. The Researcher picked up on her "nagging" and "poking" when she asked about "open questions"[vii]. It's a technique she uses in all her lab classes[viii], to go up to someone, right in their space, and ask "how are you doing, what's happening right now?" It's the mother in her coming out, making sure these kids[ix] have an opportunity to ask questions if they're stuck or even if they have that tiny bit of doubt. They need to know who to come to if they need help[x].

She should maybe dial it down a bit. The lab leaders aren't as forward and students don't really like adults intruding, getting up in their personal space[xi].

Especially as today's exercises are very easy, and students seem to be getting on with them fairly well. But as Lisa, one of the other demonstrators, said, you sort of feel a bit useless[xii] really when no one asks for help. As humans we like to be needed.

Gina: The Lab Exercises

[i] Gina seemed to thrive on the energy of the session, highlighting the embodied nature of teaching.
[ii] For this lab, students were required to complete a series of short practical experiments followed by computer-based tasks. The session was therefore already planned by the module leader, potentially reducing Gina's opportunities for agency beyond the set structure.
[iii] While she was happy to help students who were stuck, Gina found dealing with software issues particularly frustrating and tedious, reflecting the emotions present in teaching practice. She seemed, not unreasonably, to expect the equipment and software to work, but these structures were outside her control. This led to a readjustment in her priorities towards sorting out technical issues or reassuring students to just carry on.
[iv] Hierarchical structures are illustrated by the presence of the lab leader. This meant that Gina was supported in the lab, but perhaps restricted her agency because there was always a colleague she could refer to if she was unable to work out the solution herself.
[v] Rather than a literal description, this represents the embodied nature of Gina's work. Perhaps it also offers insight into the culture of the demonstrator role in that they were primarily expected to be responsive to student issues over enacting agency of their own.
[vi] As the session was structured so different students were working on different parts of the experiment and she knew that the computer tasks could take longer than anticipated, one of Gina's priorities was to make sure that students were progressing with the task at a pace that would allow them to finish during the time available.
[vii] This represents a difference in terminology between Gina and I. Gina laughingly described her "nagging" or "poking" approach, which reflected her self-deprecating humour.
[viii] Nonetheless, Gina was not entirely reactive to students, and forged spaces for agency at a micro level. This representation of her internal conversation illustrates the proactive way she approached students rather than waiting for them to ask questions.
[ix] Although she did not have any children of her own, Gina took on the identity of a mother to the students several times during our discussions. This imagined identity may be a cultural reference to the importance of a nurturing maternal role from her home country and therefore indicative of the way she brought her background to the pedagogic encounter. Alternatively, there may be natural or social influences as she often referred to the undergraduate students as "kids", perhaps distinguishing her own position as a PhD student from theirs.
[x] Gina reflected that it was not socially acceptable in her home country for students to go up to the supervisor and ask if they did not know what to do. This internal conversation suggests that an intersection of cultural factors and her own practical identity enabled, and indeed encouraged, her to take a different approach with her own students.
[xi] The influence of Gina's social interactions, with both students and the lab leaders, in constraining her teaching approach is represented here, along with that of cultural and structural forces. The lab leader was a different person each week (structure). Gina talked about having to work out each lab leader's "style" (culture) and adapt her own approach as she went along to align with it. On the one hand her compliance to the cultural norms embodied by each lab leader potentially undermined her agency in developing her own teaching style and identity as a teacher, yet on the other, it shows her prioritising supporting students and lab leaders in a way that suited them over her own preferences.
[xii] This illustrates the tension between structures (in this case, relatively easy exercises) and Gina's practical identity in which she measured success in terms of helping students and being needed. In comparison to other narratives, the extent to which she could enact her concerns of supporting students and fitting in with the expectations of others was insufficient in this context for Gina to feel fulfilled.

Ahmed: The Latecomers

Finally, about half an hour into the session, three more students walk in. They've only had around eight students so far today and when there are four GTAs, it's fairly boring[i]. Otherwise it's going fine. There's just not a lot for them to do so he's spent most of this session waiting[ii] at the side of the room. Peter, one of the other GTAs, has been working on his own project, but Ahmed needs to be available in case students need help[iii]. In this module, as he'd explained to The Researcher, students can work at their own pace and can turn up and leave whenever they like[iv], no problem. So for him this is fine. His job is to support students, even if there's only one left in the room[v] still working through the task.

He's happy[vi] to respond to any of the questions students ask, and there's often a wide variety in these sessions. If they need some information at the start of the project for example he could support them at that basic level, and when they proceed to analysing information he can help them with their analysis[vii]. He still expected more students to be here today though. Of course, this isn't the only module they're doing and the deadline for this one is still a few weeks away so there isn't much pressure right now. Perhaps there's a deadline for a different module this week. Or maybe some people have already finished[viii].

After a few minutes, the group of three students start to gather their things and get up from their seats. He goes over to them[ix].

"Are you OK?"

"Yes, we have another meeting with our supervisor now[x]."

"OK, no problem, we will be here until 5pm if you want to return."

He and the other GTAs will wait. You never know whether the three students will come back[xi].

Ahmed: The Latecomers

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[i] Boredom was an emotion that Ahmed came back to several times in our discussion, and the use of the opening word "Finally" represents Ahmed's relief when more students arrive. The influence of structures is illustrated by the ratio of students to GTAs in the session. As no one knew how many students would turn up, the number of GTAs was calculated according to the maximum number who might attend, so all were paid and expected to be there regardless of how many students were in the room. However, as seen in the narrative, this ratio potentially impacted on the way Ahmed enacted his concern of helping students through busily going round the room and answering questions.

[ii] Ahmed used the word "waiting" several times when describing his role in this session, suggesting a culture in which he was expected to wait until students had questions. One interpretation might be that this culture constrained agency, but *The Student Experience* offers a counter-narrative to this and implies that Ahmed's waiting may be an active rather than a passive choice.

[iii] In the session I observed, Peter was working on his own project. When I asked Ahmed whether he had considered doing his own work during the session, he replied that this might distract him from helping the students, a key practical concern and influence on his GTA identity which he prioritised over his own feelings of boredom. This suggests that the GTAs may have had more space than it seems to enact agency, as the different responses of Ahmed and Peter reflected their differing priority concerns. Simmering within this narrative is Ahmed's frustration when students did not need his help, as this was how he measured success in his role.

[iv] Throughout our discussions, Ahmed used the word "flexible" to describe these sessions. Rather than questioning this culture, he seemed to regard it as valuable in allowing students to work through the project in their own time. In this situation, he arguably took an active role in reinforcing prevailing cultures.

[v] This highlights the interplay between Ahmed's practical identity around measuring success through helping students, the structure that GTAs were required to stay and were paid for the full three-hour session regardless of how many students there were, and the flexible culture that characterised these sessions.

[vi] Ahmed reassured me a couple of times in our discussions that this arrangement was "fine" and he was "happy" with the situation. This is perhaps indicative of an internal conversation that diminished other emotions about the session, his compliance with the role expected of him and the way this perpetuated the dominant culture, and the power dynamics between researcher and participant influencing how he presented this scenario to me.

[vii] Focusing on the mundane aspects of Ahmed's practice illustrates the way he was able to enact some agency by responding differently to the range of student questions.

[viii] These sentences represent Ahmed's internal conversation justifying why students had not attended these sessions. Again, supporting students came through as a priority concern for him, even if that meant they did not attend this session.

[ix] Ahmed chose to go over to this group to find out why they were leaving, perhaps highlighting how the priority concern of helping students forged through his internal conversation took precedence over the flexible culture of the session in this instance.

[x] This illustrates the constraining effect of broader cultural attitudes among senior colleagues towards these sessions, potentially as a result of their flexible nature. It may be that these sessions were not seen as important by staff in the department, and students were not willing or able to prioritise them over other meetings structured at the same time, thus limiting the support that GTAs like Ahmed were able to provide.

[xi] The intersection between the structure of GTAs staying to the end, and Ahmed's internal conversation that prioritised being available to students, is reflected in his optimism at the end of the narrative, suggesting that his role, while upholding existing norms, was far from passive.

Gina: The Research

Today is the session that's closest to her PhD focus. As a junior researcher[i], she's been looking forward[ii] to this all semester.

It's good to see the students fixated on the experiment. She walks around the room, approaching the pairs of students every so often to talk about what she's doing for her PhD[iii].

The best part is when students say that they're interested in the topic. Some students are passionate and ask a lot of questions, what, how, why, which is really exciting and rewarding[iv] because she can explain what she's doing to them. Obviously that's not the case for all students. After a while you work out who's interested in the facts you're spewing out, and who isn't so much. You can't expect everyone to be interested in the same things you are when you're teaching a class of 50 or 60 students. Some of them are thinking, "I don't want your facts right now, I just want to get it done so I can go[v]." They'd never say that to her face of course, but she can read them like a book. She'd never treat them any differently though[vi], she'll answer questions from whoever asks.

Gina: The Research

[i] As noted in *The Participants*, Gina strongly defined her identity as that of a junior researcher.
[ii] As Gina was teaching a Level 1 undergraduate module, the content was fairly general and set out in detail, yet the fact that this session focused on a topic aligned with her research acted as an enabling structure for her. The emotional aspects of practice, in the form of her excitement about teaching this topic, are also represented here.
[iii] The influences of Gina's identity as a junior researcher, her practical knowledge and expertise, and her social interactions with students intersect here. The culture of the demonstrator role in which Gina could go round the room and talk to students enabled her to find spaces for agency where she could incorporate her identity as a researcher into her pedagogical encounters.
[iv] In comparison to Gina's own experiences as a student, the culture of a classroom in which students were keen to ask questions acted as a further enabler to her project around engaging them through her research topic. Indeed, she may have regarded cultivating an interest in the subject as being part of her role and thus prioritised such interactions in this particular session. Gina's emotions are represented again here, and she appeared to thrive on students being interested in a topic she was passionate about herself, showing how social interactions reinforced her identity.
[v] Gina's reflexivity can be seen through her self-deprecating use of the phrase "spewing out", and her internal conversation represented in this section recognises the tension between her prioritisation of her research knowledge and some students preferring to do only what was necessary.
[vi] Gina seemed to take pride in knowing her students, perhaps implying certain cultural expectations around the demonstrator role and the influence of social interactions with students in defining her success. This final section highlighting her commitment to treating all of her students equally, regardless of their interest (or lack of it) in the subject, illustrates a shift in the narrative from her initial focus on telling students about her own research to responding to students' priorities. While this might seem to restrict her agency, it seems more likely that it reflects a recalibration of her own priorities through her internal conversation and is therefore an example of enacting agency in its own right.

Ahmed: The Student Experience

She's a clever student. By the time she asks Ahmed for help she's finished a lot of the tasks, and as she's analysing the results she's wanting to check with him whether they're good or not. He hasn't seen her in the previous sessions but she's clearly familiar with the software. The questions she's asking are more like those he'd expect in the next session when students have finished everything[i].

"Why is this happening? I don't recognise it and I don't know what it means."

He nods, knowingly. Good question. And it's related to his research work, so he can respond confidently. He enjoys teaching this subject, especially when he can work with students one-to-one[ii].

It's tricky though. He's not really bothered about which model students use, but he knows that using a different model won't give the student any advantage[iii]. Then again, if he just tells them to use the model they've been instructed to, the student might presume that he doesn't know the answer. If students think that they have underqualified staff teaching them, that might affect their feelings about the module, the programme and the university. They should be able to trust that the people helping them have knowledge of the subject[iv]. The university tells students in their strategy and advertisements that they will have a good student experience and that's shown in the surveys too. He knows why some people gave him a good student experience when he was an undergraduate and others didn't. One of his friends, Hassan, had a really bad student experience and blamed the whole university for not having learnt anything[v].

But his main task today is to help the students to meet the objectives of this session and he doesn't want to keep others waiting. He looks around. A student has his hand up but Andrew, one of the other GTAs, is walking over to him[vi]. Ahmed turns back to the student in front of him. A brief discussion won't hurt.

"Good question. This is beyond the objective of the session, and for the assessment I'd suggest you use the regular model, but it may be useful to look at this in your future research or in your Masters' project[vii]. What are you thinking of doing for your project?..."

[i] Ahmed's internal conversation in this first paragraph sets the scene for how he responds to this individual student. The focus on the mundane in this narrative in particular foregrounds the small spaces for GTA agency and the need for Ahmed to balance different, and in this case, potentially conflicting, priorities.

[ii] The tension between two key concerns that influenced Ahmed's identity is at the heart of this narrative. Helping students and having disciplinary expertise were both indicators of success in his role that he returned to many times during our discussions. He did not receive feedback on his teaching from senior colleagues, so these measures of success seemed especially important to him. He appeared particularly keen to share his expertise with students and other GTAs, and regarded the fact that he could respond to issues beyond the scope of the module as a valuable asset to his role. Emotion is also acknowledged by highlighting his enjoyment of teaching this subject.

[iii] In the internal conversation represented by this part of the narrative, the structure of the module seems to act as a constraining force for Ahmed's project of demonstrating his expertise, as he prioritises adherence to the models set out in the module over his own belief that students should be able to use whichever model they choose. Indeed, in our discussions he said that he was ultimately there to help students to "meet the minimum requirements" of the module, and thus actively contributed to perpetuating prevailing cultural norms.

[iv] This section highlights the role of social interactions on Ahmed's identity. In our discussions, he emphasised that this was not about satisfying his own ego, but about his belief that students should feel they were being taught by someone with expertise. This may have been influenced by his practical experiences in his home country that he brought to the pedagogic encounter, and/or the culture of his discipline and department favouring subject expertise that helped him to establish credibility.

[v] It is interesting to see here how Ahmed identified with the broader university community by virtue of being employed in his role. He specifically referred to strategies, advertisements and surveys, which speaks to a culture of students as consumers and value for money. Furthermore, I was struck by his use of the term "student experience" several times in our discussions, which seemed an unusual phrase given English was Ahmed's second language. His use of this term potentially highlights the influence of departmental and sector cultures on his identity and his role in maintaining prevailing norms through adopting this language. This seems to have been exacerbated by his own practical experiences as a student, as well as those of his peers. His pace quickened when he talked about the consequences of getting things wrong, implying that this was a particular concern and illustrating the embodied nature of practice. His anxiety around his own role here contrasts with the optimism he had when talking about his students. While the combination of these influences in fact prompted Ahmed's agency through internal conversation by providing a rationale for him to offer advice beyond the structures of the session, it was clear that they had a detrimental effect on his confidence.

[vi] He appeared to be highly aware of the needs of the students in his classroom, constantly checking the room to see if any of them had their hands up. Andrew's actions meant that in the end he did not have to choose between providing additional information to this student or going to help another.

[vii] This final section shows how Ahmed actively accommodated both supporting students in line with the session objectives and offering his expertise to this student.

Arthur: The Subject

Arthur looks at the notes he's made. Hopefully the activities he's devised will help students get to grips with the main concepts for this week. Last week, he had a chat with a few of his students about how they're getting on. Some of them seemed really insecure, saying that they were struggling with the content[i]. His gut feeling tells him that most don't enjoy the module and don't seem to get the point of it, which is fair enough. As a student, he hadn't either, and it's not a subject he enjoys teaching to be honest[ii]. Obviously he's not the module leader[iii], but it's so complex that it might be better suited to Masters level where they've already built up the theoretical foundations, rather than the first-year core module he finds himself teaching. He might mention this to Phil and Kerry when he next sees them[iv].

The divisions between students are particularly apparent, especially for the last session of the day; the ones who confidently enter into discussions and almost take over the class, and those who are quiet. Last semester they were all in the same boat, because the topic was new to all of them. But it's different this time. The Researcher[v] used the word "rhythm", and they don't seem to have settled into a natural rhythm with each other. Everyone still seems sort of awkward, a little unsure of the others in the class. Maybe it's him, maybe he hasn't managed to cultivate the right atmosphere to break down the hierarchy that seems to have formed[vi]. For some students, this is what the subject is about. They like the big concepts, the facts, the names, the interrelationships between the different actors, and that gives them the edge. But others really struggle.

He knows what it's like to be one of the quiet ones who lack confidence. You have to be a certain type of person to enjoy this aspect of his discipline, and that's just not him. So much of the subject is knowledge driven, but he's really bad with names, he's really bad with figures, and he's really bad at remembering how things fit together. He wasn't a good student at school. He's much better at research methods and the applied side of the subject, so it was only when he came to University and could be analytical and creative that he began to feel more comfortable[vii]. Quite often the students will talk about things he's never heard of. Usually he just lets them talk, or asks a question to prompt them to say a bit more[viii]. But this is part of teaching on this type of module. He's finding it harder to prepare for this module than the ones last semester though. Ah well, at least the recording of this week's lecture is up now so he'll go and have a look at that[ix].

[i] This not only represents Arthur's agency in finding ways within the curriculum of checking how students were feeling, but also the extent of the rapport and empathy he had built up with them. While an enabling culture might have given him the space to engage with them in this way, this seems more representative of how the natural, practical and social elements of his identity coalesced through his interactions with students, and his priority of establishing this rapport in order to support them. Their honesty may have reflected the liminal position of his role from cultural and structural perspectives – they may have disclosed their issues to him because they saw him as a member of the teaching team who could help them, but equally they may also have opened up to him because they regarded him as different to the senior academic colleagues teaching on the module.

[ii] The reference to his gut feeling reflects the emotional and embodied aspects of his identity, shaped by his practical experiences from when he was a student.

[iii] While he was able to enact a degree of agency in developing activities, Arthur seemed conscious of his position in the broader departmental structures, and this passage shows him defining his identity in relation to what he is not.

[iv] However, Arthur had his own opinion of the module and, as suggested by his internal conversation here, he believed that the module leaders were open to receiving feedback from seminar tutors teaching the content on the ground. While he could not make large-scale changes himself and any actions he took were therefore within prevailing systems, existing cultures nonetheless meant that he actively tried to influence those who could.

[v] Although the word "rhythm" was first used by me in our discussion, Arthur took this word and used it himself to describe the dynamics within his classes.

[vi] On one level, this section represents Arthur's internal conversation around his role based on his practically- and socially-constituted concern of creating an environment in which students felt able to participate. It is also illustrative of wider forces, as he used the term "hierarchy" not only to describe classroom dynamics but also his discipline. This perhaps implies that he regarded wider cultural factors as contributing to some students' feelings of alienation.

[vii] When talking about the subject, Arthur was critical of his past self as a student, defining himself by what he was not good at, and highlighting a discrepancy between his strengths and the needs of this module. When talking his pace increased, suggesting an internal conversation in which he was keenly aware of what he perceived to be his shortcomings, and his notion of what constitutes a "good" student was representative of broader cultural dynamics in school environments. His discomfort at the content of the module and the subject more generally came through in our discussions, implying an ongoing influence of his previous emotional and practical experiences on his identity that was then lived out through his practice as a teacher. He appeared to make a link here between whether he felt suited to the subject and his enjoyment of teaching it, which he also projected onto his students.

[viii] As one of Arthur's priorities was around prompting students to engage in discussion, and in the context of a wider enabling culture that did not see a lack of expertise as detrimental, the fact that students discussed ideas that he was unfamiliar with did not appear to cause much rupture in Arthur's identity on the surface. He seemed able to adapt confidently to this situation, using his own agency to alter the power dynamic and let students speak while maintaining his overall project. This may have had an unintended impact in widening the social hierarchy between those who were familiar with the subject and those who struggled, which Arthur himself recognised.

[ix] However, although not a requirement, Arthur chose to watch the lecture recordings, which suggests some insecurity about the subject as well as a belief that it would be helpful for him to know what the students had been told. This highlights the intersection between the enabling (in this context, as they are not without controversy) structure of lecture recording systems and a constraining culture of feeling expected to have some understanding of the topic in order to establish credibility that seems to contradict the previous footnote. While Arthur's agency in identifying his own ways of dealing with his insecurities is represented here, this example also illustrates how agency is fallible and may not always be beneficial. He watched the recording even though he knew it would take him beyond his paid allocation of hours.

Ahmed: The Extras

Walking into the computer room in the Sussex Building after the confusion[i], Ahmed immediately spots several people working silently at computers. They don't look up. He doesn't recognise them, and from what's on their screens[ii] they're clearly not part of this module. Over the next ten minutes, six students from his module drift in and sit down. There are around 45 computers in the room which is fine for now, but won't be sufficient once the rest of the students arrive[iii].

Going over to the master computer, the one connected to the projector, he opens PowerPoint and creates a new slide. He makes sure the projector is still switched off and starts typing in red, revising and adapting what he's written several times before he's satisfied[iv]:

> This room is reserved for ENG6649 so students on this course have priority. If you are not working on this module, please leave the room.

He's prepared at least. The general rule, and others would agree with this, is that if the space is available and they don't need it then it's fine for others to be working there. He's seen other teachers ask people to leave where there are lots of students and limited numbers of computers[v], but it's usually not necessary.

Ahmed: The Extras

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[i] Structural factors undermined Ahmed's project of supporting students in this narrative as two rooms had been booked due to potential numbers of students, and cultural issues were also apparent as the arrangements had not been communicated clearly to GTAs or students so students had gone to both rooms. The Module Leader was not present at the session, so the situation was left to the GTAs to sort out, and they ended up splitting themselves between the two rooms. However, any agency that the GTAs cultivated here was largely as a result of reacting to the situation they were facing.

[ii] The influence of cultures and hierarchies is already being seen through the mundane details of this narrative, for example in the way that Ahmed looks at the computer screens of those in the room to identify whether they are part of his session rather than asking them directly, and the fact that they do not question whether they should be in there, even as the session starts. This was a different computer room to the one usually used for these sessions. While this unfamiliar physical environment and the lack of communication may have reinforced Ahmed's approach, in fact his actions in this narrative were in line with his reluctance to take on an authoritative role in other sessions (as seen for example in *The Troubleshooting*), suggesting that this was more deeply embedded. Ahmed would not challenge students from other modules who were playing computer games or working on other projects in the room during his session, even in his regular computer room.

[iii] Ahmed's internal conversation around why he decided to take action is illustrated here, and again is linked to his priority of helping his own students.

[iv] While Ahmed chose to take action, his passive use of a slide rather than directly speaking to those who were not part of his session suggests either a culture that did not enable GTA authority, or a reluctance on his part to take on this role. In observing him write and rewrite the slide several times, I could see Ahmed's internal conversation playing out in terms of prioritising the wording he used. He said afterwards that he wanted to make sure it sounded appropriate, which perhaps indicates insecurity around speaking English as a second language. This is further supported by the fact that when I asked him whether he would ever verbally request others in the room to leave, he said no several times before conceding that as a group, the GTAs might nominate the person with the best English to approach them. In this instance, Ahmed seemed to prioritise fluency of communications over freeing up the computers, illustrating an adaptation of his project in light of the situation in front of him that meant he could accommodate a non-confrontational approach in which his students remained supported.

[v] This final section highlights Ahmed's internal conversation justifying why he chose not to use the slide. While I would consider his decision not to intervene to be agential, Ahmed's rationale for his choice was culturally shaped by the unwritten consensus referred to here, and legitimised through what he had observed of others.

The Researcher: The Name

She stops. Just for a second, she can feel her heart jolt and the tears start to form[i]. She hadn't expected to have this reaction, just listening to people's experiences of teaching. Ahmed continues, telling her that students on this module don't necessarily know the GTAs are PhD students, they see them as being there for support. He presumes the module leader introduces the GTAs in the lecture[ii]. Few students ask him anything social, anything about himself. In the group project modules[iii] some, usually international students, might, but in this session it's too busy, and anyway he says, he's just[iv] there to help them solve their issues with the task[v]. But there's something in his response that makes her ask the question, especially given all of his experience and expertise[vi].

"Do your students know your name?"

"I think the majority don't know my name, yeah. Nobody asked me[vii]."

[i] I had an immediate emotional and embodied reaction to this part of our discussion. As represented by my internal conversation, the notion of a name seemed integral to a teacher's identity, and I had never come across a situation where the students would not know their teacher's name.
[ii] In theory, the lecture was the structure through which GTAs were introduced in the module Ahmed was teaching on, rather than the labs where they were actually present. However, as culturally GTAs did not attend the lectures, Ahmed was unsure whether, or how, this happened. Rather than verbally introducing himself to students in the sessions I observed, at the time the session was due to start Ahmed silently put up a slide before starting to walk around the room.
[iii] Each module had a different structure and culture, and Ahmed's natural identity as an international student and his social interactions with students from similar backgrounds intersected more easily in the project module. Here, the enabling culture meant that he placed higher priority on social interactions as part of his teaching identity, and enacted agency in a way that helped him to establish rapport with those students. This illustrates how he shifted his priorities through internal conversations in response to different contexts.
[iv] Ahmed used the word "just" when describing his role on several occasions in a way that was perhaps reflective of the cultures surrounding the role.
[v] In contrast with the project module, Ahmed's sense of his role in the module I observed was shaped by the absence of a particular type of social interaction. The culture of the session meant that it would have been difficult for him to introduce himself to each student individually. In balancing priorities, he favoured the practical definition of success as helping students, rather than holding social conversations with them which he did not regard as necessary to providing such support in this context. This also may tie in with his identity, as he described himself as "task-oriented" in *The PhD*.
[vi] While Ahmed's background and expertise may have been practical manifestations of his success in his home country and research work, they were potentially hidden from students.
[vii] The narrative ends by highlighting the contrasting responses of Ahmed and I to the fact that the students did not know his name. This may illustrate the different ways we define our individual identities, and our differing priority concerns.

Gina: The Final Session

It's sad really. She'd wanted to say a proper goodbye to everybody, to her students she'd worked with over the semester and had developed a kind of affection for[i].

She'd got the email[ii] last Thursday, after the lab on Tuesday[iii], from Jennifer... Jennifer someone, the manager possibly, or the administrator in the department[iv]? The person who organises the demonstrators, anyway. The email had said that they weren't needed during the following week. She hadn't really seen it coming, and neither had the other demonstrators. There'd been a lab planned for this week, she isn't quite sure exactly what on, but the date had been in the handbook[v] and now it's cancelled. She's heard that students are worried about their exams and need more time to revise because the exams for this module are in the first week[vi]. This was one of the sessions The Researcher was supposed to observe. She'd better apologise to The Researcher when she sees her[vii].

It's positive for the students so it doesn't matter really. The money's pretty good for part-time work anyway, around £44-something for three hours in the lab, so that's not a problem. It frees up her schedule on Tuesday too so yeah, it's fine[viii]. Just sad that she doesn't get to say goodbye...

Gina: The Final Session

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[i] This first section of her internal conversation represents Gina's emotional reaction to this situation, and highlights social interactions as a key influence on her identity. Saying goodbye may have been particularly important to her in marking the end of her first year of teaching.

[ii] Communication to demonstrators came via email rather than in person, and as there was a different lab leader each week, the lab leader of the previous session may also not have known that it would be the last one. While this is indicative of constraining structures on Gina's project of saying goodbye to her students, they may have been reinforced by other elements of departmental culture that Gina and I were unaware of.

[iii] Interestingly, I had heard students talking about the session being the final one while we were waiting before the lab on the Tuesday. This implies that the decision had already been made and communicated to students, whereas the email was only sent to Gina 48 hours later. There is an issue of power here, with information being withheld (whether intentionally or not) from the demonstrators, thus marginalising them not only from the decisions made about teaching but also from the communications about those decisions. As suggested in this narrative, the constraining impact of these cultural forces on agency can be seen in the fact that having this information may have resulted in Gina approaching the previous lab differently.

[iv] Gina could not remember who the email had come from, to the extent that she took her phone out during our discussion to find their name and job title. She had never met Jennifer, suggesting a structural and cultural disconnect between the demonstrators and those who recruit and organise them.

[v] The handbook represents a key structure of communication between the lab leaders and the demonstrators. The demonstrators received their information about the module as a whole through the handbook which they were sent at the start of the semester, and a specific topic for that final week had been set out. The potential for the handbook to be a constraining structure was realised and exacerbated by the module leader's agency in changing it at the last minute. Demonstrators therefore not only had a lack of agency in this situation, but also a fundamental lack of control.

[vi] The rationale for the cancellation was not explained directly to Gina, which is perhaps reflective of cultural attitudes towards demonstrators in that it was not deemed necessary to communicate this information. Instead, she heard a rumour from another demonstrator about why the session was cancelled, illustrating the way that knowledge was socially constructed among the demonstrators. Gina believed that the session was cancelled because the exam for this module had been timetabled in the first week of the exam period (a constraining structure that she and others had no control over), and that decision-makers in the department felt that the extra time for revision was more important than the final week practical. It was not clear whether this was due to cultural perceptions in the department or a response to direct student feedback. Nonetheless, in this part of the narrative, Gina's internal conversation highlights the way she foregrounds student needs as a priority over her own feelings and interests.

[vii] The social interaction between Gina and I is acknowledged here.

[viii] Money plays a structural role, and the cancellation had financial implications for Gina and the other demonstrators. She was keen to point out that this was not her primary motivation for taking on her demonstrator role, and in response to an earlier draft emphasised that she was grateful for the money. Gina and I had contrasting perspectives around pay, as she recognised the financial benefits whereas I was more concerned about possible exploitation and inconsistency. According to University policy, all GTAs should be on a formal contract where they are paid a salary, but Gina's experience suggests that this hasn't been implemented in practice in all departments. In this final paragraph, Gina's internal conversation indicates how she reconciled her lack of agency in the situation, which has largely been imposed on her, by highlighting the benefits to herself as well as the students and adapting her project in light of this reflexive conversation.

Arthur: The Project

The phone rings again. Arthur saves the chapter of his thesis he's been working on, notes the number and sighs. Looks like he's not going to get this finished before he goes off to teach after all[i].

"Hi Arthur."

"Hi Alison, how are things?"

"Oh you wouldn't believe how busy this week's been. I've been up and down the country, travelling every day this week. London Monday, then Birmingham, Bristol. Got a conference coming up next week too. Haven't written my presentation yet, but I can do it on the train I'm sure. It's just mad at the moment, feels like I'm barely home but never mind, it's part of the job I suppose. You remember the work I'm doing with Martina? Not the project with the school, the other one. It's just one thing after another at the moment…[ii]"

He knows she'll be phoning about the project he's working on for her. He enjoys being part of something that makes a difference in the real world, especially on an issue he cares so much about. And anyway, Alison's good to work with and great at giving advice. It might take twenty minutes or so, but she'll get round to what she actually wants from him eventually. It's not her fault that she doesn't realise how pressured his time is right now[iii]. So politely, he stays silent and waits[iv].

In his conversation with The Researcher last week, she asked whether he included these phone calls on his timesheet. When he took on this work there was never a discussion about what he would, or wouldn't, claim back. But it's not like he can charge for these, it's just a phone call every so often. Albeit a phone call that's often over an hour long. And then there's the meetings as well. Some of them have lasted for up to three hours[v].

To be honest, it's the same for his work in the department now that he's on a salaried contract. Academics just get paid what they get paid and they do what they need to within that. For seminar tutors like him, they[vi] base it on an estimation of the amount of time he spends on different activities such as teaching, office hours and marking[vii]. Last term, he was paid around £1,500 per month, and was pretty much working full-time once everything was taken into account. Of course, he's not working during the summer so he won't get paid then and his salary drops to around £900 per month this semester. It's…fine. He's been a student for a long time and it's a higher salary than he's ever earned. But in terms of the volume of work he's had and the fact that he's teaching at a University, well…in reality…it's not a lot to be fair[viii].

Maybe The Researcher has a point, but that's just the way it is. It's definitely becoming more difficult to balance his PhD with other commitments now he's in his fourth year, especially given his funding ran out six months ago[ix]. But he can't exactly go back now and start asking Alison for payment. And it's not like it's any different for other PhD students[x].

[i] This acknowledges the project and the writing up of his thesis as two of the multiple, shifting priority concerns that Arthur was constantly balancing and renegotiating through internal conversation.
[ii] According to Arthur, Alison talked a lot about her research, even when it wasn't relevant to the work he was doing for her. This paragraph illustrating their social interactions juxtaposes the privilege she had in being able to spend time telling him about her research and Arthur's juggling of several different priorities.
[iii] In an earlier draft of this narrative, Arthur fed back his discomfort and guilt about its inclusion. While he felt that the issue of unpaid labour was important, he also acknowledged that he had learned a lot from Alison and enjoyed working on the project. He reflected that some of his discomfort may have been as a result of the power dynamics between employer and employee framed in this narrative that he understandably did not feel able to challenge, but that exacerbated the often conflicting priorities he had to balance. Nonetheless, this section has been reframed to offer a more nuanced articulation of his experiences and represent Arthur's emotional attachment to the project.
[iv] While Arthur chose to stay silent here and was therefore far from passive, his actions, or indeed, his polite inaction, in this narrative were strongly influenced by structure (his role as an employee) and culture (the power differentials between himself and Alison).
[v] In this representation of his internal conversation, the combination of the structures of formal timesheets and a culture of not discussing what could be claimed seemingly puts the onus on Arthur as the employee to decide what he should claim for. This may be furthered by his own lack of practical experience of similar scenarios, as well as his emotional discomfort of asking for money, all of which impacted on his project of being paid fairly for his work. The narrative is therefore indicative of the fallibility of agency and its detrimental impact on an individual if not supported by enabling structures and cultures.
[vi] Arthur's workload, a key structure in this narrative, was calculated by others.
[vii] At the start of that academic year, previously casual workers were all placed on salaried contracts. These structural changes were broadly welcomed, especially by the trade unions. While Arthur could see the benefits, he also experienced a lack of flexibility and felt that he was doing more unpaid work compared to the module he'd taught on previously, although this may have been due to his previous department having particularly good employment practices that were not consistent across the institution. Arthur was contracted for teaching, marking and the office hours themselves, but he was fairly sure that the preparation he did for his office hours and his email correspondence with students were not acknowledged in his contract, thus comprising additional unpaid labour. The fact that he nonetheless engaged in this work suggests that he prioritised his concern for supporting students over his own workload and feelings of resentment. However, this was potentially at a cost to him and contributed to the perpetuation of these cultural expectations.
[viii] The figures here represent wider structures around the precariousness of tutor employment and a lack of stable income. The amount Arthur got paid varied according to the amount of teaching available in each semester, and he had to find a way to continue to pay living costs during the summer when he was not paid. In our discussion, Arthur said he thought about this issue a lot, highlighting an internal conversation of trying to justify the situation despite feelings of frustration at the level of workload in comparison to pay.
[ix] This represents broader structural forces in terms of the financial consequences of not finishing his PhD within a particular time period, which potentially raised the priority of earning money as a fundamental concern over others. Arthur's decision to take on the project and some ad hoc paid work in his department, on top of his PhD and teaching responsibilities, was heavily influenced by the increased precariousness that he experienced in no longer having funding to rely on. Arguably there is a tension here between needing to finish in a certain time, but also needing to take on paid work that would inhibit his ability to do so.
[x] When Arthur talked about the employment experiences of his peers in our discussions he tailed off. It seemed as though unpaid labour was common, to the extent that it was almost accepted as part of doing a PhD, as indicated by the representation of Arthur's internal conversation here to justify his decision not to take action.

Gina: The Outreach

The spacious hall is already buzzing with teenagers from around 20 schools chatting excitedly, blazers and coats cast to one side. Staff from the research centre she's part of[i] will be talking about their work and how the sample specimens in the room are used for research. They've taken care to choose ones that the children will find attractive and interesting.

She's volunteered[ii] today because spreading scientific awareness for children is really important. Especially for girls. After all, she's a woman in science herself, a woman of colour in science[iii]. She'd been lucky, her father had tried to steer her towards getting good qualifications in science[iv] and he agrees with her that we need to encourage more girls into the field.

It was around their age when she'd concluded that engineering wasn't for her[v], and she could see how easy it would be to drift away from science completely. And there's other stuff too. Just the other day, following a lecture on the topic, she heard some of the girls in her lab worrying about their BMI. She tried to reassure them as much as she could. After all, The Rock's tall and super-muscular but his BMI would have him as overweight or obese. There's not an inch of fat on him so it's not the only definition of how healthy you are[vi].

Thankfully the girls in the group in front of her are a lot less shy than she was as a teenager, eagerly asking about the specimens in front of them.

"Have you seen these before? These are some of the specimens we use here at the research centre for our experiments. We've got over 20,000 and we use them for all kinds of things. Are you interested in them? Are you interested in maths? Or science? What do you want to be when you grow up?[vii]"

"I wanna do a PhD definitely!"

"Engineering, I think."

"Me too. Or maybe physics. They're my favourite classes at school."

"I'd love to do research eventually, but I'm not quite sure what in. But I'm going to apply to university anyway next year. Do you use these in your research?"

She loves their enthusiasm. "Yep, I do. Excellent. Hey, maybe one day you can work for me![viii]"

Girls' education is so important. Like her father always said, if you educate a boy you educate the boy, but if you educate a girl you educate the entire family. Women are such communal creatures, and if a woman is educated she makes sure everyone else in the family is educated too[ix]. We hold each other up and that's what society, what the scientific community[x], needs.

Gina: The Outreach

[i] Although I consider it to be teaching, Gina became involved in the outreach work through her PhD research, highlighting the intersection of research and teaching constituted through her natural and practical identities. It is within this cultural space of voluntary outreach activities rather than the more structured sessions within the curriculum that Gina found most freedom to enact her concern of inspiring in others the passion she has for her subject and research.
[ii] The impact of structural forces is seen here as Gina was engaged in the outreach work on an unpaid basis. As an outsider I was concerned that she was not paid for her time and expertise.
[iii] However, in contrast to my critique, this section illustrates the internal conversation that ultimately led Gina to prioritise her involvement in this work over other concerns such as time and money. Gina identified as a feminist, and her outreach role was a way for her to enact these values. While she did not specifically describe herself as a role model, she highlighted the importance of visibility for girls, and girls like her, who do not often see themselves represented in the scientific community. Her natural, embodied self came to the fore in her reference to being a woman of colour in science, which was perhaps also an acknowledgement of cultural factors within her discipline and their influence on her identity. Although cultural forces might have been constraining in terms of working in the field and she may have perpetuated existing structures around the lack of pay, for Gina in this situation they appeared to act as a driver for agency as she tried to covertly resist these societal norms.
[iv] Gina's father seemed to be a strong influence on her feminism, highlighting the long-lasting impact of social interactions through parental support on her identity, which in turn informed her practice. The genders were interesting here, with Gina positioning her father as an ally.
[v] Here, Gina drew on her previous practical experiences to empathise with the teenage girls and acknowledge that this was a crucial stage in their development where they might decide that engineering or science was not for them.
[vi] This focus on the mundane social interactions within the lab indicates how Gina began to resist cultural and societal pressures around body image. While acknowledging that social attitudes towards body positivity had improved, Gina also talked at length about how she challenged female students' negative perceptions of themselves in her lab, in this instance using the example of wrestler-turned-actor The Rock. This was not identified as part of her demonstrator role by her department, but here the tightly-structured lab exercises and expectations of her role did not seem to hinder Gina's agency.
[vii] The list of questions is representative of Gina's embodied passion and enthusiasm which shone through in the way her pace quickened in our discussions, and she barely stopped for breath when talking about her interactions with the school students.
[viii] Gina used her embodied, imagined self as a potential female leader of colour in science to inspire the students through social interactions here.
[ix] This final paragraph represents the internal conversation underpinning Gina's agency in the narrative. She described an apparently enabling familial culture and social interactions that have developed her identity as a feminist and driven her to prioritise seeking opportunities to support others like her.
[x] However, this enabling familial culture seemed to be at odds with the culture of the scientific community she found herself in, as espoused by her aspirations for broader social change set out at the end of the narrative.

The Researcher: The Gender Split

She'd noticed it early on, in the pilot observation. She's always seen this as a male-dominated subject[i] and so she'd tried to keep an open mind, but it was definitely there. The way that the male students sat on one side of the room and the female students on the other, so that when he grouped them where they sat[ii] there was only one mixed group.

In raising this with Arthur in their discussion, he says he's been considering the gender dynamics too[iii]. They seem to be more pronounced on this module than on others, he thinks, as he's noticed that the one or two dominant students in each of his seminars are male, white and British[iv]. Less so in the sessions she's observed perhaps, and the group activities have helped[v]. He recounts an example where one of the male students had spoken, unchallenged, for five minutes. Not that this was necessarily a bad thing of course, he was just really interested in the subject[vi].

The way the seminar groups had been allocated suggests to Arthur that the module leaders were not oblivious of this dynamic either. Looking at her highlighted notes from the session, The Researcher mentions to Arthur that the three examples used of leaders in the field were all female. While he can't say for certain what the rationale behind this was, Arthur seems fairly sure that this was deliberate[vii]. He also tells her that he's raised the gender split with Phil[viii] and they've discussed some potential strategies for addressing it. She moves on, and only realises afterwards that she should have asked what those strategies are[ix].

The Researcher: The Gender Split

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[i] As The Researcher, I was also conducting my own internal conversations during the research. Here, I recognise that I may have been culturally conditioned to make assumptions about aspects of participants' teaching, which potentially influenced the way I introduced gender as a point for discussion with Arthur.

[ii] I wanted to explore whether splitting the groups in this way was a conscious decision by Arthur, whether he'd noticed the gender split in that moment, and how any agency enacted here intersected with other possible cultural considerations around the way students had positioned themselves in the classroom.

[iii] Although I may have prompted gender as an area of focus for our discussion, Arthur already seemed engaged in an internal conversation around this issue.

[iv] This narrative represents tensions between Arthur's different priority concerns and his use of his internal conversation to reconcile these. Arthur did not want to criticise these students for being dominant, as one of his priority concerns was to encourage their enthusiasm for the subject and engage them in discussion, but he also recognised that dominant students may adversely affect the classroom dynamics.

[v] He therefore developed another project around helping such students to learn that those who are less dominant may also have valuable contributions to make to the discussion by splitting them into smaller discussion groups, each focused on a different question. The prevailing culture which allowed him the freedom to structure activities (as represented in *The Session Plan*) thus enabled his use of agency to support student learning of both groups. Having said this, in a comment on a draft of this narrative Arthur mentioned that one dominant student took offence to this approach, which highlights that students themselves were not simply passive, predictable recipients of learning but were instead contributing to the culture of the classroom. As a result of his process of reflexivity, Arthur was able to speak with the student one-to-one to explain his rationale.

[vi] Nonetheless, in this incident he deliberately chose to allow the student to continue speaking, perhaps because he did not feel he had the authority to cut him off as a result of the prevailing culture, or maybe as it tied in with one of his main concerns around prompting students to talk in the classroom. It is interesting to contrast his decision not to exert authority in this instance with the one-to-one conversation he had with the offended student described in the previous footnote, suggesting an active approach to deciding when to intervene.

[vii] Arthur acknowledged that it might be easier for white, male, British students to speak as they were more likely to see themselves represented through the disciplinary culture. Although this perhaps addresses gender more than challenging the predominantly white, Western focus of his discipline, this part of the narrative is illustrative of the module leaders setting an enabling culture of resistance through their own agency by using examples of women in the field in their lectures, which Arthur then chose to replicate in his session.

[viii] Arthur had not only already been thinking about issues relating to gender before I had raised the topic, but had also taken advantage of an enabling culture in which Phil was open to dialogue and feedback to highlight it with him.

[ix] This is included to illustrate my reflexive approach, and to highlight that these stories are not necessarily complete, are ongoing and open to interpretation.

Ahmed: The Assessment (Part 1)

"Would this be ok for me to pass the assessment?[i]" Ahmed hesitates as he's just a GTA. The Module Leader didn't talk to them about the assessment in their briefing[ii] and Ahmed doesn't want to give the wrong information. He can't hold that much responsibility[iii]. After all, he's not going to be marking their assessments[iv]. They should get some guidance in the lecture about this[v].

"OK, can you open up the assessment guidelines on the VLE?" The student loads up the VLE, and then stops. He clicks on the first page, then clicks back to the homepage. He then clicks onto another. That doesn't seem to be it either.

"Can you find the assessment instructions?" Again, the student clicks onto a page on the VLE and clicks back[vi].

Eventually, the student finds the document. "This is it, all of the instructions and the criteria are on here so have a look through this," Ahmed advises. "If you have any issues you could talk to The Module Leader[vii]."

Ahmed: The Assessment (Part 2)

He opens his notepad containing the sketches he'd drawn for students over the previous few weeks[viii] and pulls out the printed sheets. Last week[ix], students had asked lots of questions about the assessment, so today he has the instructions printed out. He'd also found a paper in an engineering education journal, written by colleagues who'd previously done the same experiment at his institution. It might be a different cohort, but it gives him some idea of the results from previous students[x] so he can help the students in today's lab with their own results and conclusions.

Ahmed: The Assessment (Parts 1 and 2)

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[i] This statement from the student draws on the structure of the assessment process, as well as the culture of students focusing on what they needed to do to pass their assessment and wanting reassurance from Ahmed. It is also the opening of a social interaction between the student and Ahmed that shaped his identity and actions as a teacher in this context, and perhaps guided the development of his project towards specifically helping them with the assessment.

[ii] The intersection of culture and structure in this mundane interaction constrained Ahmed's agency in responding to the student. While structures existed to support GTAs in the form of the briefing by The Module Leader, these seemed to be underpinned by cultural expectations that providing advice on the assessment was not part of the GTA role. It is unclear whether the details of the assessment were deliberately withheld, but the lack of information limited what Ahmed could advise. Nonetheless, while Ahmed seemed anxious about providing appropriate information to the students, he also appeared to be accepting of his role in complying with the boundaries that had been set.

[iii] Ahmed's internal conversation in justifying why he could not provide advice to the student is represented here. His response may also reflect his practical identity around expertise explored in other narratives, in that he could not advise the student because he did not have the knowledge about the assessment himself. He perhaps did not abandon his priority of helping students, but instead defined it more narrowly in this context due to his fear of giving out the wrong information.

[iv] The structures that meant that GTAs did not do any marking for this module further reinforced Ahmed's internal conversation.

[v] The reference to the lecture indicates that Ahmed drew on existing structures to identify what would work better. The maintaining of the cultural status quo was seen in his suggestion of additional guidance for students from the person doing the marking, rather than the provision of more information around assessment for GTAs. It was not clear whether he believed this was already happening, or was recommending what should happen in the future, but he did not feed this back to The Module Leader. As noted in *The Troubleshooting*, this may have been due to the cultural hierarchies in place or it may have been an active choice based on his previous experiences.

[vi] In the absence of having the information himself and prioritising his concern to help the student, Ahmed utilised the existing structure of the virtual learning environment (VLE) to identify the 'official' guidance. Ahmed did not know where to find the information about the assessment on the VLE, so asked the student to look for it. As highlighted here however, the structure was so opaque that the student couldn't find the information either.

[vii] Furthermore, Ahmed directed the student to The Module Leader, who in this situation represents a formal structure. His decision to comply with the guidance may have reflected some degree of agency, but was also heavily constrained by the gatekeeping of information discussed above.

[viii] Ahmed always carried a notepad around with him. He wasn't instructed to do so, and in fact none of the GTAs in this lab were given specific activities to carry out with the students, but his use of the notepad to explain concepts through diagrams comprised a small act of agency. This may have been tied to his previous practical experience as a lecturer, or may have been socially constituted through observing others.

[ix] These narratives have been paired together to illustrate how Ahmed identified spaces where he could enact some agency within the context of the structures and cultures around him following his social interactions with students in the previous session *(Part 1)*.

[x] As well as the assessment information, Ahmed utilised the existing structure of the journal article which seemed to be an enabler for his project of advising students. Ahmed had no intention of giving the paper to the students, but instead wanted to use it to shore up his own credibility, reflecting his own priority of making sure he had expertise around his subject (in this case, the assessment rather than disciplinary expertise). It is interesting to note that he chose to use the article rather than approaching The Module Leader, so the existing cultures were unlikely to change.

Gina: The Invigilation

She stands there, a little uncomfortably[i], watching them. Heads down[ii], they're super into their assessments, silent except for the occasional cough. That's good. There's four of them to control the environment and make sure things run smoothly[iii]. It seems to be going well so far, and there haven't been any delays at least. She must be vigilant, that's what the word means after all, to be vigilant, be present for any examples of unfair means or anything that students might need. This is the first time she's invigilated so she's not sure what she'd actually do if she did see anything wrong[iv]. Of course, having introduced the exam at the start as the lecturer in charge, Maria's just over there in the corner finishing off some marking so she can ask her if she needs to[v].

She'd found out that this session was an exam a week ago, and when they'd first got the email they weren't sure whether or not they'd be required. After all, they're just[vi] demonstrators so why would they be needed? But Lisa, one of the other demonstrators, had spoken to Maria who'd confirmed they would be invigilating[vii].

It's a good thing for the students, definitely, that she's there, and she does her best to reassure them. She's still a student herself and knows how stressful exams can be. At least the students know her, rather than having a stranger telling them what to do. She's responsible for making sure things happen correctly and students get their exams done on time, but she made sure to wish each of them all the best when she checked their registration cards at the start[viii]. She's got to be careful not to loom over them though, she felt more pressured when her own invigilators did that[ix]. Stay vigilant, but don't get too close.

But it's definitely…different from what she usually does in this lab. She shifts from one foot to the other and her mind begins to wander[x]. This probably isn't the most interesting session for The Researcher to observe. She misses the interaction with the students, but it's a chance for her to learn a new skill that'll be good to have on her CV[xi]. Students have so many exams these days, it's important to know how to deal with them. Restlessly, she walks along the front of the room and then returns to her original spot. Ten minutes left to go.

Gina: The Invigilation

[i] I was especially interested in Gina's embodied self in this observation. The contrast between her stillness here and the way she'd frequently pace up and down the room in other sessions seemed to highlight the boredom and discomfort she experienced during a session that was so different to what she was used to.

[ii] Unlike the other narratives, this one is characterised by little social interaction between Gina and the students. The cultural and structural norms of invigilation significantly limited her opportunities for agency.

[iii] This represents Gina's internal conversation justifying her own discomfort. She spoke several times about her role as an invigilator, and the phrase "control the environment" implied that she was happy to acquiesce with the prevailing constraining culture of the session, perhaps by identifying this as a new project for this new context. One of the ways she regarded herself as doing well in this role was if students were getting on with their work without delays or interruptions, giving the whole narrative an air of compliance.

[iv] Gina's internal conversation in making sense of an unfamiliar role is represented here.

[v] The lecturer, Maria, provided a briefing for demonstrators at the start of the session. While Maria was present in the room to begin and end the exam (structure), the culture seemed to be that invigilation during the exam was left to the demonstrators. Gina did not question that the lecturer was marking the previous cohorts' exam scripts during the exam, and in fact suggested that the lecturer's position in the room potentially showed trust in the demonstrators. However, while Gina said that she welcomed the additional responsibility due to the seriousness and formality of the exam, this combined with her uncertainty about her role and the presence of the module leader seemed to make her more likely to conform to cultural expectations. Although not a focus of this research, the use of demonstrators as invigilators could have created space for lecturer agency.

[vi] Cultural and structural forces can be seen here in terms of communication via email (structure) on a short-term, need-to-know basis (culture), potentially limiting agency as Gina had little time to prepare. As with Ahmed in *The Name* and *The Assessment*, her use of the word "just" indicated a diminishing of her role, again potentially as a result of the culture around how demonstrators were regarded in the department.

[vii] Gina raised the lack of communication between academic staff and demonstrators several times in our discussions, suggesting a culture in which it was up to the demonstrators to take the initiative, find out for themselves what was happening, and share that knowledge between them. While this marginalisation from the rest of the teaching team did not appear to be malicious or deliberate, it was not clear whether the module leaders assumed demonstrators did not need to know this information, did not think of telling them, or were not organised enough to think this far ahead. Gina and the other demonstrators did not seem to question this with the module leaders.

[viii] Gina's natural and practical experience of being a student meant that she was highly aware of the emotions associated with exams, which she returned to repeatedly in our discussions. She saw the fact that her experience was relatively recent as an advantage in supporting the students. She spoke of how she would encourage students "like a Dad" at the start, and if asked to accompany a student on a break during the exam would also talk reassuringly to them. While not in a position to challenge the highly constraining environment of the exam, she was thus able to cultivate small spaces of agency to support students.

[ix] Similarly, as a result of her experience as a student, Gina seemed conscious of her own embodiment in her criticism of invigilators who "loom" (her term).

[x] Gina often tried to find the positive aspects in her work. However, the tension between her embodied discomfort and internal conversation around invigilation, and the projects she usually enacted in the lab, can be seen here. Her initial hesitation when I asked her about her experience of invigilation suggested that she did not enjoy it, and as our conversation continued she admitted she found it boring.

[xi] Nonetheless, through her internal conversation Gina prioritised the structure of the CV and culture of employability over her own discomfort, even at such an early stage of her PhD, highlighting an active reconciling of her practice with an alternative concern. Perhaps this is an example of Gina looking forward to a potential future identity, even if its exact nature is not yet clear.

Arthur: The Marking

Arthur looks again at the comparison between his marks and Kerry's. He hasn't done a good job here. They've told him he's been too harsh overall, with his marks slightly below the average[i]. He sighs. That'll be extra work[ii]. Is it the same for the other tutors? His conversations with Rachel have suggested so. She'd found it hard to work out what students were meant to be doing and how much weight to give to different aspects of their writing too[iii].

He's had a different experience, marking on this module. They clearly have a view of what they want the module to be and they're obviously thinking it through very carefully, but there's been some confusion so it's not necessarily filtering down[iv] to people like him who are doing the actual delivery. Previously, in another module, he'd been asked to mark a sample of assessments, and had met with the module leaders and other seminar tutors to come to a common understanding of why they'd[v] given the marks they had and what marks they should be giving. Whereas this time, he'd just been told to mark the samples, they'd looked over what he'd done, then he'd been told it was fine to go ahead and mark the rest of the assignments[vi]. And he's only finding out now, having marked 80 2,500-word essays[vii], that he's been too harsh.

Kerry's the only one of them who's actually delivering seminars. She only has one seminar class so had fewer than 20 essays to mark. He looks again at her marks and there's several in the 80s. Odd. No one gets a mark over 80, especially in the first year, unless it's an exceptional piece of work that would be put forward for an award or something. You wouldn't get several in one class, surely[viii]?

Confused, he opens up the rubric. Yep, it's there, comments about students' analytical skills, the quality of the sources they've used, the coherence of their arguments, and the presence of their own voice supported by evidence. That's what he'd marked against, but he's not convinced Kerry's done the same. If he'd known how Kerry was marking from the start, he could have made sure he was looking for the right things[ix]. He hesitates. It's always hard when it's a new module.

And also, maybe his feedback has been useful to students. OK, his marks might have been too harsh, but he's at least given feedback to help them with their analysis, their referencing, those things that they might be able to use in their future writing. It seems that very little emphasis is placed on the process of writing essays, so a lot of the first years don't know what a first class essay looks like or what they need to be doing. This isn't the last time they'll be writing essays after all[x]. And hopefully some of them will come along to his office hours to discuss the feedback further. There's only so much you can do through written feedback[xi].

Arthur: The Marking

[i] In our discussion about marking, Arthur started by talking about his own feelings of disappointment and acknowledged that he had felt anxious when assessing previous assignments, which suggests the prominence of his emotions and an existing internal conversation around the marking process. The reference to a "good job" implies a broader culture in which his success and identity as a teacher were judged by the extent to which he complied with the marks of the module leaders.
[ii] Following such a discrepancy, there was a back-and-forth process of reviewing and amending marks which had to be done in a short space of time, often over the weekend. This had significant workload implications, forcing a shift in Arthur's immediate concerns.
[iii] One way Arthur tried to make sense of his internal conversations was to discuss them with other tutors, even if this did not lead to active challenge of the system. However, although he did not ask for guidance at the time, he raised the issue in a TA Forum the year after these narratives were written, by which time he was a CTA. This was partly following our discussion but also because one of the other TAs had had a similar experience. In a comment on a later draft, Arthur noted that he felt more able to resist the prevailing culture at this point, not only because he felt more frustrated but also because of the development of a stronger community of TAs and CTAs. This resulted in the TA coordinator implementing his suggestion of providing guidance and best practice on marking as a team through the circulation of a departmental email, showing the impact of his (and others') resistance on broader structures and cultures.
[iv] Arthur was generous towards the intentions of the module leaders (his use of the word "confusion" suggests a degree of diplomacy), but felt that the systems were not necessarily in place to support him and the other tutors. His repeated use of the term "filtered" seemed to be a way of distancing criticism from the module leaders but also implied a culture of passivity in how information was communicated and the unwritten rules underpinning the marking process.
[v] Here, Arthur and the other seminar tutors are included in the word "they" to highlight that they were part of the same team for the other module. This is in contrast with the third sentence of the narrative where "they" situates the module leaders as separate to the tutors.
[vi] This indicates the different cultures that prevailed in different departments. Arthur foregrounded the approach of gaining consensus through discussion as good practice, highlighting his valuing of practical and social interactions in constructing his teaching identity. He commented on the initial draft that while an additional meeting might seem like more work, in his experience it would reduce the last minute workload of reassigning marks. Through this suggestion Arthur actively chose to comply with the existing structures, as the purpose of the meeting was for seminar tutors to understand what marks they should be giving so they could calibrate themselves to that expectation.
[vii] Emotions are key here, as shown by Arthur's frustration at having marked so many assignments that then needed amending through burdensome structures.
[viii] Arthur expressed surprise around the discrepancy between Kerry's marks and his expectations, based around his practical experience of Level 1 student marks. However, the structural and cultural hierarchy meant that he chose not to openly challenge Kerry. In a comment on the draft, Arthur recounted that he later completed a group exercise with Kerry and others in the department, where she denied handing out marks in the 80s. Again, Arthur said nothing, but this suggests academic staff were also constrained by, and perpetuated, departmental cultures around marking.
[ix] The rubric was the key structure in place for the marking process. It shaped the way Arthur marked the assessments, and in turn he willingly complied with it because he prioritised the concern for consistency between markers above individual agency.
[x] The narrative ends with this hopeful paragraph representing Arthur's internal conversation about the potential benefits of his feedback, and a possible shift in his concerns from ensuring compliance with existing structures to supporting students more generally. It is illustrative of how Arthur mediated the effects of a departmental culture that he felt did not support students sufficiently around essay writing through his internal conversation around his practical experience as a student, in order to enact his agency by deliberately structuring his feedback in a way that offered additional guidance.
[xi] Arthur spoke about the structural restrictions of online marking in terms of the type and amount of feedback he could give, especially given the limited amount of time he was allocated to mark each essay. Furthermore, Arthur's internal conversation highlights the office hours as an enabling departmental structure for providing the additional feedback he believed students needed.

Ahmed: The PhD

It's worked quite well this semester. All, well, most, of the applications are done centrally[i], but he had a problem getting GTA work to begin with – because he was prioritising his study[ii] he didn't give applying for jobs much thought. When he eventually applied after his second year, they didn't really want older[iii] students like him. They seemed to think that he should be writing and finishing his research[iv]. Still, he'd been able to apply for one module directly in another department and his interview for that had been successful. He must be doing something right anyway. For a second module, the lecturer had asked his supervisor to recommend someone and he'd been put forward, and for a third which he'd taught previously, the lecturer had just asked if he wanted to be a GTA again this time[v].

They agree on the terms of the contract for each module[vi] and he signs it online. Sometimes they specify what days GTAs are needed so you can make sure you're available on those days. He might decide not to apply for anything next semester if he has other pressures[vii]. Hassan says that you have to apply for everything to have a chance of getting GTA work, but actually he's been careful in his selection for this semester[viii]. Normally he would be open-minded and happy to teach outside his comfort zone. However he's a PhD student who needs to finish, and when it's a topic that relates to your background and field of study[ix], you don't need to prepare. While he might be able to stay in the UK for one or two years[x], sooner or later he'll have to return and things will be different back home. Most of the universities in his country are teaching-oriented rather than research-oriented so the commitment is to teaching the students and his job will be to service[xi] the department. He can select what he wants to teach right now, but he needs to be open-minded when he finishes.

For his PhD, he prefers working at night and getting up late. Personally he likes the flexibility and freedom[xii] in his work, but having said that, he's task-oriented. So a couple of weeks ago, he had a pressured deadline where he had to work through the night, but he managed his schedule so that he could sleep before the morning's teaching session. It's not a big deal though, and he's happy to do it[xiii].

Ahmed: The PhD

[i] From a structural perspective, there was a policy in this institution that all GTA positions were advertised centrally. Ahmed's faculty also in theory had a standardised system for recruiting GTAs. Ahmed initially said that all GTAs were recruited in this way but then corrected this to "most", implying that he was aware of exceptions (including himself).
[ii] In the early stages of his study, Ahmed had prioritised understanding what was expected when doing a PhD and familiarising himself with an academic system that was new to him. As an international student, Ahmed would have also balanced concerns around trying to accommodate to life in a new country.
[iii] This is not referring to his natural age, but the practical stage of his PhD.
[iv] Cultural factors and unwritten rules potentially posed barriers to Ahmed seeking employment as a GTA. These tended to be centred around his research commitments rather than his teaching ability, reflecting cultural expectations at different stages of the PhD and the gatekeeping that resulted in his department. The word "they" is used to represent the central structures as a faceless collective, as it was not clear to Ahmed who made these decisions.
[v] This offers more detail around the disparity between the formal structures regarding centralised recruitment of GTAs, and Ahmed's experience that recruitment in some areas was still influenced by informal mechanisms and word of mouth. These cultural factors seemed to have enabled Ahmed's project of gaining GTA work, but could quite easily have been constraining for another PhD student.
[vi] The conversation with Ahmed implied that there was one standard, overarching GTA contract but the details were specific to the cultures of each individual module. Although the way Ahmed described the process suggested some negotiation, in practice he was expected to agree to the contract terms.
[vii] The discrepancy between formal structures and informal cultures acted as an enabler for Ahmed to decide which roles he wished to apply for, and this part of the narrative represents his awareness that his priorities may change over the course of his PhD. Structures that explicitly set out the details and expectations of employment seemed to support Ahmed's agency, because he could make an informed decision when applying for GTA roles.
[viii] This represents the way that knowledge about recruitment could be socially constructed between GTAs. However, it also reflects Ahmed's active role in selecting the roles to apply for, as he chose to go against Hassan's advice.
[ix] The structural pressures for PhD students to finish within a certain timescale seemed to take precedence in Ahmed's internal conversation here. While being "open-minded" was an important value for him, he prioritised subjects where he had expertise, partly because he saw this as integral to the role, but also because it would be easier for him to balance teaching and research priorities as he would not need to prepare for the lab sessions.
[x] As an international student, there were additional structures constraining Ahmed's agency. He could only stay in the UK after his PhD if he could secure a job or training with financial support, so he knew that at some point he would have to return to his home country.
[xi] The distinct cultures of the Russell Group institution that Ahmed was working in and those of his home country are highlighted here. While it might seem as though he was less able to make choices in the UK environment, Ahmed felt that agency was still restricted in his home institution as a result of the focus on teaching, because certain subjects were expected to be taught. Although not reflected in this narrative, cultural differences were also seen by the fact he always used the collective "we" rather than "I" when talking about his home country in our discussions.
[xii] Ahmed spoke of the contrast between the flexibility of his research work, and the more constraining structures of his teaching commitments that required him to work at a particular time. In identifying his practical identity as "task-oriented", Ahmed also gave examples of how he adjusted his schedule to meet the needs of the teaching structures, although he did not automatically characterise this structure as negative despite its constraints. This passage suggests that he did not necessarily prioritise research over teaching despite his identity as a PhD student, instead actively negotiating both his research and teaching commitments in a far more nuanced way.
[xiii] Ahmed's internal conversation reinforced his acceptance of existing structures and cultures, and the adaptations he made to navigate them.

Arthur: The Module

16 December 2018

Dear James,

I hope you're well. Following on from my teaching on EPT364 this semester, I wanted to contact you to see if you knew of any further teaching opportunities next semester[i]? No problem if not, but I'm happy to continue teaching, so let me know if anything comes up.

Arthur

8 January 2019

Dear Arthur,

Thank you for getting in touch. As it happens, one of our seminar tutors who'd been assigned back in September to PNT164[ii] has had to drop out unexpectedly. If you're still available to teach this semester, that would be great. We'd be looking at four seminars on Thursdays:

10am – Seminar Room 2 Robson Building (the new one)

11am – Seminar Room B54, Hills Building

12noon – Seminar Room C25, Hills Building

1pm – Seminar Room B76, Hills Building[iii]

Our initial meeting with all of the seminar tutors to talk through what this module is about was back in September[iv], but I've attached the module handbook for you to have a look through. The module leaders Kerry and Phil will send you the session plans on the Monday or Tuesday of each week.

James

28 February 2019

Dear Kerry and Phil,

As you know, I started a couple of weeks ago as one of the seminar tutors for PNT164. Things seem to be going ok so far, but as I wasn't down to teach on this module when you met the other seminar tutors in September (see correspondence with James below), I wonder if it would be possible to meet at some point[v] to talk about the broader aims of the module to make sure what I'm doing fits in with them, and what you want students to get out of it[vi]?

Arthur

Arthur: The Module

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[i] Arthur had a part-time, temporary teaching contract until Christmas in the department. While this was a formal contract of employment, nonetheless he was in a precarious position, living semester-by-semester with no guarantee of teaching. On the one hand, this illustrates the constraining structures of Arthur's work, increasing the urgency of securing employment and making it difficult to sustain projects due to the short-term nature of his immediate teaching contract. However, Arthur's knowledge of these structures meant that he knew who to ask about potential work, and he was therefore able to enact agency by approaching James directly.

[ii] The department assigned seminar tutors at the start of the year rather than at the start of each semester. However, while there might have been systems in place for regular appointments, there was no formal process of filling the role if one of the tutors dropped out, so Arthur got this teaching work from his own initiative.

[iii] This is representative of Arthur's timetable, which acted as a constraining structure from the perspective of adapting his teaching activities. All of his sessions were on the same day, in different rooms (with the first two in different buildings) and without a break. Due to his other commitments he preferred to teach all of the seminars on one day, suggesting that his priorities intersected with the structures in this instance. However, he had very little time in between sessions to talk to students and prepare and set up for the next session, which potentially limited his agency in responding to what happened in each session and adapting his plan accordingly. Where he did adapt his plans, this tended to be reactive and in the moment of each session, although occasionally he did implement similar changes in the remaining seminars of the day. Arthur felt students engaged more in certain rooms because the noise reverberated, creating a buzz in the classroom. While he enacted some agency in utilising this in the classroom environment, his lack of control over rooms that were booked for him acted as a constraining force on the approaches he could use, potentially causing him to adapt his projects according to the room he found himself in.

[iv] While structures were put in place to support seminar tutors and he had participated in similar meetings for other modules, holding these at the start of the year made it difficult to accommodate the messiness of teaching practice and the culture of seminar tutors dropping out. James passed on the handbook, which is representative of the structure around the module but would only encapsulate those aspects that were explicitly written down.

[v] Again, it was down to Arthur's active intervention that this meeting was suggested, and as with *The Session Plan*, he utilised existing structures in his call for the meeting.

[vi] Arthur had successfully navigated departmental structures to get this teaching role, but understanding the cultures seemed to be more difficult. While the handbook may have addressed some of the expectations for the module, it was the tacit, unwritten rules that Arthur was hoping to access through his suggestion to meet. It might seem that a lack of direction from the module leaders would offer room for agency in prompting him to develop his own projects, but for Arthur this isolation from departmental culture and structures acted as a constraining force. One of his priority concerns was to make sure that his seminars fitted in with the overall aims of the module, and this narrative highlights his frustration at the difficulties he experienced in complying with these.

The Researcher: The Training[i]

She'd never really seen it like that before. She knew that the teaching sessions she ran were compulsory[ii] in some departments[iii], and it's not necessarily a bad thing to make sure teachers are appropriately supported before they're allowed into a classroom[iv] – both for the students and for the teacher themselves.

But the subject of pay makes her feel really uncomfortable[v]. Gina has said that money is less of a priority for her than for other PhD students[vi]. But as a matter of principle, if teachers are required to attend sessions to work then they're spending that time on work. After all, if she needs to go on a course, she would go during her working day or take the time back[vii]. Surely this should be a key part of their contracts?

Having said that though, she's taken enough days off and spent enough money to attend conferences like the one last week to present her doctoral research. Her department is hardly supportive of these things, assuming that her development should be around her managerial responsibilities[viii], and through such small acts of resistance[ix] she disagrees. But of course it comes at a cost in terms of time and money. She's lucky that she can take the hit[x]. Maybe that's the difference here.

[i] I have deliberately used the term "training" provocatively. I feel very uncomfortable with it as a way of describing what I do as I believe it reflects a deficit model of professional development. However, I recognise that this is the language used in other disciplines, and am thus constrained by the prevailing culture in trying to accommodate different perspectives of the work I do. This and the final narrative (*The Next Steps*) are set up to show contrasting perspectives around professional development between myself and Gina.

[ii] Although I dislike the requirement for mandatory training, examining my embodied discomfort raised a critical question for me around the extent to which I choose to comply with rather than question this dominant culture.

[iii] There is an issue of equity in terms of the cultural implementation of formal structures. The mandatory requirement is not the same across the University and generally enforced at faculty level, so different GTAs are subject to different rules and constraints. As a result, it may be more difficult for some than others to get GTA work, and their motivation for attending our team's sessions may be different.

[iv] This reflects my internal conversation in trying to reconcile my own values and beliefs with the rationale underpinning institutional structures and cultures that seem focused on socialising new teachers.

[v] The emotional aspects of being complicit in a system that requires GTAs at a vulnerable stage in their career to attend training that they are not paid for before they can work are highlighted here.

[vi] Gina was in a somewhat privileged position in that she seemed to have other financial support, but she recognised that this was not the case for all GTAs and others may have prioritised money as a key concern. This is reflective both of the different identities between GTAs, and the different structures and cultures they experienced even within the same institution.

[vii] Our interaction led me to reflect on my own privilege, as illustrated by this part of my internal conversation. As different cultural forces impacted on my concerns and those of Gina, I am contrasting my experience here with what is expected of GTAs to foreground inequity among teachers at different levels within the same institution.

[viii] This represents the constraining forces within my own departmental culture.

[ix] My internal conversation is highlighted here in terms of how I see my research, enact agency within the spaces available to me, and justify to myself the time I take off and the money I pay, therefore mirroring Gina's internal conversation for engaging in the training.

[x] I have ended the narrative by returning to an acknowledgement of my own privilege in comparison to Gina's position and that of other GTAs through this internal conversation. However while my position makes it easier for me to be able to enact these "small acts of resistance", it also makes it easier for me to continue to perpetuate the system without challenging it.

Gina: The Next Steps

She scours the website but still can't find it[i]. She's got her eye on a couple of modules that she's keen to demonstrate on. She'd like to do this one again and of course she'll be able to demonstrate on the second year module around her research area this time. It's good to have more choice this year now that she's been to the required sessions[ii] run by The Researcher[iii]. Last time they met, the Researcher asked her if she'd been paid to attend them[iv], which struck her as a bit odd. They're extremely useful so to be honest, she'd have expected to pay to attend them herself. Everyone should be attending these sessions[v].

Although she had some preconceptions, she's found teaching to be excellent. She's learnt a lot from the students and it's helped her public speaking – even her mother says she stammers less[vi]. Hopefully she's taught them something too, and, ok, maybe "inspire" is a strong word, but she'd like to think she's made them a bit interested in the scientific field[vii]. She enjoys it more now, which is really strange because she'd never seen herself as someone who'd be happy walking around a lab and answering student questions. But it kind of grows on you[viii]. It's always fun when people are interested in what they're doing. And you see the potential for growth in students, as well as actual, real-time growth in them[ix] which is incredible.

No matter, she'll just keep checking back[x] and once the vacancies are up she can fill out the form. September's still a few months away anyway[xi].

[i] The website is highlighted as a constraining structure for GTAs looking for work, as the information about forthcoming jobs was difficult for demonstrators to find.
[ii] Her practical identity and priority concern as a researcher with subject expertise meant that Gina was particularly keen to act as a demonstrator for the second-year module, and had been disappointed that she had been unable to this year. She was not allowed to apply for it because she was still in the first year of her PhD, so it was the cultural attitudes towards research of her department that acted as a constraint in this situation. Similarly she had been unable to demonstrate in the first semester of her PhD because she had to attend the required training first. Given the workshops were run at the start of the semester, as a first-year it was impossible for her to navigate the structures around booking onto the required workshops in time. Arguably, there was possibly a further cultural constraint in terms of how much information demonstrators were given about available training opportunities, and how far they were expected to find these on their own. This section therefore highlights both the potential for agency in terms of Gina selecting which modules she wished to apply for, and the structures and cultures that had constrained her choice to date.
[iii] The complexity of the relationship between Gina and I is represented here.
[iv] It was important for me to show the contrapuntal approach underpinning these stories, as this highlights my own positionality, values and priority concerns coming through in the questions I asked.
[v] The intersection of structures and cultures around pay illustrates the different priority concerns of Gina and I represented in this narrative and *The Training*. Gina seemed happy to conform to the University's requirements for "training", thus maintaining these cultural norms, although I wondered how much of her response was influenced by my dual position as The Researcher and the person leading the sessions.
[vi] Gina's social interactions with her parents seemed to have a strong influence on her identity, and indicated a nuanced relationship between her background and previous experiences, and her teaching practice.
[vii] Although she used the term herself, Gina felt that "inspire" was too strong a word for what she did. Nonetheless, in the narrative it seemed an appropriate way of representing the fact that a key recurring priority concern was to pass on her own passion for science and provoke change through the social interactions with her students, rather than simply helping them to pass the exam.
[viii] Her reflections suggested that Gina's identity was affected by her practical experience and social interactions within the classroom, highlighting that the relationship between identity and practice was not one-way. As represented by her internal conversation here, she openly challenged how she had previously seen the demonstrator role in our discussions.
[ix] The idea of growth came through in Gina's reflexivity around her role. From the perspective of practical interactions she seemed to feel valued through witnessing not only the potential growth of students but actual progress, and realised this through social interactions with the students.
[x] The structure of the process for demonstrator recruitment meant that the onus (whether perceived or actual) was on the demonstrators to keep an eye out for jobs rather than relying on communications from the department.
[xi] This conversation was in May, highlighting how the uncertainty of GTA employment potentially limited opportunities for agency as it was impossible for them to plan ahead. Nonetheless, Gina adapted the temporal aspects of her project in response to these structural constraints.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In the previous chapter, I set out a collection of short stories based around participants' experiences in the classroom, and used footnotes to emphasise the systematic process that had underpinned their construction (Gillborn, 2010). While recognising the possibility of multiple interpretations, I also offered analytical commentary through the lens of Archer's (1995, 2000, 2003, 2007) realist social theory. Next, I will move beyond internal analysis of each individual text to identify areas of "convergence and divergence" (Riessman, 2008, p.191), not only among participants but also between participants and The Researcher, in how they constructed their identities, created spaces for agency, and contributed to morphostasis and morphogenesis. As with the footnotes, due to the complexity of participants' lived experiences and the socio-political contexts in which they were working, it is not possible to highlight all of the nuances within the stories, and the reader may well interpret the narratives differently (Riessman, 2008). Nonetheless, the creation and sharing of stories plays an important role in understanding and advocating for broader systemic change, both within departments and institutions, and in society more widely (Delgado, 1989). In structuring this discussion chapter, I return to the flowchart introduced in the literature review which aligns with my research questions:

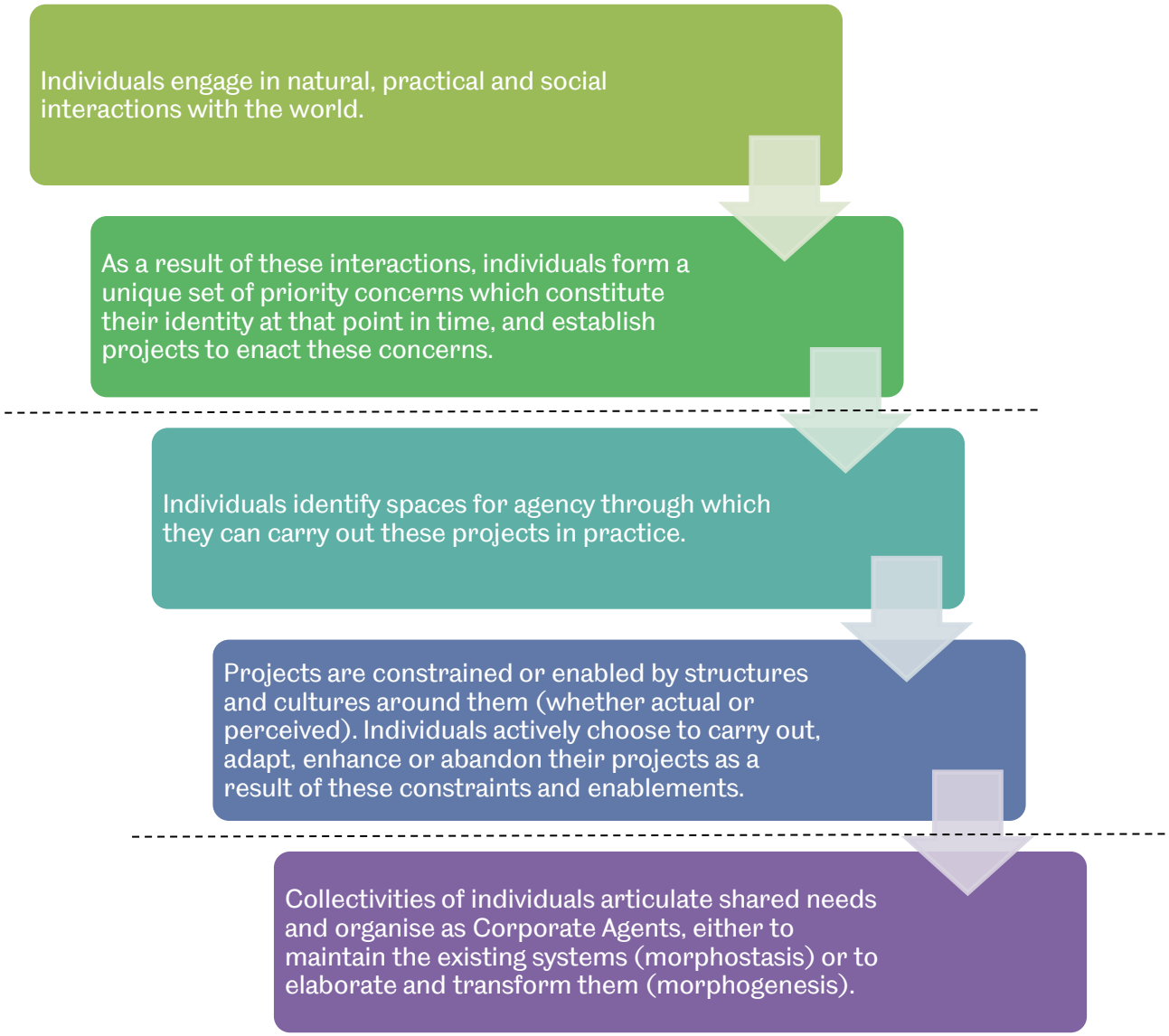

Figure 4: Structure of the Discussion chapter

Recognising the intersection between individuals' interactions with the world and their identification of priority concerns and projects in forming their identities, I begin by considering these first two elements of the flowchart together with regard to the GTAs in my study. Similarly, Archer (2000) argues that we cannot talk about agency without acknowledging the structures and cultures that enable and constrain individuals' projects. In the second section of this chapter, I therefore explore how participants created physical, social, political and ideological spaces for agency, the ways in which their projects were enabled or constrained by the structures and cultures around them, and how these forces affected the projects they chose and the way they enacted them. Finally, I discuss how far GTA collectivities influenced broader social systems, either contributing to morphostasis or elaboration of structures and cultures.

How do GTAs construct identities as teachers in higher education, and how are these identities enacted in day-to-day practice?

Practical interactions

As a collective, the narratives highlight and value the heterogeneous ways, even with such a small sample from a single institution, that GTAs engage in natural, practical and social interactions with the world to forge identities as teachers (Archer, 2000). I start by exploring practical interactions which focus on how participants view performative success, as this heterogeneity is most clearly seen in the way they described their roles in *The Participants*. Gina's description of her position at the university throughout our conversations was focused on her research and she was adamant that she did not consider herself to have enough expertise to call herself a teacher, which seemed to be a key indicator of effectiveness in this role for her. Meanwhile, Arthur's definition of his role was entirely teaching-focused, and Ahmed's was somewhere in between. Even the title 'GTA' was therefore inconsistently applied, illustrating the unique nature of personal identities according to Archer's (2000) framework and reinforcing Zotos et al's (2020) claim that GTAs do not necessarily regard themselves as teachers. Indeed, as with Zotos et al's (2020) participants, narratives such as Gina's *The Invigilation* and Ahmed's *The Assessment (Part 1)* highlight instances where participants diminished their teaching roles by using adjectives such as 'only' or 'just', suggesting their identities were also influenced by performative comparisons between their roles and those of others.

Drawing further on Archer's (2000) framework highlighting the influence of practical interactions on the individuals' priority concerns, there are a number of reasons why such differences in identity might occur. Gina was in the first year of her PhD, so familiarising herself with the requirements of PhD research and studying in the UK to ensure performative success may have been her priority concern at this time (Antoniadou and Quinlan, 2020; Collins, 2019; Jiang et al, 2010; Winter et al, 2015). This may also have been reinforced by her department's structures and cultures which will be explored later in this chapter. Arthur's teaching-focused description of his identity may have been influenced by both practical concerns and departmental structures: the former as he was carrying out his PhD at a different institution so his concerns in relation to this one were entirely teaching-related; and the latter as his department had specifically created the Teaching Assistant role to contain additional responsibility which he was keen to carry out well. Similarly, the practical interactions through which Ahmed had already developed his understanding of effective teaching in his home institution may have framed the way he formed his identity in the UK in comparison (Winter et al, 2015). Both Arthur and Ahmed directly referenced their previous teaching experience at several points, highlighting the influence of earlier practical interactions on cultivating their priority concerns in relation to what success might look like for their current role.

In considering their practical interactions around their roles, I had wondered whether participants might regard teaching as something they did 'on the side' to support priority concerns around research, but their responses indicated a much more nuanced balancing of identities. Although Arthur and Gina identified the financial benefits of teaching in *The Project* and *The Final Session* respectively in line with Park's (2004) findings, both said this was not their sole, or even primary, motivation for teaching, suggesting alternative concerns such as gaining experience or enthusiasm for teaching held a higher priority. *The PhD* represents Ahmed's efforts in carefully balancing the freedom of research and what he regarded as the

necessary constraints of teaching through his internal conversation, and illustrated the way he created projects that would reconcile these different priorities (Park and Ramos, 2002; Winstone and Moore, 2017). GTAs were not only prioritising concerns from within the institution however. *The Project* indicates the challenges of navigating different jobs including Arthur's teaching role alongside his PhD studies, and with Ahmed's experiences in *The PhD*, also highlights the time pressures participants felt due to broader research funding structures (Jordan and Howe, 2018; Muzaka, 2009; Park and Ramos, 2002; Winstone and Moore, 2017). Furthermore, as indicated by Raaper (2018) and UCU (2018, 2020) these narratives also indicate the wider job insecurity experienced by GTAs. The impact of these pressures on how they defined success in their roles can be seen through the suggestion by both Arthur and Ahmed that it was their responsibility to manage their time appropriately. These narratives therefore indicate how GTAs negotiated a range of often conflicting priority concerns in forging their identities through practical interactions.

Natural interactions

However, practical interactions were not the only elements that shaped participants' teaching identities. The influence of natural interactions in terms of how GTAs embodied and enacted their identities can be seen through several narratives, for example Arthur's gut feeling that prompted his concern of establishing rapport with students in *The Subject* (Archer, 2000; Summerscales, 2010). As in Collins' (2019) study, participants also actively used their physicality in their pedagogic encounters on several occasions to enact particular concerns. As a result of their priority concerns to engage and help students, both Arthur and Ahmed deliberately positioned themselves in particular parts of the room to decentre themselves and support student learning in *The Hovering* and *The Student Experience* respectively. However, this embodiment was not always positive. Gina's thriving within the lively environment of *The Lab Exercises* can be contrasted by her restlessness in *The Invigilation*, illustrating how natural, physical interactions affect the formation of different identities for the same individual in different situations.

Natural interactions are also foregrounded in *The Participants*, where The Researcher references Gina's experience as a woman of colour in science, Arthur's quiet confidence, and the increase in Ahmed's speaking pace as he talked enthusiastically about his subject. Gina's natural positionality seemed to have a particularly striking influence on the development of her teaching identity, especially in *The Outreach* where her internal conversation around the importance of feminism and her experiences as a woman of colour in her discipline directly impacted on her interactions with students. The possible effect of Gina's home culture and family in constructing an imagined identity as a mother in *The Lab Exercises* represents the influence of natural interactions between participants and their backgrounds beyond direct teaching experiences, in this case on Gina's priority concern to ensure her students feel supported (Collins, 2019; Jiang et al, 2010; Winter et al, 2015). Similarly, in *The Name*, Ahmed brought his natural identity as an international GTA to prioritise establishing rapport with international students in certain situations (Winter et al, 2015). This acts as a critique against the deficit model of international GTAs that results in fewer work opportunities for them, as it emphasises the value of the experiences they bring to the pedagogic encounter (Collins, 2019; Winter et al, 2015).

As well as the embodiment and physicality of their identities, the emotional aspects of practice and identity construction highlighted by Akinbode (2013), Ghaye (2007), Quinlan (2019) and Zembylas and McGlynn (2012) that resulted from Archer's (2000) natural interactions can be seen from the very first narrative, where The Researcher meets *The Participants*. It would be impossible to discuss all of the emotions that are represented in the narratives, but they highlight both participants' positivity and frustrations within their internal conversations when trying to enact their concerns through their projects. Arthur's recognition of the different ways that his students engage in *The Hovering*, and Ahmed's belief that students will return later in the session in *The Latecomers*, indicate a level of optimism that influenced their interactions through pedagogic encounters, namely Arthur's lack of intervention in discussion and Ahmed's reassurance to the students that he would be waiting for them. Gina's enthusiasm shone through in the narratives, particularly when she talked about inspiring students in her research area as represented in *The Research*, *The Outreach* and *The Next Steps*, and again, this concern forged from natural interactions was borne out in her project of talking to students about her work. Often these emotions were complex however, with *The Project* representing Arthur's resentment at his workload, discomfort at asking for money, and mixed emotions regarding working with Alison. Similarly, although he acknowledged that his priority concern was to develop a session that would engage students in discussion, Arthur's guilt in his internal conversation when adapting the curriculum in *The Session Plan* suggests a degree of empathy towards Kerry's work in developing the original materials (Clegg and Rowland, 2010).

Ahmed's waiting in *The Latecomers* and Gina's repeated emphasis on being vigilant in *The Invigilation* imply an element of boredom cultivated through the natural interactions that were part of their roles. Through their internal conversation, both seemed to delegitimise or suppress Akinbode's (2013, p.70) "undesirable" emotions, particularly Gina's sadness around not being able to say goodbye in *The Final Session*, and in our discussions they reassured me more than once that they were "fine". This might have been because they accepted the boredom as part of their job, or that they did not want me to consider them unprofessional (Baker and Lee, 2011; Clegg and Stevenson, 2013), suggesting perhaps a tension between natural and practical identities. There also seemed to be a deeper, and more emotionally charged, narrative around the need to feel useful in both *The Latecomers* (Ahmed) and *The Lab Exercises* (Gina), which again illustrates the intersection between natural interactions of emotions, and practical interactions in terms of how they conceptualised effective performance in their roles. Their internal conversations around feeling needed here did not seem to be limited to avoiding boredom, but instead provided an insight into how they gained a sense of value as teachers, and perhaps informed their more proactive approach of going up to students in comparison to Arthur's "hovering".

The interplay between Archer's (2000) natural and practical interactions is also represented in the empathy Gina and Arthur expressed as a result of being students themselves, most notably in *The Invigilation* and *The Subject*. These narratives show how their lived experiences as students shaped their priority concerns and the projects they adopted with their own students (Sandi-Urena and Gatlin, 2013; Zotos et al, 2020). *The Subject* was a particularly moving account of Arthur's internal conversation around the inadequacies he had felt as a student, and how these natural and practical interactions led to his project of

actively gathering feedback from his own students to address his priority concern of supporting those who were struggling for similar reasons. In most cases, the concerns they identified as a result of such interactions took the form of trying to provide something that had been missing for them, for example Gina's "nagging" in *The Lab Exercises*, the type of feedback Arthur provided in *The Marking*, and Ahmed's dilemma in *The Student Experience* about whether to provide additional information beyond the focus of the session. While participants very rarely referred to their current personal lives in our discussions, the way they drew on their experiences as students also highlights GTAs' "continuous sense of self" in relation to their roles, for example in Gina's recognition of the difference between the attitude of the girls she spoke with in *The Outreach* and her own experience at that age (Archer, 2000, p.2).

Social interactions

Furthermore, it was not only participants' natural and practical experiences as students themselves, but also Archer's (2000) social interactions in terms of their encounters with others, particularly students, that contributed to the development of their personal identities. Participants seemed to construct ideas around what students expected of them through their social interactions, particularly in establishing credibility as a teacher (Muzaka, 2009; Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko, 2018), which, in turn, influenced their priority concerns. Credibility underpinned Ahmed's project in *The Student Experience* and *The Assessment (Part 2)* where he brought additional information so he felt equipped to answer student questions in line with the GTAs in Sandi-Urena and Gatlin's (2013) study. Social interactions intersected with this practical expertise in his field that appeared to be an important priority concern for Ahmed. Such interactions manifested in the somewhat judgemental approach he adopted towards his peers with less disciplinary expertise in *The Troubleshooting* (Jiang et al, 2010; Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko, 2020a). Although she did not mention credibility directly, demonstrating her research expertise to students seemed to underpin Gina's social interactions with them in *The Research*, illustrating the interplay between teaching and research identities and its influence not only on her priority concerns but also how these informed the projects she identified (Muzaka, 2009; Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko, 2018). The contrasting internal conversations of Ahmed and The Researcher in *The Name* represent the different priorities of different individuals, as The Researcher's concern that Ahmed's extensive practical expertise and experience were hidden from his students who were not necessarily even aware of his name was not shared by Ahmed himself. For The Researcher, possibly as a result of her own positionality, a name represents Archer's (2000, p.2) "continuous sense of self" and Ahmed's practical expertise and experience. However for Ahmed, his name was perhaps part of his natural identity that he actively chose to subordinate in favour of other priority concerns, most notably the need to help students which seemed to emerge to some extent from his social interactions with them.

In contrast, Arthur's internal conversation suggested that although students might have expected him to give them the answers, he did not necessarily regard this as a primary aspect of his role. Perhaps this indicates a prioritisation of his previous practical experiences as a student or teacher around the importance of facilitating student participation as highlighted by Sandi-Urena and Gatlin (2013) and Zotos et al (2020) over establishing the

credibility through disciplinary expertise emphasised by Muzaka (2009) and Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko (2018). On the surface, Arthur seemed more comfortable with not being an expert in the field than the others, describing in *The Subject* how he had encouraged students with more subject knowledge to take the lead in the seminars and perhaps indicating that social expectations of students were less important than other factors in shaping his teaching identity. However, the fact that he watched the lectures suggests that there was some level of insecurity about his lack of expertise, and that credibility established through subject knowledge or at least expectations of the discipline may have had more of an influence than he recognised (Barr and Wright, 2019; Clegg, 2008; Neumann, 2001; Quinlan, 2019; Roberts, 2015). This may have been the result of practical interactions, social interactions, or both.The anthology therefore allows for representation of his prioritisation of student discussion to stand as a counter-narrative alongside Ahmed and Gina's priority concerns, while also acknowledging potential contradictions within his stories (Gallagher, 2011).

Although credibility seemed to play a role, at least to some extent, for GTAs establishing their identities, it is interesting to explore the effects of authority, or lack of it, both real and perceived, on participants' concerns and projects in the narratives (Quinlan, 2019). Although Gina seemed to welcome the responsibility in *The Invigilation*, unlike Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko's (2020a) participants, all three seemed actively subordinate authority as a priority concern, even in contexts where they were largely unsupervised. Arthur's approach of "*Hovering*" rather than directly telling the students to focus on the question seemingly came from uncertainty in his internal conversation around what was acceptable in his role. It is also worth contrasting Arthur's one-to-one challenging of the dominant student with his avoidance of authority in the classroom by allowing another student to continue speaking for five minutes in *The Gender Split*, illustrating how different balancing of priority concerns resulting from different social interactions could lead to the enactment of very different projects. Similarly, although Ahmed's use of slides in *The Troubleshooting*, *The Name* and *The Extras* was an active decision from Archer's (2000, 2003, 2007) perspective, his internal conversation suggested that this was the result of a passive approach to adopting a position of authority in the classroom. This seemed to be reinforced by social interactions in the form of observing others. Their reluctance to embody an authoritative presence may have been because participants themselves held authority as a lower priority than others, their surrounding structures and cultures did not enable that authority, or they actively prioritised not being authoritative. Again, it is not clear from the discussions with participants whether this was due to practical or social interactions, or a combination of both.

As well as encounters with students, and despite limited opportunities to develop functioning communities, as highlighted by Barr and Wright (2019) social interactions with peers influenced the GTAs' identities and their projects in the classroom. This dynamic between GTAs was complex. Although Ahmed insisted that they saw each other as peers, seemingly prioritising equality among the GTAs, my observation that other GTAs seemed to defer to him as a result of his expertise and his description of his "bad habit" in *The Student Experience* suggests this was not necessarily the case, and in fact, as mentioned above, was subordinate to his priority of disciplinary credibility. This is perhaps indicative of the difference between his perception of his interactions with others and the social construction

of his identity in practice (Argyris and Schön, 1996). Although she interacted with other demonstrators in the classroom setting, Gina spoke less than the others about the influence of social interactions with peers on the configuration of her personal teaching identity. While Arthur's engagement with peers seemed more ad hoc, when they happened these social interactions nonetheless affected the projects through which he enacted his role as a teacher in the classroom. The influence of these interactions was apparently seen in the way that Arthur questioned his assumptions about departmental expectations of his role and took a more hands-off approach in *The Hovering* as a result of Amir's observation.

Future/imagined identities

While not explicitly considered in Archer's framework in relation to identities, the vagueness with which participants talked about Clegg's (2008, 2011b) and Lauriala and Kukkonen's (2005) imagined or future selves as teachers was striking. This perhaps highlights the immediacy of their priority concerns as occupants of Rao et al's (2021) borderlands that will be explored further in the next section. Ahmed intended to return to his country to teach and remained in contact with his former colleagues, suggesting that his future teaching identity was constituted more through social interactions with colleagues in his home country than his interactions in the UK. His plans were also structurally dictated through visa requirements and sponsorship from his home institution to do his PhD. As suggested by Muzaka (2009) and Raaper (2018), in *The Invigilation*, Gina referred briefly to the skills she might gain for her career. However, she did not seem to have a concrete idea of what these might be or how they might help her in the future. Her internal conversation suggested that she articulated these skills as a way of justifying the worth of being an invigilator, rather than actively taking on the role to enact her priority concerns. Arthur was perhaps more explicit about his future identity, but only through our conversations around the draft narratives where he articulated a clear desire to move away from academia and perhaps take a role in a further education setting.

The main example of constructing an ideal self was related to Gina's experience of her research, which touches on all three of Archer's (2000) orders. She situated herself through her internal conversation in *The Outreach* within an idealised version of what success should look like (practical) within her research community which was, at least to some extent, "refracted" through the context of disciplinary norms (Clegg, 2008, p.335). Interestingly, her concerns in this narrative were less about her own aspirations and more about how she would inspire others, setting herself up as a role model through her social interactions with school children and students that would in turn enable them to cultivate their ideal selves. From the perspective of her natural interactions, as a first-year PhD student teaching in her first semester who had come from a different country, Gina may have been less socialised within the culture of UK higher education and therefore more able to imagine future identities, if not for herself then at least for her students (Archer, 2000).

These narratives highlight the complex and nuanced ways that the GTAs actively formed their personal teaching identities by creating, negotiating and recreating priority concerns through their internal conversations. Having set out the role of natural, practical and social interactions in the cultivation of participants' identities as teachers, in the next section, I use Archer's work to explore how, and in what spaces, the three participants I worked with

enacted agency in their teaching practice, and how they mediated the cultures and structures that constrained or enabled this agency.

In what ways do GTAs create spaces for agency in their teaching contexts, and what enables or constrains their opportunities for agency?

The third and fourth elements of Archer's (1995) framework set out at the start of this chapter focus on how individuals identify spaces for agency in which to carry out their projects, how structures and cultures might enable or constrain their agency, and how they might adapt, enhance or abandon their projects in response. There were examples of all participants using their internal conversation to find spaces, particularly social and physical spaces, where they could enact some form of agency through pedagogic encounters (Massey, 1999). One of the key social spaces was the way the GTAs asked questions and proactively decided whether and how to approach students in *The Hovering* (Arthur), *The Lab Exercises* (Gina) and *The Latecomers* (Ahmed) (Case, 2015b). Similarly, Arthur's internal conversation about the value of the feedback he provided in The Marking highlights how he used social spaces outside the formal structures of the classroom and marking processes to enact agency, in this case to better support students. Although not instructed to do so, Arthur and Ahmed both developed their own slides to facilitate student learning in *The Session Plan* and *The Troubleshooting* respectively while Ahmed used drawings in *The Assessment (Part 2)*, thus creating physical and material spaces for agency. As these examples all occurred at a micro level, this emphasises the value of observing interactions in the mundane classroom environment itself in highlighting physical and social spaces that may have been previously hidden or ignored (Ashwin, 2008; Clegg, 2005).

However, the process of enacting agency is far from simple. As active agents, participants balanced a range of priority concerns in their pedagogic encounters which were often negotiated and renegotiated through the enactment of different projects. The spaces for agency that GTAs created therefore needed to be equally fluid (Massey, 1999). Arthur's internal conversation around the adaptation of his curriculum in *The Session Plan* and classroom technique in *The Hovering* represents his prioritisation of student-led approaches, but *The Subject* also highlights the tension he felt between encouraging students to speak and ensuring discussions were not dominated by the most vocal (Collins, 2019). Similarly, Ahmed prioritised the practical concern of supporting students by being available and answering their questions in *The Troubleshooting* and *The Latecomers*, as seen by his refusal to engage with other work as Peter did (Muzaka, 2009; Sandi-Urena and Gatlin, 2013). This may have been related to his conceptualisation of teaching in his home institution as "service" highlighted in *The PhD*, a notion largely unfamiliar to me in the context of UK higher education but perhaps forged through previous practical and social interactions (Jiang et al, 2010; Winter et al, 2015). However, in contrast to his actions in these narratives, Ahmed offered little advice in *The Assessment (Part 1)* in case he was wrong. The priority concern of supporting students remained as he still believed that he was helping them by not providing incorrect information, but the projects that Ahmed identified to enact this concern were very different in all three narratives (Archer, 2000, 2003, 2007). These examples therefore highlight the dynamic way that spaces for agency shifted according to the social, temporal and political context in which they took place (Massey, 1999; Carter et al, 2021).

Exploring the reasons why Arthur and Ahmed's projects might have changed in these different contexts requires a return to the interplay between structure, culture and agency that is at the heart of Archer's (2000) framework. As highlighted by Archer, individual agency is enabled and constrained by surrounding structures and cultures, whether actual or perceived, and the intersection between these three elements will form the basis for the discussion in the rest of this section. I begin by considering the effects of relationships with others on participant projects.

Relationships with others as structural and cultural enablers and constraints

In the same way that it was highly influential in the construction of participant identities, one of the key influential cultures on agency was the attitudes and expectations of students, as seen in Ahmed's *The Student Experience*. The representation of his internal conversation illustrates how he potentially reconciled conflicting priority concerns around establishing the subject knowledge and credibility that he believed students expected and working within the learning outcomes for the module (Muzaka, 2009; Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko, 2018). Here, the cultures of what students expected from teachers and what they expected from the teaching on the module were perhaps in tension. By adapting his project of offering help and support to students, he was able to incorporate both his expertise and a focus on the requirements for the module in a way that accommodated both cultures. In doing so, he cultivated a social space for agency within the physical environment of the classroom through his interactions with the student (Massey, 1999).

The cultural split between students who simply wanted to pass the assessment or complete the tasks required, and those who were interested in more detail about the subject, is highlighted in *The Research* (Gina) and *The Assessment (Part 1)* (Ahmed) (Zotos et al, 2020). Both narratives illustrate how participants made active decisions through internal conversations to restrict their actions, adapt their projects or reprioritise their concerns in response to student attitudes as they centred their conversations tightly around the assessment (Archer, 2000). Massey's (1999) emphasis on the dynamic nature of spaces for agency can be further seen in *The Invigilation* and *The Latecomers*. In the former, the structure of the invigilator role led to Gina mostly subordinating her primary concern of encouraging students in favour of making the exam run smoothly, whereas in the latter, the broader culture of student non-attendance prompted Ahmed to lower his expectations of how much he could support the students in the room. Although both show examples of participants establishing political spaces for agency in trying to meet student needs, nonetheless the resulting projects that were constrained by the structures and cultures around their roles left both of them feeling dissatisfied.

While these spaces for agency were created by the participants through social interactions with students in the physical space of the classroom, Arthur's internal conversation in *The Session Plan* highlights the complex translation process of adapting the curriculum he had been sent, seemingly at odds with Barr and Wright's (2019) argument that detailed materials from the module leader were supportive for GTA practice. Arthur's ownership and criticality that underpinned his creation of a political and ideological space for agency here was forged from his priority concern around making his session engaging for students. As discussion and debate were encouraged in his subject, Arthur may have had more cultural enablers to

establish such spaces for agency than Ahmed and Gina whose pedagogic encounters in the lab were more tightly structured through lab experiments and set handouts (Barr and Wright, 2019; Neumann, 2001; Roberts, 2015). However, although Arthur prioritised the need for consistency between seminar tutors here, perhaps indicating a similar constraining culture to that highlighted by Drewelow (2013), he was also enabled by a culture in which module leaders were happy for him to adapt the session plan. Furthermore, he made an active decision to utilise established structures, in this case the authority of the module leader, to legitimise his changes. Arthur's engagement with the curriculum as socially constructed and interpreted through pedagogic encounters with students, rather than a fixed structure to 'deliver' (despite his own use of the term), highlights how political, ideological and social spaces for agency can be created through reflexive approaches to curriculum and enabled by departmental cultures and structures (Apple, 2014).

In other narratives however, the relationships between participants and their senior colleagues were complex and often variable, even when they concerned the same people, and therefore had the potential to act as either enabling or constraining forces. In contrast to Arthur and Kerry's interactions in *The Session Plan* described above, where Kerry legitimises Arthur's agency, Arthur silences himself in the meeting rather than criticising Kerry in *The Marking*, highlighting Massey's (1999) conceptualisation of space as dynamic, social and temporal by illustrating that opportunities for agency vary in different situations. Furthermore, these spaces for agency are also political, as the nature of Arthur's project differed depending on the power dynamics between himself and Kerry, and was perhaps heavily influenced by the presence of others in the room during *The Marking* (Carter et al, 2021). The potential for agency, or lack of it, was often highly dependent on the attitude of senior colleagues themselves. Supervisors seemed to play a limited role in supporting the development of these three GTAs as teachers (Park, 2004). The only examples mentioned in our discussions were Ahmed's supervisor putting him forward for GTA work in *The PhD*, and the role of Gina's supervisor as the leader of the research centre in *The Outreach*. It is difficult to tell from this study how far supervisors enabled or constrained their projects, so like Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko (2020b) I have focused on the senior teaching colleagues who were more prominent in the GTA narratives. The variability of these relationships is highlighted by the divergent opportunities that the three GTAs had to give feedback to the module leaders also noted in Barr and Wright (2019) and Darling and Staton (1989), again indicating Carter et al's (2021) political nature of the spaces for agency they cultivated. Arthur was encouraged to give feedback and discuss issues in *The Subject* and *The Gender Split*, yet Gina did not mention providing feedback to senior colleagues at all in our discussions. This may have been because it was not a priority concern for her, or it may have been not encouraged or enabled, either by the senior colleagues she worked with or departmental structures and systems.

Ahmed seemed particularly aware of Carter et al's (2021) political elements underpinning spaces for agency, for example in *The Latecomers* where he abandoned his project to help a group of students as another colleague had deemed it appropriate to organise a project meeting with them during the session (Park and Ramos, 2002). Furthermore, in his internal conversation in *The Troubleshooting* he was highly selective in providing feedback, offering technical suggestions around the handout, but choosing not to raise other issues due to his

past experiences with defensive senior colleagues (Darling and Staton, 1989). The other GTAs also indicated sensitivity to political spaces for agency in adapting their projects. Gina's self-critical internal conversation around her "nagging" represented in *The Lab Exercises* was situated against what she saw the lab leader doing, suggesting that she prioritised conformity to what she perceived as cultural norms and changed her approach accordingly in a similar way to the academics in Jiang et al's (2010) study. Beyond the context of participants' teaching in the classroom, Arthur's deliberate polite silencing of himself in his conversation with Alison in *The Project* is illustrative of the way GTAs adapted their behaviour in particular situations (Beijaard et al, 2004). It could be argued that Arthur's priority here was maintaining a positive working relationship with Alison over his other commitments, especially given that he enjoyed working with her. Nonetheless, his actions were also constrained by the power dynamics between employer and employee, suggesting that such political spaces for agency may be more representative of Raaper's (2018, p.429) "peacekeepers and mediators". Although these examples highlight the role of senior colleagues in shaping the structures and cultures influencing participant agency, it is important to acknowledge the wider constraining and enabling forces beyond individuals.

Effects of broader departmental, institutional and sector-wide structures and cultures

Departmental cultures and structures perpetuated by dominant groups including, but not limited to, senior colleagues generally had a significantly constraining effect on the ways in which the participants were able to cultivate spaces for agency (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Kahn, 2009; Park and Ramos, 2002; Triantafyllaki, 2010). The position of GTAs in Rao et al's (2021) borderland was arguably most evident in the fact that, as highlighted by Muzaka (2009), Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko (2020a) and Park (2004), all three indicated a separation and lack of communication between themselves and their senior colleagues. The resulting political uncertainty and insecurity arguably limited possible spaces for agency. Ahmed noted the challenge of being excluded from key information, such as the lectures in *The Troubleshooting*, the room in *The Extras*, and the details about *The Assessment (Part 1)*, that could have enabled him to support students more effectively. Meanwhile, in Gina's *The Invigilation*, information that had not been communicated by the module leader was instead socially constructed by GTAs (Gunn, 2007; Raaper, 2018). As Kahn et al (2017) found in their study of student engagement, the collective reflexivity among GTAs created through this uncertainty was for the purpose of making meaning out of the situations they found themselves in rather than Corporate Agency. Having little notice about changes to sessions also seemed to be part of Gina's departmental culture, as she was notified about both *The Invigilation* and *The Final Session* at the last minute, highlighting her borderland position as a student rather than a colleague (Rao et al, 2021). Like the participants in Winstone and Moore's (2017) study, the departmental administration staff seemed to treat her as a student rather than a teacher. Gina's experience indicates how the exploitation of a flexible curriculum by others combined with a culture of a lack of communication with GTAs and the precariousness of GTA work could have a detrimental impact on social spaces for GTA agency, in that it denied her the opportunity to say goodbye to her students.

Even where potentially enabling structures were in place within departments, the unpredictable nature of GTAs' employment meant that these systems were not always

working appropriately and therefore acted as constraints to particular projects. In the example of *The Module*, there was an initial briefing for seminar tutors in Arthur's department but as he started his role partway through the year, he had to use his own initiative to get the information he needed to enact his project of aligning his sessions to the module aims. This was especially frustrating in situations where GTAs had 'insider' information through their interactions with students. Ahmed had significant insight into how students were using the handouts provided in *The Troubleshooting* for example, yet the social and political spaces created by a structure that prompted little interaction between GTAs and senior colleagues meant that it was difficult for him to pass this information on. Furthermore, the structures resulting in limited time between Arthur receiving *The Session Plan* and having to teach it, as well as the lack of time between sessions due to timetabling in *The Module*, restricted his project of creating engaging activities for student learning when combined with his other commitments. Of course, GTAs were not the only teachers who were constrained by departmental, institutional and sector-wide structures and cultures. Their position in the borderland perhaps made Gina, Arthur and Ahmed more sensitive to the pressures that academic colleagues were under, as emphasised in *The Invigilation*, *The Marking* and *The PhD* respectively (Rao et al, 2021). Their political repression of social spaces for agency here not only suggested an awareness of the cultural and structural constraints of the neoliberal institution on senior colleagues' agency in line with Archer's (2008) findings. It also reinforced Raaper's (2018) work by indicating how the GTAs adapted their behaviour in response to these internal conversations in a way that perhaps diminished their own needs.

As well as illustrating the effects of specific, local departmental structures and cultures, the broader precariousness, transience and casualisation of GTA work within Rao et al's (2021) borderlands is also surfaced through the narratives. *The Marking*, *The PhD*, *The Module* and *The Next Steps* indicate the impact of unwritten rules that GTAs found themselves trying to navigate. This was particularly seen in the context of their projects around getting GTA work in the first place, supporting Park (2004) and Park and Ramos' (2002) critique of the opaque nature of recruitment processes. Cultural expectations and formal structures in Ahmed and Gina's departments linked to their research commitments restricted opportunities for them to teach, emphasising the role of gatekeepers in even being able to enter the borderlands (Rao et al, 2021). Even where the representation of Ahmed's internal conversation suggests that he could actively select what he applied for, the conversation with his peer implies that not all GTAs were aware of how to negotiate the often hidden employment systems (Lingard, 2007; Park, 2004; Park and Ramos, 2002). Once they were employed as GTAs, *The Training* reinforces the findings of Clegg (2003), Park (2004) and Park and Ramos (2002) around the inconsistency of such structures and cultures across the institution, suggesting that the projects of different GTAs would be affected in different ways.

Spaces for agency are therefore highly influenced by the political context around GTAs, exacerbated by their dynamic, uncertain and variable position in the borderlands (Rao et al, 2021). The fallibility of agency expressed in Archer's (2000) framework can be seen in the ways GTAs attempt to navigate these borderlands in the narratives. The intersection of structural and cultural constraints around recruitment processes, GTAs' willingness to accept uncertainty and their struggle to set clear boundaries, possibly because of their broader liminal position as doctoral students, arguably meant that even when GTAs created

political, social and ideological spaces for agency, in doing so they also prioritised concerns and projects that were potentially detrimental to them. This is represented by the references to unpaid 'extras', most notably in Arthur's accounts in *The Project* of his work to support students that was not acknowledged in his contract and the additional labour that came out of the moderation process in *The Marking*, but also in Gina's volunteering in *The Outreach* and the unpaid training she was required to do before she could engage in GTA work (Jordan and Howe, 2018; Muzaka, 2009; Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko, 2020a; Raaper, 2018). Indeed, in *The Project* Arthur seemed resigned to the fact that his experience was common among PhD students due to their position in the borderlands (Rao et al, 2021).

Alongside these issues associated with GTAs' liminal position in higher education institutions, several of the narratives also highlight the constraining effects of broader socialisation on GTA agency. Gina and The Researcher had very different feelings about *The Training*, with Gina's enthusiasm directly contrasting The Researcher's discomfort. While Gina recognised the value of such training, despite her dislike of the term "training", The Researcher uses arguments of necessary socialisation to justify her complicity in, and perpetuation of, a system that potentially exploits the GTAs she claims to advocate for by constraining and potentially obscuring their spaces for agency (Gair and Mullins, 2011; Gunn, 2007; Lingard, 2007; Park, 2004). This focus on the necessity of "training" within sector-wide structures around GTA employment ties in with broader cultural forces of marketisation and performativity that manifest through an increased focus on student satisfaction scores, which, as with Archer's (2008) participants, can also be seen in the language of Ahmed's internal conversation represented in *The Student Experience*. While Ahmed seemed to genuinely care about his students' learning, as English was his second language his repeated use of the term "student experience" suggests the permeation of a departmental, and indeed, sector-wide discourse highlighted by Raaper (2018) on the way GTAs approach day-to-day practice. Although this does not mean he is not enacting agency, it indicates a socialising influence on the concerns Ahmed prioritised and how they shaped the projects he carried out.

Through their internal conversations, GTAs therefore cultivated some spaces for agency, which were both constrained and enabled by the cultures and structures around them. In the final section of this chapter, I focus on the fifth element of Archer's framework as set out above, exploring how GTA agency contributed to broader morphostasis and elaboration of cultural and structural systems.

GTA agency in relation to morphostasis and morphogenesis

Despite the unpredictability of the pedagogic encounter opening up physical, social, political and ideological spaces for GTA agency, the narratives suggest that their classrooms were far from hooks' (1994, p.12) "most radical space of possibility in the academy". As with the students in Kahn (2017) and Lundgren-Resenterra and Kahn's (2019) studies, the vast majority of their agential actions took place within existing systems so participants were more likely to reinforce and perpetuate structures and cultures as Archer's (1995) Primary Agents than create morphogenetic change (Archer, 1995; Kahn, 2017; Lundgren-Resenterra and Kahn, 2019). All three participants spoke of adapting their projects in light of what was 'expected' of them, rather than initiating projects that might lead to the structural and

cultural elaboration of their roles. Despite Gina using her brief interactions with students to create a social space for agency in which she could offer encouragement in *The Invigilation*, Darling and Staton's (1989, p.234) "mechanisms for compliance" were particularly strong in facilitating morphostasis in the context of assessment. This was indicated by Ahmed's narrowing and redefining of his project in *The Assessment (Part 1)* discussed above, and the way he drew on established structures when giving assessment advice to students in this context. Gina seemed to have a specific idea of her role as invigilator, and her focus on the exam going smoothly illustrates her contribution to broader morphostasis regarding exam protocols. As with The Module mentioned above, Arthur's priority concern that underpinned his critique of the approaches taken by the module leaders in *The Marking* was not aimed at elaborating the structure of the assessment criteria itself, but ensuring consistency between seminar tutors (Drewelow, 2013).

Given the insecurity of the position of GTAs within the institution, their contribution to morphostasis is perhaps unsurprising, yet this does not mean that GTAs were not able to support cultural and structural elaboration in small ways (Archer, 1995). Interestingly, Gina's greatest opportunity for agency fell outside the curriculum she was employed to teach (Kahn, 2017). Like the international GTAs in Collins' (2019) study, Gina talked in our discussions about how she actively sought out social, political and ideological spaces in which she could challenge dominant cultures around gender. This concern played out in her interactions with school pupils and students in the physical and social spaces of the classroom in *The Outreach*, and seemingly took the form of Clegg's (2008, p.340) "covert resistance". Although she was perhaps engaging in this alone, which would situate her as a Primary Agent under Archer's (1995) framework, arguably Gina's enactment of agency here had a significant impact on her students at a micro-level, highlighting the nuances of morphogenesis. Indeed, as Archer (1995) emphasises the temporal aspect of wider social elaboration, her influence may not have been felt by her students until well after the session itself. Similarly, Arthur followed the lead of senior colleagues by drawing on female figures to begin to diversify representation in his traditionally male-dominated subject in *The Gender Split*, supporting the broader structural and cultural elaboration that was already taking place in his department through collective reflexivity of other teachers as Corporate Agents.

Building on Arthur's contribution to wider morphogenesis among his colleagues, his experience of teaching in a further education setting, along with that of his peers which he considered to exceed his own, acted as a catalyst for the most significant example of GTAs coming together as Corporate Agents to elaborate departmental cultures (Archer, 1995). This example of morphogenesis was raised by Arthur after reading a draft of *The Marking*, again highlighting the historicity of Archer's (1995) argument that change takes time. The structural formalisation of the Contracted Teaching Assistant (CTA) role the year after my observations contributed to the development of a CTA community of Corporate Agents and thus the cultivation of a dynamic, social space for agency (Massey, 1999). Along with his frustration that their expertise was not recognised or valued by his department, this appeared to empower Arthur and other seminar tutors to offer alternatives to existing departmental marking practices. The relational goods that emerged following discussions between CTAs and senior colleagues in the department included the introduction of new

structures and guidance to support the CTAs with their marking, illustrating the power of collective reflexivity in developing Corporate Agency and bringing about morphogenesis.

However, perhaps because of a lack of shared identity, the individualised nature of higher education emphasised by Archer (2008 and Macfarlane (2005), and the fact that communities tended to be highly localised, most examples of agency referred to in this section are forged from specific decisions and actions made through the internal conversations of individuals instead of collective reflexivity. This is most clearly indicated by Ahmed's use of "I" when talking about his GTA role, in comparison to the "we" he used when referring to working with colleagues from his home institution. As a result, their actions tended to take place within isolated spaces for agency in existing systems, described by Webb (2018, pp.99, 101) as "bolt-holes and breathing spaces", rather than as the communities of Corporate Agents organising for change which are at the heart of social realism. Nonetheless, this study suggests that these physical, social, historical, political and ideological spaces, however small and diverse, are significant to GTAs and can, in some cases, contribute to structural and cultural elaboration. It is therefore important to consider how such spaces and GTA communities can be fostered and nurtured within departments, institutions, and across the wider national and international sector.

Conclusion

The narratives set out earlier in this thesis illustrate the heterogeneity, even within a small sample and in the same institution, of ways in which GTAs developed identities and established spaces to enact agency through pedagogic encounters. As highlighted in Archer's (2000) framework set out in the literature review, they cultivated identities as teachers through natural, practical and social interactions with the world manifested through their embodied and emotional selves, a strong sense of what success looked like in their roles, and social interactions with others including students, peers, senior colleagues and employers. GTAs identified and balanced a range of often-conflicting priorities, which were negotiated and renegotiated through internal conversation and the enactment of different projects in different situations. These were enabled and constrained by the structures and cultures around them, and their broader position as inhabitants of Rao et al's (2021) borderlands.

While there were examples of GTAs creating Massey's (1999, p.264) "open and dynamic" spaces for agency through their day-to-day interactions within the classroom, these rarely led to the elaboration of structures and cultures articulated by Archer's (1995) framework. The exclusion of GTAs from teaching teams was a key constraining culture, even though (or perhaps because) they acknowledged the challenges that senior colleagues faced and sought to adapt their practice to accommodate them (Raaper, 2018). This marginalisation was exacerbated by the precariousness, unpredictability and transience of GTA work resulting from their position in the borderlands (Rao et al, 2021). Morphogenesis requires agential communities to bring about structural and cultural elaboration, and with the exception of the actions of Arthur and the other seminar tutors in *The Marking*, GTAs did not talk about their community as a force for change (Archer, 1995). Where collective reflexivity did take place, the relational goods created through interactions with peers tended to focus on constructing knowledge in situations where they were unsure about what they were expected to do, which by its very nature perpetuates existing structures and cultures rather

than generating morphogenesis (Archer, 2013). This is not to say that other forms of GTA agency are not important however. The contribution Arthur made to his department's move to challenge disciplinary gender norms, and the political and ideological space that Gina created in her classroom to address the same issue, show that GTAs can influence the elaboration of structures and cultures. The fact that these projects take place at a micro level does not make them any less significant for the groups of students they were teaching, even if the temporal nature of Archer's (1995) framework means the effects of their actions cannot necessarily be known from this study.

Although this research has focused on the agency of GTAs, it is important to recognise that GTA collective action alone will not be sufficient to change the cultures and structures that constrain their projects. In the final chapter, I will look at the role of academic developers in enacting change in their institutions.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

> To act, we need to recognise ourselves as agents with the potential for collective agency. Without such an account, we ontologically undermine the grounds for hope (Clegg, 2005, p.160).

In this thesis, I have situated my research project within the context of higher education and highlighted the gaps in the academic literature, policy and practice around identities and agency of GTAs. I have identified a series of research questions, and offered a systematic rationale for my multi-stage stimulated recall methodology, which acknowledges the importance of lived experiences in the classroom and the diverse experiences of GTAs as a marginalised group. I have drawn on Archer's (1995, 2000, 2003, 2007) realist social theory as a basis for my study, explaining how it relates to my research questions, underpins my methodology and frames my analytical approach. My findings have been presented and analysed as composite narratives to highlight the mundane aspects of classroom practice where identity and agency might be enacted, and their broader interplay with structure and culture. In this final section of my thesis, I set out the project's contribution to knowledge and practice, discuss its limitations, and identify the learning for myself and others in similar roles.

The contribution of the study

GTAs are relatively underrepresented in research, policy and practice, with very few studies focusing specifically on their identity and agency (Jordan and Howe, 2018; Muzaka, 2009; Park and Ramos, 2002; Raaper, 2018). This project not only constitutes an original application of Archer's framework to the GTA context, but also sheds new insights into the complexity of GTA identities (Rosewell and Ashwin, 2019). By focusing on specific incidents, this study also provides a novel exploration of how the interplay between structure and agency varies between different individuals at different times and in different situations. It also highlights the ways in which GTAs find physical, social, political and ideological spaces for agency, both within the classroom through the enactment of a dynamic, unpredictable curriculum, and beyond (Carter et al, 2021; Massey, 1999; Murray, 2012). As with Kahn (2017) and Lundgren-Resenterra and Kahn's (2020) studies, most of these examples took place within existing systems, highlighting that collective reflexivity does not always lead to corporate agency and change, and can in fact reinforce prevailing structures and cultures (Archer, 2003; Kahn, 2017; Lundgren-Resenterra and Kahn, 2020). However, the narratives also indicate how GTAs begin to contribute to wider structural elaboration (Archer, 1995).

Furthermore, this study claims a methodological contribution to knowledge, particularly in addressing some of Clegg and Stevenson's (2013) concerns around the reliance on interviews within research into higher education. In praising more experimental forms of research, they highlight the importance of an "openness of the text [which] invites re-theorisation and also dissonance" (Clegg and Stevenson, 2013, p.10). The example highlighted in Clegg and Stevenson (2013) is of a study in which the researcher first presented the data through direct quotes from participants, then re-presented it to show the different stages of analysing that data. My work takes this a step further, by not only including footnotes to show the analytical process underpinning the stories, but also by including The Researcher in the

stories in her own right. By situating the character of The Researcher alongside the participants within the anthology following Jacobson and Larsen's (2014) suggestion, this thesis builds on Clegg and Stevenson's (2013) call for more transparency around the positionality of insider researchers by offering a novel approach within an empirical study to explicitly representing this ethnographic immersion of the researcher. It is my hope that the fictionalised nature of the narratives, the character of The Researcher, and the introduction of Riessman's (2008) areas of contradiction and alternative possibilities set out in the footnotes decentres my authority within this thesis and recognises my fallibility alongside that of the participants. In doing so, my approach illustrates how the openness that Clegg and Stevenson (2013) aspire to can be embedded within research methodologies in higher education to encourage constructive challenge of the interpretations represented.

With a few exceptions, most notably Byrne (2017) and Quinlan (2019) who both use poetry as a form of data representation, the use of fictional narrative methods is again rare in research into higher education. Drawing inspiration from ethnography, critical race theory, and broader research into marginalised groups (for example studies such as Gillborn, 2010 and Sikes and Piper, 2010), this study therefore offers a contribution in demonstrating the depth of insights provided by fictional composite stories in exploring the interplay between structure, culture and agency in a higher education setting. The use of Baker and Lee's (2011) stimulated recall and the collaborative approach inspired by Mahoney (2007) I adopted to working with participants on an ongoing basis applies Caine et al's (2013, p.575) notion of "experience as lived in the midst" to an empirical study, as it embraces changes in circumstances over time within the methodology. This is difficult to achieve through the questionnaires and interviews more commonly used in research into higher education as highlighted by Zotos et al (2020). It is especially important for GTAs working in Rao et al's (2021) shifting borderlands, and by working with them in the creation and recreation of the narratives, albeit imperfectly, I hope to have represented the constantly changing and precarious nature of their employment, even within the short time of this study. However, it also provides a broader methodological framework for exploring and representing ongoing changes in participants' lives that could be useful in other areas of research into higher education.

The reliance on interviews and questionnaires in research into higher education is also at a distance from the primacy of practice that Archer's (2000) framework foregrounds. As highlighted by Ashwin (2008), interviews tend to be at a more general level rather than focused on specific teaching and learning encounters, and as a result, the nuances of how the interplay between structure and agency changes over time and in different situations can be lost through an overreliance on interviews. While Ashwin (2008) mentions that some studies in higher education have used video to prompt discussion, my study shows how stimulated recall methods, more commonly used in early years and school settings, can be applied in higher education contexts to offer insights into the complexities of practice on the ground. In presenting the developing narratives at conferences, others in similar roles commented that the stories are unsurprising, as the GTAs they work with have reported similar experiences. While the issues raised may seem familiar, this project highlights how Clegg's (2005) work on theorising the mundane and Ashwin's (2008) call for research into learning and teaching to focus on specific incidents can be applied to offer empirical, in-depth insights into teaching

in higher education. Although the projects that GTAs identify may seem small, ordinary and common to an outsider, they are highly significant and meaningful to participants and I hope this research honours that. However, the implications of this research do not only rest with GTAs themselves, but also the academic developers, module leaders and others who work with them across the sector, both nationally and internationally.

Recommendations and implications for research, policy and practice

As highlighted by Giroux (2006), at the heart of realist social theory is the creation of institutions that are transformative, emancipatory and socially just, and while this study is focused on a single institution, many of the findings and contributions have broader implications both nationally and internationally. This research project began with Hanson's (2010) recognition that academic professional developers such as myself are not immune from our own positionality, or the broader cultural and structural forces shaping our priority concerns within our own contexts. Although approaches to academic professional development vary across the sector and internationally, by virtue of our role we may well perpetuate the deficit model that has been heavily critiqued by Behari-Leak (2017) and Collins (2019) focused on socialising GTAs to existing structures and cultures and developing their skills and knowledge as technicians of learning. This may be exacerbated in settings outside the UK where the GTA role is more formally defined, as professional development colleagues are more likely to focus on survival skills that fit the specific expectations of the role (Park, 2004). Individual teachers' practices within their classroom space are unlikely to lead to the large-scale change required to create a shift away from this deficit model, and it is important to avoid overstating how far academic developers can change institutional structures and cultures on our own. However, in offering recommendations for literature, policy and practice, I return to the themes in my literature review to explore what these findings suggest might be possible for academic professional development colleagues working with GTAs within the institution, nationally and internationally.

Although this study was conducted within a single institution, the questions that it raises for those in academic development are relevant regardless of where we are based and are therefore applicable beyond this individual site. All of us construct our own identities and have our experiences of navigating structures, cultures and agency within our contexts, and as Collins (2019) highlights, these can be very different to those of GTAs. The narratives within this study represent three participants from backgrounds that are different to mine, and the contradictions between the participant narratives and those of The Researcher highlight the ways in which we construct our own assumptions. Indeed, while this project focuses on three participants, the fact that the narratives highlight significant diversity even within such a small sample suggests that the range of ways that GTAs cultivate identities and agency through their practice is likely to be even greater on a national and international basis. This therefore reinforces the need for academic developers to explore how we might accommodate such diversity within our practice. It is my hope that the anthology prompts those of us who work with GTAs to interrogate our own identities and their influence on the narratives we use, reflect critically on whose narratives we are promoting through our activities and whose are missing, consider our role in socialising GTAs into a particular way of being, and identify what we might do in order to honour the diverse experiences GTAs bring. This is an uncomfortable process, which requires us to let go of our familiar norms and

question whether our aims for our professional development programmes align with the concerns that GTAs prioritise (Kahn et al, 2012).

The power of this collection of short stories is in its representation of the messy, emotional and contradictory nature of teaching practice highlighted in the literature review and methodology chapters. Teaching is not a checklist of activities, but an approach through which teachers engage with students in an ethical way that acknowledges the unpredictability of the learning process (Ghaye, 2007; Quinlan, 2018; Todd, 2001; Zembylas and McGlynn, 2012). Too often, we as academic developers present anecdotes from our own practice as complete stories with 'happy' endings that mask the feelings of frustration and uncertainty acknowledged by Akinbode (2013) and Kahn (2014) respectively as natural parts of teaching. This potentially creates feelings of inadequacy, and perpetuates particular images of what GTAs 'should' become. Again, this may be even more pronounced in international contexts where the role of the GTA, and therefore what they are 'expected' to become, is more clearly set out. In Archer's (2000, p.2) terms, it is our "continuous sense of self" that we tend to show to those we work with, rather than the process of negotiating and renegotiating priority concerns and adopting, changing and discarding particular projects (see also Archer, 2003, 2007). Actively and openly reflecting on our emotions as academic developers across the sector offers an antidote to such narratives by supporting and emboldening GTAs to navigate the messiness of teaching represented in the narratives.

These messages are relevant to academic developers both nationally and internationally, as they encourage us to question the structures and cultures in which we are working and how they might impact on GTAs, regardless of what the GTA role might look like in our respective institutions. Inspired by Delgado's (1989) reference to narratives as a destructive force, we may be in a position to break down broader narratives around GTA practice in our own contexts, and raise awareness among GTAs about the potential spaces in which agency can be enacted through enabling structures and cultures; the ways of navigating structures and cultures which are constraining; the power of agential communities; and the imagining and re-imagining of future possibilities. We may also work to actively facilitate collective reflexivity among GTAs ourselves, which forms the foundation for Archer's (1995) social elaboration. For colleagues working across the sector, nationally and internationally, this may involve developing more equitable relationships between academic developers and GTAs as Bale and Moran (2020) start to do, especially with international GTAs whose backgrounds may be different from our own, in order to develop professional development activity in a way that goes beyond token consultation. Furthermore, as highlighted in Clegg's (2005) quote at the start of this chapter, we need to consider how we might develop our own agential communities both within and beyond our institutions, and as national and international collectives to bring about possibilities for morphogenesis specifically for GTAs.

While I have focused primarily on the implications for academic developers such as myself, this thesis has value beyond those working in professional development for GTAs. The use of footnotes for additional details means that the stories can be used in their own right with GTAs themselves. Drawing on Delgado's (1989) focus on narrative as a way of building communities and destroying assumptions, this might include asking GTAs to read and discuss the stories, perhaps identifying which aspects of particular narratives speak to or challenge their experiences, whether in relation to identities and agency or more broadly.

Potentially this anthology could also be used as a model to encourage GTAs to write their own narratives as I had originally intended, and thus prompt them to represent their experiences in a way not usually done in higher education. Similarly, the narratives could also act as powerful tools to support module leaders to not only consider how to work effectively with GTAs, but also to critically consider moral and ethical aspects such as where GTAs fit in the teaching team; what knowledge GTAs bring to pedagogical encounters; and how to foster collectivities of GTAs. Finally, sharing these stories more widely, for example with those responsible for recruitment or policy making within institutions, may contribute to broader morphogenesis to reduce precariousness among colleagues on fixed term contracts.

In terms of recommendations for further study, the application of Archer's social realism could be explored more in future research looking at a broader range of GTA experience. There are also other possible lenses through which the data created in this project could be considered. Even from the narratives as they stand, it would be interesting to look in more detail at the interactions between GTAs and those around them, the emotional and embodied aspects of GTA practice, the role of their discipline or research community, and the intersections between their professional and personal identities, all of which were highlighted within this research but were not a focus in their own right. Furthermore, there are other narratives not included within this thesis that could offer insights into different aspects of GTA practice. While there has been recent emphasis on the role of the supervisor in PhD student success regarding their doctoral research (for example Keefer, 2015; Lee, 2008), there has been little nuanced study around how supervisors support or undermine their work as GTAs, and the participants in this study only briefly mentioned their supervisors in relation to GTA work. Further consideration could also be given to issues of gender, ethnicity and class in the context of GTA identity and agency (Clegg, 2008; Rosewell and Ashwin, 2019). Finally, precariousness was highlighted by all three participants, and experience within the institution where the study took place suggests that precariousness for GTAs has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Looking at the data through these lenses could therefore provide multiple avenues for further study.

This brings me to my final area for discussion, which is around the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on my study. Due to the timing of my project, data creation was not affected. However, as I analysed and re-analysed my data multiple times, the effects of COVID-19 have undoubtedly influenced the final write-up of my thesis. Although Ahmed had returned to his home country by the time the pandemic hit, Arthur's contract was not renewed and a more secure teaching role he had applied for was withdrawn, while Gina also lost the teaching opportunities she was expecting and her research progress has been affected. My anger, frustration and sadness at their experiences has certainly influenced my comments in the analytical footnotes, particularly around *The PhD*, *The Project*, *The Next Steps* and *The Module*, and potentially the way I foregrounded the issue of precariousness among GTAs in my thesis. Although I am one individual and this is only a single study, nonetheless I hope that publishing the findings from this project may help to highlight the value that GTAs bring to pedagogic encounters, and challenge the recent actions of institutions in relation to the employment of GTAs.

Limitations of the study

In my methodology chapter, I explained how I had originally hoped to adopt an approach of co-production for this project as set out by Bell and Pahl (2018). However, although I invited participants to input into the selection of the narratives, and incorporated the ongoing changes in their lives into the stories and accompanying analysis, like Byrne (2017) and Mahoney (2007) I acknowledge that the project remains largely driven by me. It is not clear whether the research questions I set out represent the issues most pertinent to GTAs themselves, and my application of Archer's work, which was unfamiliar to participants, may have discouraged them from challenging my analysis in the footnotes. There remains a tricky ethical question from Bell and Pahl (2018) about how to work with participants in a co-produced way without adding to their workload, especially given their liminal position and balancing of multiple competing priorities. While no project could ever be described as fully co-produced, I would hope to work more systematically with participants from the start to identify research questions and design the project in future (Bell and Pahl, 2018).

Ideally I would also have liked to have prompted more GTA input into the concept mapping and observation phases of my methodology. I believe that the peer discussion I had originally planned might have further decentred my authority as the researcher from the start, encouraging participants to take more ownership of the process. Similarly, I would have preferred to send participants my observation notes in advance of the discussions so that they could reflect on the session and potentially add their own ideas. In prioritising their preferences around the timing of the reflective discussions, I perhaps compromised too much on creating a collaborative environment and therefore took more control of the study as the researcher than I had initially intended. Having said this, it is worth acknowledging that I am assuming that the GTAs wanted more ownership of the project. Perhaps, given the way they asked me questions to make sure they were responding as I expected in line with Hampshire et al's (2014) experiences, like Mahoney's (2007) participants they were content with the amount of engagement in this work, especially given their own disciplinary experiences of research. It is easy to assume that co-production is the ideal for this type of research, so maybe this is a discussion that I could have had with the participants at the start of the project.

I am unapologetic about the sample size of this study due to the depth of its findings and analysis. However, the GTAs who volunteered to participate in the project are likely to have been those most committed to and positive about their teaching, which might have impacted on how they enacted agency within their respective contexts. Although my ontological and epistemological stance involves representing and valuing agency of a group that has been marginalised in literature, policy and practice, I am keen to resist any suggestion that GTAs should be solely responsible for developing their own identities and enacting agency. Focusing on Archer's (2000, p.2) "continuous sense of self" and the development of individual identities and agency at the expense of structural and cultural inequalities risks imposing unrealistic expectations for GTAs to become agents of change within the increasingly managerialist higher education sector or 'blaming' them for complying with established norms. Indeed, while Webb (2018, pp.99, 101) acknowledges the place of the classroom as one of the "bolt-holes, breathing spaces and places of refuge" in which radical, subversive teaching could happen, he also highlights that such pockets of resistance can only ever be "at the margins", and may be co-opted by the institution to suggest that it is more inclusive than

it actually is. I have tried to balance this tension between structures, cultures and agency in my analysis and discussion, but the focus of this project on GTAs rather than other actors and my own position as internal researcher mean that I may not have always done this successfully (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Clegg and Stevenson, 2013; Hanson, 2013).

My learning from the project

Having considered the limitations of my research, I end by reflecting on how this project has changed me as a researcher and practitioner. The research process has challenged my assumptions around how far I could adopt an idealistic co-produced approach in practice, but I was determined not to use this as an excuse to avoid at least attempting an imperfect collaborative approach (Bell and Pahl, 2018). I am more aware of how my own positionality might impact on my research, and as a result I have moved away from claiming to foreground GTA 'voices' towards a more realistic and honest notion of representing their experiences. However, my learning from the project goes much further than the research process itself. Working with Arthur, Gina and Ahmed has led me to fundamentally question what I thought I knew about GTAs, the experiences they have, the situations they find themselves in and how they respond to those situations. This is most clearly represented in *The Name*, but is apparent throughout the anthology of narratives as my interpretations contrast with those of the participants.

Although ultimately this is my thesis, if the impact of this study remains with me as an individual rather than the GTAs I work with or colleagues in similar academic professional development roles it has failed, and so the question remains around how I use these findings going forward (Bell and Pahl, 2018). Through this research, I have cultivated my own commitment to find ways of elaborating the structures and cultures that lead to the marginalisation and exclusion of GTAs. As a direct result of my work on this project, I have developed a new session as part of our team's workshop series that aims to empower GTAs to consider what they bring to their interactions with students, where they might create spaces for agency, and how they can navigate the often hidden structures and cultures in their own contexts. While only a small act of resistance, and one that is yet to lead to collective reflexivity beyond our team, let alone morphogenetic change, I hope that this will not only support the GTAs I work with but also be a model for a broader community of academic developers to use. The next step is to take this further by forging spaces for collective reflexivity among GTAs and academic developers, and cultivating agential communities that can advocate for GTAs' needs (Apple, 2014; Lundgren-Resenterra and Kahn, 2019). This is not without personal and professional risk, but ultimately ties in with what I believe higher education, and professional development, should be about:

> The sounds of higher education should therefore be a cacophony of different voices. There should be shouting. Higher education should challenge, provoke and inspire. It should look messy. It should not fit neatly within the lines of an accountant's ledger. It should look rather like the world in which it exists and which it partly serves (McArthur, 2011 p.746).

If morphogenesis is to happen to enable GTAs like Ahmed, Gina and Arthur to flourish, those in academic professional development roles need to consider how we might create

McArthur's (2011, p.746) "cacophony" and use our own spaces for collective reflexivity and corporate agency, however limited and uncomfortable, to elaborate and transform existing structures and cultures in our context that fail to honour what GTAs bring to pedagogic encounters.

The Researcher: Epilogue

Line by line, she reads through the answers to the questions on the spreadsheet[i] in front of her. What did you do before you came here, why did you come here[ii], what interests you most about teaching, what helped or hindered you as a learner[iii], who or what inspires you as a teacher[iv]? Over fifty responses, and the detail is way beyond what she'd expected given it had been sent out less than a week ago. They've really thought about it, and some of them are much more socially conscious than she was at their age. She opens up her Powerpoint and starts to highlight the comments that resonate with her, drawing out the themes into bullet points on the slide. Given the effort they've made, she can't just gloss over this[v].

She'd been determined to still teach this session despite the strange circumstances, because she knows some of them need to attend before they can take on GTA work. Unpaid until they start teaching, but it's better than nothing and apparently they'll be able to claim it back[vi]. The faculty who'd asked for the session wanted an induction into the roles and responsibilities for a GTA[vii], but she'd had other ideas[viii]. It's not perfect[ix], but hopefully it goes some way in encouraging them to start to think differently and ask questions[x].

So far, their discussions have perhaps not been as in-depth as they usually are in the face-to-face session, and they're not responding to each other as much maybe[xi], but there's plenty of ideas from the 60-odd participants who have logged on. It's definitely worth asking the questions she's prepared around the spreadsheet responses.

"How might these points raised from the group, or your own responses to the questions, influence your teaching? What else do you need to consider?[xii]" She turns off her mic, and video and the responses soon start coming through on the text chat.

She waits in silence for a few minutes, before turning her mic back on.

"Right, so let's pick up on some of the points you've raised."

The Researcher: Epilogue

[i] This session was due to take place a couple of weeks after the University ceased all face-to-face teaching as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Usually, in the face-to-face workshop this activity took the form of individual reflection and peer discussion, thus facilitating the development of teacher identity through social interactions. For the online version, I had identified this as an activity that could be done in advance while still including some elements of peer learning in the session itself. This reflects the way I adapted my approach to my project in light of the structural limitations of COVID-19 restrictions, but also the enabling cultures and practical experiences of my privileged position that meant I felt confident in moving the workshop online at short notice.

[ii] These questions acknowledge participants' backgrounds and practical experiences as strengths for their teaching, as well as encouraging them to consider where teaching might fit alongside their other priority concerns. They recognise GTAs as active agents rather than passive 'deliverers' of curriculum.

[iii] Asking them what had helped or hindered them as a learner draws on the importance of their own experiences as students, both positive and negative. These questions are designed to draw out emotional responses to teaching, and potentially begin to explore their interplay with cultural and structural influences, thus moving beyond a deficit model that focuses primarily on the development of knowledge and skills to more holistic approaches to teaching.

[iv] The final question is an attempt to encourage participants to consider the influence of practical and social interactions on their identity, and use these to explore possible aspirational selves as teachers. The questions are designed to decentre my experiences and authority as far as possible, placing the focus on the participants as experts in their own context from the start and prompting them to develop their own internal conversations around teaching.

[v] The structure of the task, sent out by email with a specific form to complete, and the culture of student willingness to complete it, meant that the response to my project was far greater than I had anticipated. My agency manifested in how I used their work, and morally, I wanted to respond with similar effort as indicated by my internal conversation here.

[vi] As a result of this research I actively queried payment for GTAs with the faculty, who agreed to pay them for their attendance as long as they undertook GTA work following the training. While a minor change in some ways, this shows some resistance to existing norms and practices.

[vii] I had been asked by the faculty in August 2019 to develop an overarching introductory session that would be mandatory for their GTAs, illustrating both structures around GTA work in the faculty and the cultural expectation that I would conform to these. This felt uncomfortably close to socialising GTAs into a particular way of teaching that seemed oppressive in light of this research, so I was reluctant to be complicit in perpetuating these cultures and structures.

[viii] However, I realised I could use the structure of mandatory attendance for good and set out an alternative project to enact my concern of empowering GTAs. While I created a session that seemingly introduced the GTA role, I designed it to encourage GTAs to be critical in their practice and value their experience, rather than socialising them into the role. Although a small act of resistance, this nonetheless begins a move towards morphogenesis.

[ix] Here, I recognise the cultural and structural constraints on my project of incorporating the findings from this research into my teaching, and the importance of both providing GTAs with sufficient knowledge to negotiate the structures and cultures in their own departments and supporting them to develop the critical pedagogic approach that I value so highly. Now that the narratives have been agreed with the research participants I worked with, I am hoping to use some of these as examples for discussion around spaces for agency and potential constraints.

[x] Based on the difficulties faced by participants in the narratives, but acknowledging that these are different in different contexts, I have included a list of questions for GTAs to ask their departments around protocols and processes, so they are more equipped to navigate the structural and cultural constraints in their own context.

[xi] This highlights my project of supporting participants to develop teaching identities through social interaction, but also the structural constraints of trying to do this on an online platform.

[xii] This question illustrates how I prompt participants to explore how and where they might carve out spaces for agency, and consider its interplay with broader structures and cultures. It places value on the past interactions that have shaped their identities, rather than starting from departmental and institutional requirements.

Appendix 1: Session Plan for Concept Mapping

This session was originally planned to be a group session bringing all selected participants together to introduce the project and start their thinking about factors that influence how they see their position in the institution. The comments in orange reflect the prompts I planned to use, and the points in green were omitted as they took the form of one-to-one meetings.

Time	Activity	Resources
10 mins	**Welcome and Introductions** Welcome participants to the project. Introduce myself as the researcher, and participants to introduce themselves to each other: • Name, department and teaching context • Why they've signed up for the project	
30 mins	**Introduction to the project** • Aims of the project • Co-creation ethos of the project • Overview of method – what participants will be asked to do • My role as researcher • Participant questions	Information sheets, consent forms
40 mins	**Concept mapping exercise** 20 mins: Staged exercise where participants respond to the following questions by writing ideas on A3/flipchart paper or post-it notes – starting from the middle of the page and working outwards: *When thinking about the following questions, consider them in the context of your relationship with the University.* • What is your name? What word/words best describes what you do in the University? (participants may not identify as 'teachers' – this identifies their preferred language) • If you were to introduce yourself to someone at the University for the first time, what would you tell them? Why would you tell them this information? Is there anything you would leave out? (prompting participants to highlight key aspects of their identity and why this is important for them) • Why did you take on a teaching role in the University? (find out motivations – do they want to become teachers?) • What approach do you take in the classroom? Why do you take this approach? (focusing participants' attention to the classroom situation)	A3/flipchart paper, coloured pens, post-its

	• If you could do anything you wanted to in the classroom, what would you do? Why can't you currently do it at the moment? (aspirations, constraints and agency) • What are you currently worried or concerned about? (any 'bigger picture' issues) Participants spend 5 minutes each sharing their page with another person. They then have a few minutes to make any additions to their concept maps in a different coloured pen/ different coloured post-it. Finally, participants feed back key points to the whole room and time for discussion of general points (10 mins).	
10 mins	**Next steps** • Talking to students about setting up observations • Practical arrangements for observations • Agreeing pseudonyms • Thank you and close	

Appendix 2: Diagrams of Room Positioning From Field Notes

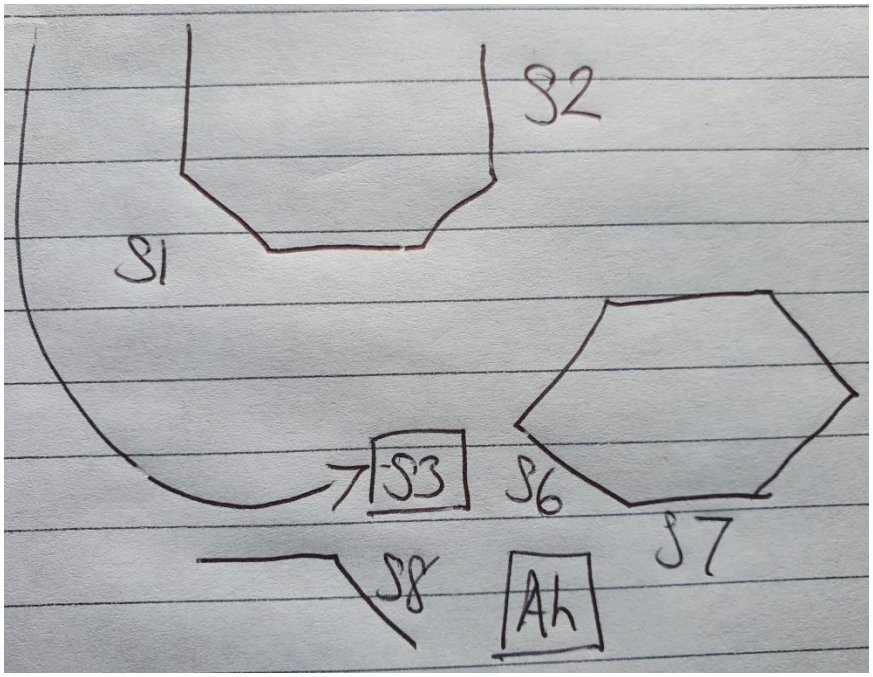

Image 1: Ahmed's positioning when supporting students. Ahmed talking to Students 6, 7 and 8, before Student 3 moves to ask him a question and join the group.

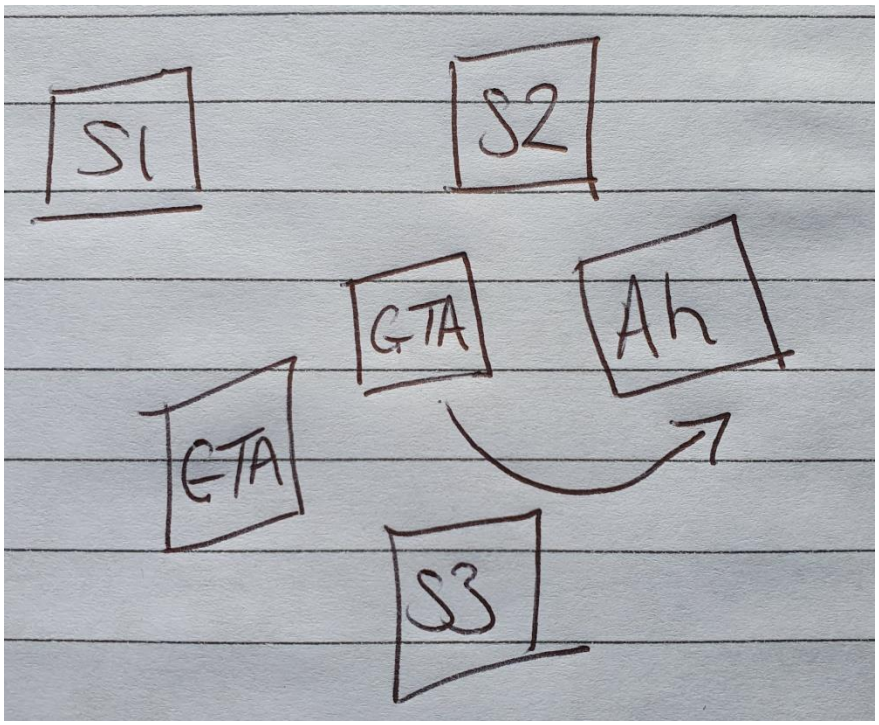

Image 2: Ahmed's "bad habit". Ahmed's "bad habit" of standing beside a GTA who was talking to Student 2. The GTA moved behind Ahmed, letting him take the lead. Another GTA and two students were also listening in to Ahmed's conversation with Student 2.

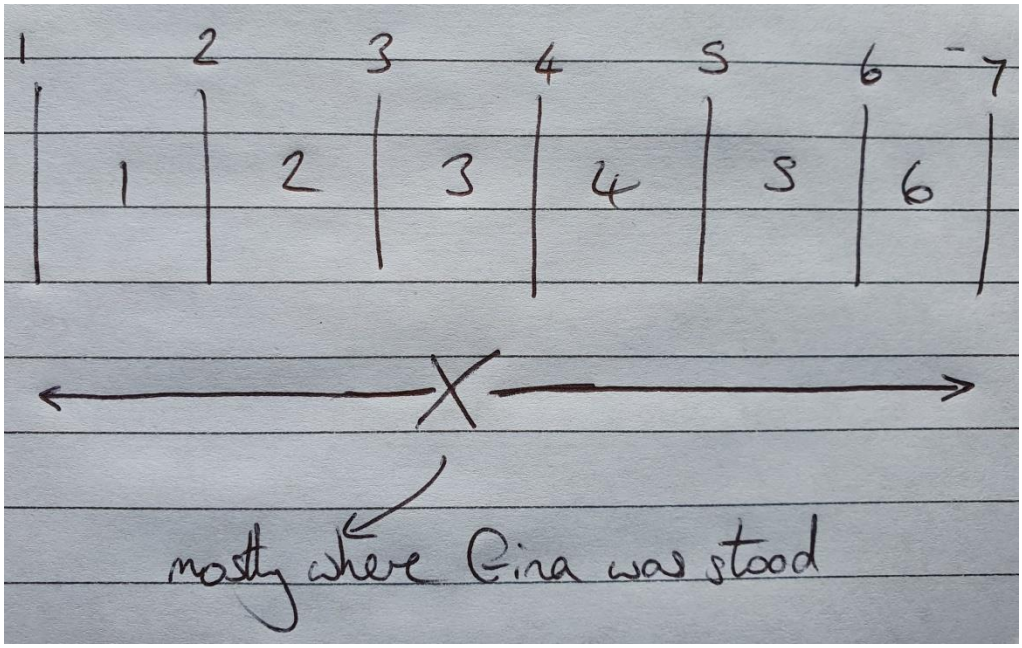

Image 3: Gina's movement in *The Invigilation*. Gina's positioning in *The Invigilation*, where she largely remained in the same place, but occasionally moved in the direction of the arrows as she became increasingly restless. The top numbers represent benches, and students were seated in the gaps 1-6.

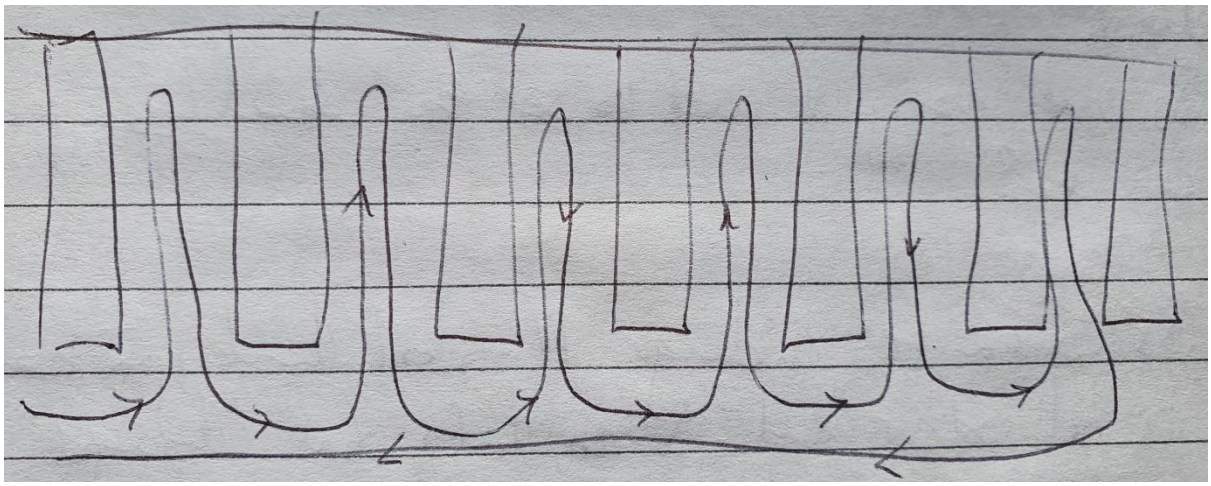

Image 4: Gina's movement in *The Lab Exercises*. As a comparison, this diagram represents Gina's movements in a lab session in the same room, which were considerably more animated.

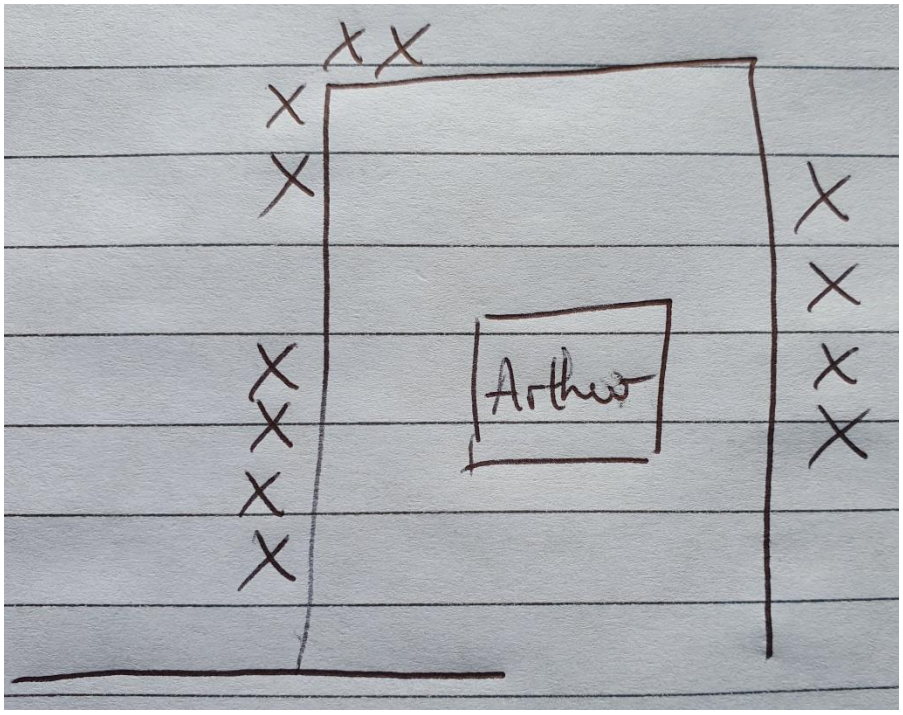

Image 5: Arthur's positioning during group exercises in *The Hovering*. This shows how Arthur moved aside one of the tables (at the bottom of the image) to create a horseshoe, with each X representing a student. This enabled him to sit in the centre to listen to all of the groups in *The Hovering*.

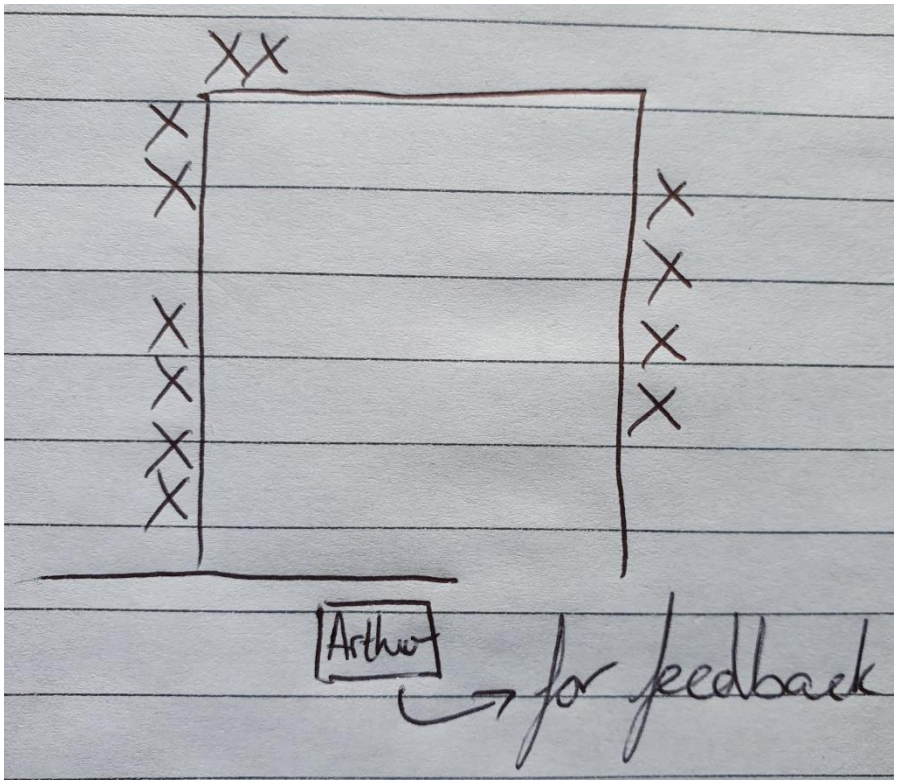

Image 6: Arthur's positioning during whole group discussion in *The Hovering*. Arthur then moved back to the front of the room when getting feedback from the groups.

Appendix 3: Samples of initial data analysis

Stage 1

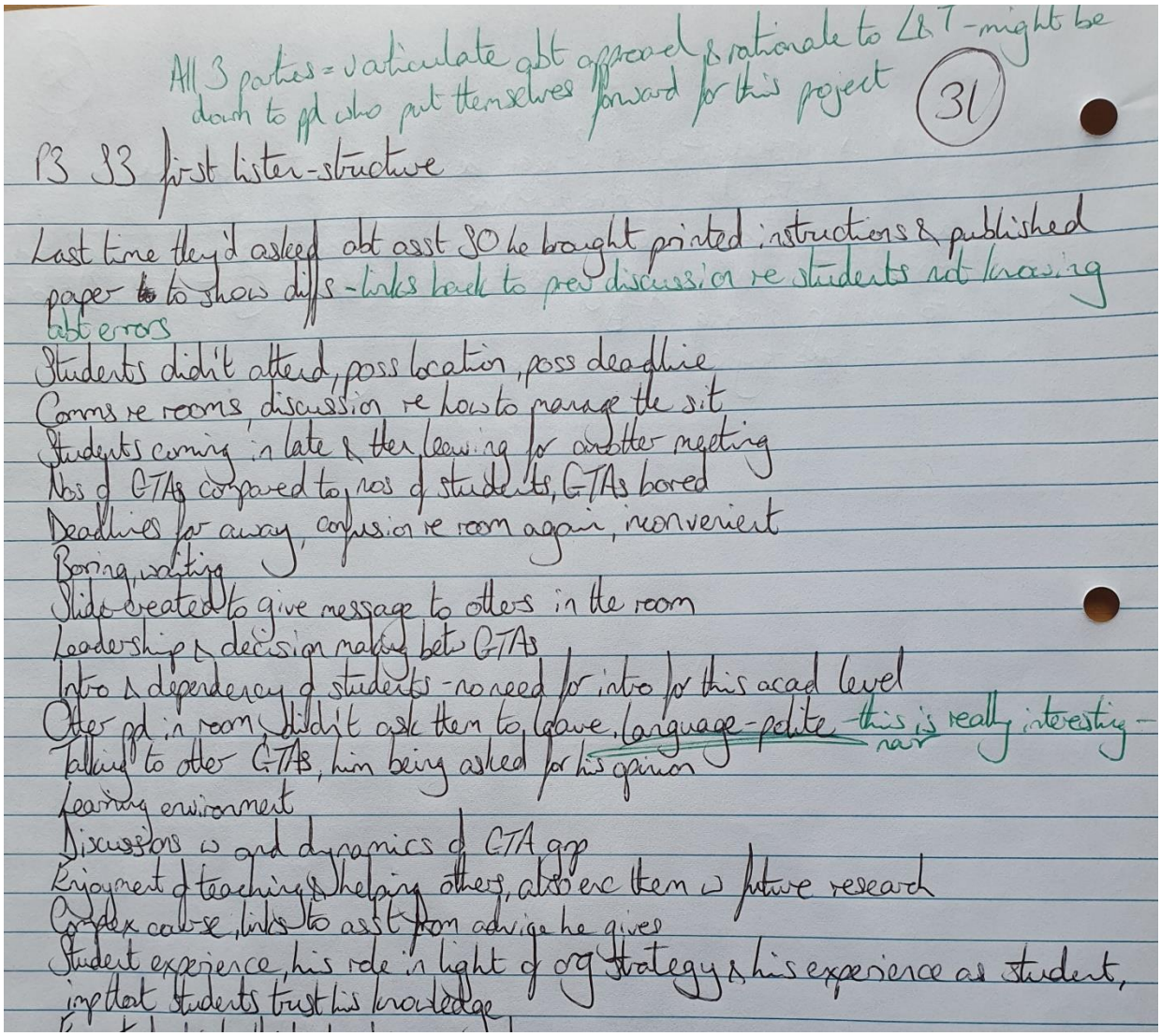

Image 7: First stage of data analysis. This image shows my notes from my first listen of Ahmed's third reflective discussion. The comments in green are my initial thoughts about possible narratives.

Stage 2

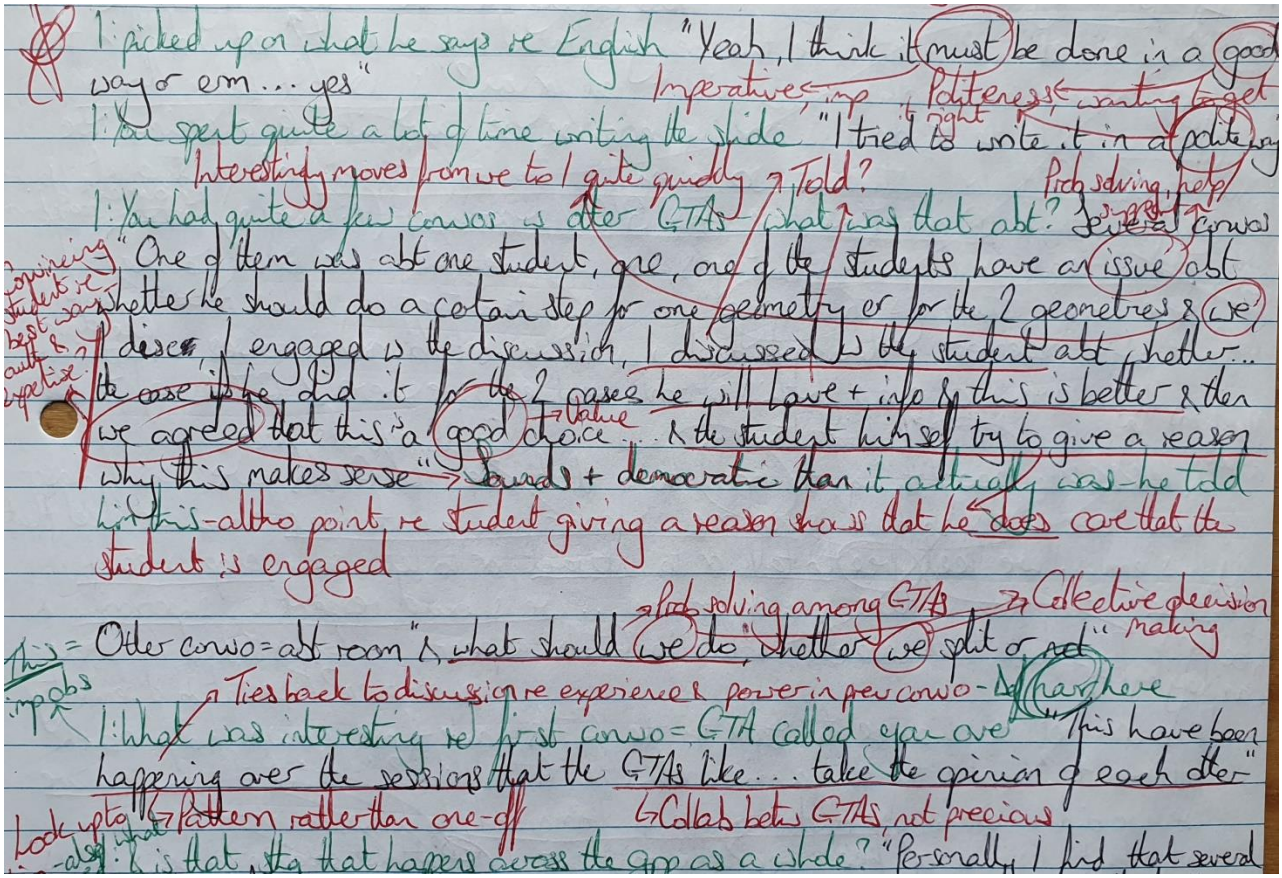

Image 8: Second stage of data analysis. This image shows the second stage of my analysis, which was the equivalent of 'close reading' of individual stories. The text in black is taken from the recording, the text in red are my initial analytical comments, and the text in green are broader ideas for the project or aspects where I prompted Ahmed with a question.

Stage 3

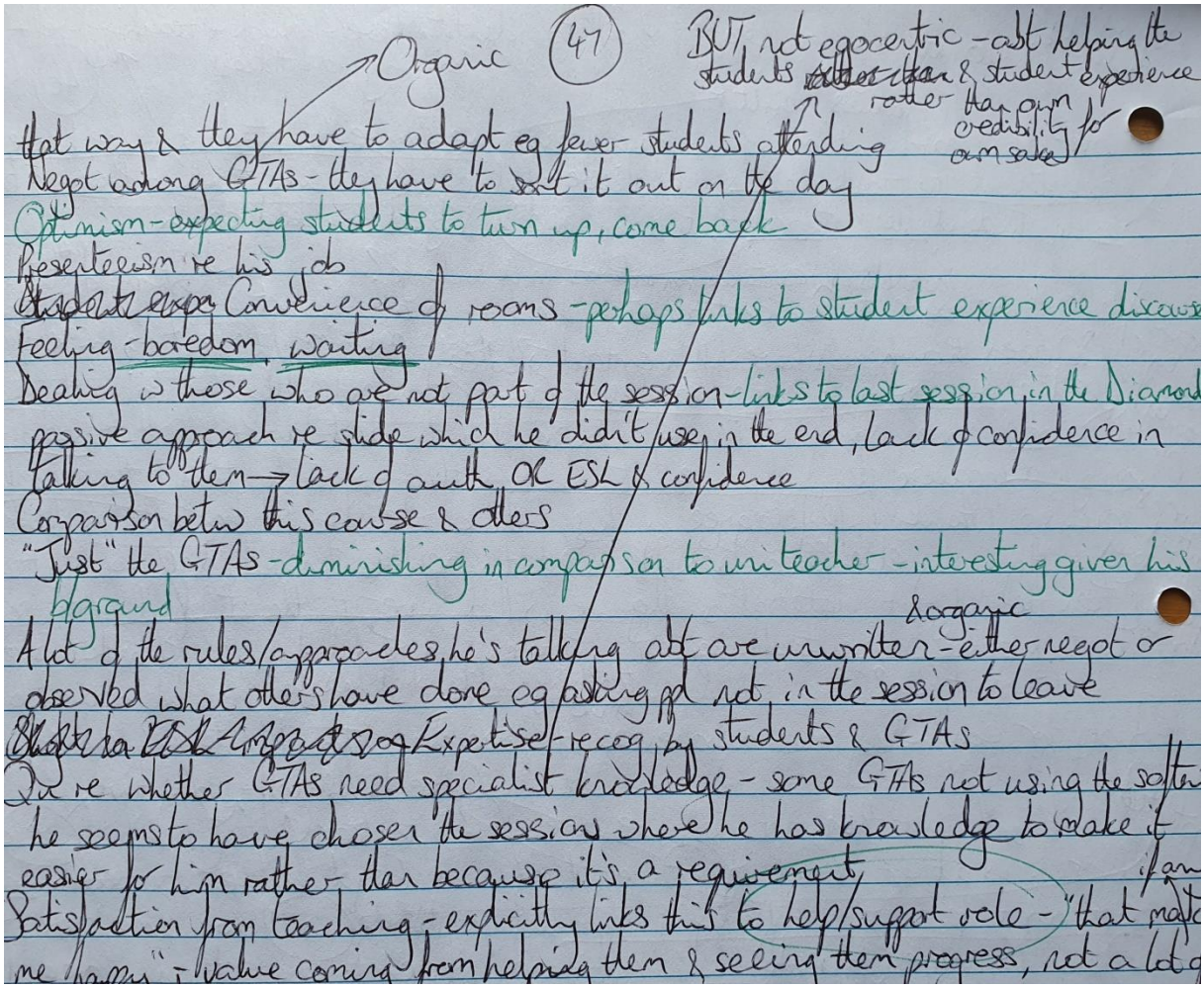

Image 9: Third stage of data analysis. These are my notes from the third stage of analysis, when I went back to listening to the discussion as a whole again. The green text is in more depth here than in the first image, as the project had progressed and I was starting to draw out possible themes across different narratives.

Appendix 4: Ethics Application, Information Sheets and Consent Forms

Section A

Title of research project: A critical exploration of if, and if so, how, Graduate Teaching Assistants' perceptions of their identity in UK Higher Education influences their classroom practice as teachers.

Section B

Proposed project duration: December 2018 – September 2020

Potentially vulnerable participants: There is the potential for this project to involve participants whose circumstances may unduly influence their decisions to consent in terms of possible benefits and extra support for their teaching. To address this, I will ensure that the benefits, expectations and limitations are clearly articulated to potential participants through the information sheet and the Introductory meeting.

Section C

Aims and objectives of the research: This research project aims to explore how Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs – postgraduate research students who teach in higher education institutions) new to teaching in one Russell Group institution forge their identities, and if and how these constructions influence the ways in which they enact their roles within teaching spaces. It aims to foreground the voices of GTAs who are often missing from policy, institutional and professional development discourses, placing value on the diversity of their experiences. It will also shift discussions around new teachers' identity development away from an abstract space towards the sites in which they teach, as well as identifying where (if anywhere) GTAs have agency to shape the learning experience for their students.

The proposed research questions for the project are:

- How do GTAs perceive their position in UK higher education?
- What influences these perceptions?
- What is the relationship between these perceptions and the decisions that GTAs make in their day-to-day practice?
- How far do GTAs feel they have agency over what they do in their day-to-day practice?

Methodology: I plan to work with four participants to co-construct narratives around their teaching practice in light of the research questions above (see below for further details about how these participants will be selected and approached, as well as the eligibility criteria). This project will comprise three stages which allow flexibility to involve participants in its design:

- Concept mapping by participants around how they perceive their position in UK higher education

- Recording of three teaching sessions via video and/or written field notes (at the discretion of each participant and their students) over the course of a teaching semester by the researcher, each followed by a reflective discussion between participant and researcher based on the observation and the concept mapping
- Narrative analysis of the concept maps and reflective discussions (referring back to the recordings as appropriate), and co-production of individual fictional narratives by participants and researcher.

As I plan to co-produce knowledge with participants, some aspects of the methodology cannot be predicted until the research is in progress. Therefore, while I provide a proposed framework below, this will be discussed with participants throughout the project and may be adapted in light of their needs.

Concept mapping – I will meet with recruited participants as a group to introduce the project, set expectations around the separation of my 'day job' and my role as researcher (see below) and answer any questions. As part of this meeting, participants will be asked to create a concept map of how they see themselves and what influences these perceptions. This will form the basis of the observations.

Observations and reflective discussions – Participants will select three separate teaching sessions to be observed over the course of a single semester. The number of observations, and therefore the number of sessions participants need to be teaching, may exclude some potential participants and departments, but I will attempt to achieve as wide a range of experiences as possible. A teaching observation is only a snapshot and every teaching session is different (even if it is with the same group of students at the same time of day in the same teaching space), so observing each participant three times will enable them to draw on a range of experiences. The method of observation aligns with broader practice norms in the University, and I regularly conduct observations as part of my day job. However, I am conscious that my experience in conducting observations might influence what I look for in this project. I will therefore use participants' concept maps to identify several prompts for the observations, tailored to each individual and agreed with them prior to the observation.

As an observer, my presence will potentially be disruptive to both the teacher and the students. Students need to feel comfortable to speak in seminars, able to talk about sensitive matters in project supervision, or move safely around the laboratory. Information sheets and consent forms have also been produced for students (see attached) that are tailored to the specific situation they find themselves in as 'indirect' participants. When explaining the research to participants I will offer them and their students the choice as to whether the observation should be conducted through written field notes only, or field notes and video. For consistency, the same approach will be used for all three of their observations. However, a pilot will be conducted with each teacher to iron out any difficulties, work out what to look for in the observation and test out the impact of the recording in a real setting and enable participants to get used to being observed. Participants will have the opportunity to change their minds about how they are recorded after the pilot. The participant will need to make the student information sheet and consent form available prior to the session, and ask students to let the participant or myself know if they are not willing to be observed. I will take the consent forms for students to sign to each session.

Each observation will be followed by a reflective discussion with the participant. The observation recordings will provide the stimulus for discussion, and I will make it clear from the start that these are for participants' use only and will not be shared. Participants will be sent the recordings with sufficient time to reflect on them prior to the discussion. The specific questions that are asked will therefore depend on what comes out of the observations, so it is impossible to outline what these will be at this stage. The reflective discussions will be recorded for use in the production of the narratives.

Analysis and production of individual narratives - From the observations and discussions, I will work with participants to develop individual narratives that represent their teaching role and how they enact their identities in practice. My desire to foreground participants' voices is at the heart of working collaboratively with them to produce the narratives. A co-produced narrative approach avoids over-generalisation by respecting the individuality of every teacher, allows them to interpret their practice in a way that is meaningful to them, and gives them some control over how their accounts and experiences are represented. While narrative approaches are familiar to me due to my background, I need to recognise that this may not be the case for the participants. I also acknowledge my preference for the written word, and to avoid this being imposed on participants the narratives can be presented in any format they choose so that their story is told in the way that they feel communicates it best. Participants' individual narratives will be reproduced in my thesis as they stand, and the analysis will be of these narratives. I plan to bring participants together where appropriate in the process to share my analysis, and to discuss the narratives produced as a group.

Participants will be invited to be co-authors on any future publications, and while the final decision about whether to waive their anonymity is up to them, as the researcher I will ensure that they are aware of the potential consequences of doing so. They will have the opportunity to comment on any future publications regardless of whether they wish to be named as co-authors.

Personal safety: The observations will take place during University hours and on University premises, so I do not anticipate any additional issues of personal safety beyond what would normally be expected of a standard working day. However, due to my own capacity the discussions (initial meetings and concept mapping, and reflective conversations) may need to take place outside University hours. In all cases I will meet with participants on University premises, but due to the nature of discussions these might take place in private rooms rather than public spaces. I will therefore ensure that someone knows where I am and what time I will return home, and carry a charged mobile phone at all times.

Section D

How will you identify the potential participants?

I plan to work with four GTAs at a single institution, and they will self-select for the project as detailed below. Although they may have teaching experience from elsewhere (for example in schools or in their home countries), they must have been teaching in UK higher education for less than two years when they sign up. This will ensure consistency about what constitutes

"new to teaching" while recognising the temporary position of GTAs as teachers in higher education. Participants will be purposively sampled to ensure diversity as far as possible in terms of gender, age, discipline, ethnicity, nationality, experiences and teaching contexts (for example seminars, laboratory demonstration, research project supervision). This focus on diversity rather than representation in this project reflects my own values around foregrounding the range of teaching identities that is not recognised in existing professional development and higher education discourses.

How will the potential participants be approached and recruited?

Participants will be approached via a general email sent out to the institutional GTA email list inviting applications, which will include full details of what will be involved in the project (see attached). Key demographic details will be captured to inform the sampling process described above.

How do you plan to obtain informed consent?

Due to the complex methodological process and the ethos of co-production underpinning this project, detailed information about what the project entails will be provided in the initial email sent to the GTA email list and articulated at the initial meeting (see email attached). The pilot referred to above will model the process that the observation will take. Written informed consent from participants will be obtained via the attached consent form. In my case, it is also important to obtain informed consent from students as it will be difficult to discuss teaching without talking about students. A student-facing information sheet will therefore be produced (see attached) which explains the project and emphasises that they have the right to withdraw with no consequence to their experience or assessment for the module in question. How this situation will be managed (for example moving the student to a different group, or changing the group who will be observed) will be agreed following discussion with the teacher and student concerned. The consent form for students (see attached) is tailored to their specific situation as 'indirect' participants.

Participation is voluntary, and participants and students will be able to withdraw at any time prior to the fictionalised narratives being produced. If students wish to withdraw after the observations they can only do so if they can identify the aspect of their data that they wish to be withdrawn.

What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm/distress to the participants?

There is no potential for physical harm to the participants. However, I plan to work with participants who I am likely to engage with in other settings, which has significant ethical implications for the participant-researcher relationship. This is particularly important due to my role as assessor on the non-credit bearing pathway for professional recognition designed for GTAs. There is a risk that participants may see me as "performance monitoring" or feel coerced into taking part because of the position I hold, even though that is not my intention. It is also important to acknowledge the sensitivity of using observations as a method with new teachers at a vulnerable stage of their career in terms of their confidence and their precarious position within the institution.

How will this be managed to ensure appropriate protection and well-being of the participants?

With regard to the tensions between my institutional role and my role as researcher, I need to set clear boundaries from the start of the project around what my role as researcher is, where it starts and ends, and how it might be different from my "day job". The activities for my research will be kept completely separate to those of the programmes I teach on, where another member of the team will assess their work to avoid a conflict of interest. In terms of supporting teachers at an early stage of their career, I plan to signpost participants to broader support and set up informal buddying opportunities with others in the project from the start.

I have deliberately designed the project in a way that gives some power and agency to participants to shape its direction, which should establish an ongoing dialogue between researcher and participants where issues can be raised and addressed. Furthermore, after the project has concluded I will meet with participants at the end of the project to bring it to a definite close, and discuss how my role, and my relationship with them, will change going forward.

Section E

What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the project, with the exception of participants disclosing harmful practices to me or if I see any harmful teaching practice. This will be made clear to participants in the information sheet when they sign up and explained verbally, along with how their data will be securely stored. In terms of asking permission from institutional gatekeepers, I am concerned that contacting Heads of Department will compromise the anonymity of participants, especially in smaller departments with fewer GTAs, and that this could potentially lead to the 'surveillance', whether real or perceived, that I am keen to avoid. Following advice from Professor Dan Goodley in the School of Education, once I have recruited participants I therefore plan to email appropriate Faculty Directors of Learning and Teaching (FDLTs) (see attached) as gatekeepers to gain permission for the research to take place in their faculty.

To protect my position and that of participants, the institution will remain anonymous in any future publications and I plan to embargo my thesis for three years. Three years is a fairly standard length of time for PhD completion given that my participants are likely to be in the second year of their studies at least, so should mean that the participants are in a more secure position or will have moved on from the institution by the time my thesis is published. Pseudonyms will be chosen by participants, and I will refer to faculties (eg Engineering, Social Sciences) rather than departments so that those working in smaller departments are not identifiable. I will preserve anonymity for students who are involved indirectly and will aim to do so for participants because of their precarious position within their institution. However, while the narratives will be fictional and I will try to work with participants to remove identifying information, complete anonymity for participants may not be guaranteed and I

need to ensure participants are aware of this. Identities and narratives are personal, and there is a balance to be achieved between taking out or changing details that might identify someone without making the narrative too generic or altering its meaning. Similarly, while the importance of anonymity will be explained to the students in the information sheet and observed sessions, I am reliant on them not talk to others about the project to preserve anonymity and this has been incorporated into their consent form. In the information sheet, it will be acknowledged that the fictionalised narratives may be shared with other participants, but this will be under the pseudonyms and it will be up to participants how much they share in that closed setting. As the narratives will be written by participants, and they will be involved in shaping the research, I hope that this will create a dialogue in which issues of anonymity can be discussed at each stage of the project to ensure participants are fully aware of the implications.

How and where will the data be stored, used and (if appropriate) destroyed?

All data will be stored in a confidential folder on secure University servers which only the researcher will have access to, and participants will be informed of this via the information sheet. The demographic data used for selecting participants will be destroyed following the observations for those who are not part of the project (in case I need to approach one of them as a substitute for another participant dropping out) and after the project has concluded for those who are part of the project. While the folders will be named, they will be named according to participant pseudonyms. Recordings will be shared with participants in a secure manner to inform the reflective discussions, and will be destroyed at the end of the project. The reflective discussions and narrative drafts will again be shared with participants in a secure manner. These will be destroyed three years after publication output has ceased.

Participant Information Sheet February 2019

1. Research Project Title:

How do Graduate Teaching Assistants' perceptions of themselves influence their teaching practice?

2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the project's purpose?

This research project aims to work collaboratively with Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who are new to teaching in higher education to explore how their understanding of their identities influences their classroom practice. It also aims to identify where (if anywhere) GTAs have agency to shape the learning experience for their students.

This project is part of an EdD Doctorate in Education.

4. Why have I been chosen?

You have received an invitation to participate in this research because you are currently on the GTA email list. If you are interested in participating, please complete the form at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc2g6p7MRN0ydcvG0nyWgJcftWx31yHmjd7adscd0-m2SYkgg/viewform. Four participants will be selected from those who complete the form to ensure maximum diversity of experience.

To be eligible to participate in the project, you must have been teaching in UK Higher Education for less than two years, and must have sufficient teaching opportunities in Semester 2 as indicated in section 6 below.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time prior to the production of the fictionalised narratives (see below) without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact Sarah Moore hip06sej@sheffield.ac.uk.

6. What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

As this is a co-produced project, it will involve input from you at the following stages:

- Initial meeting in January 2019 to explore how you see your role
- Four observations of your teaching in Semester 2 (one pilot, and three for the research itself), each followed by a reflective discussion between you and the researcher. The observations will be recorded to support the discussion, either by

video and/or by written field notes, depending on your preference and that of your students. You will be sent the recording (whether written or video) in advance of the reflective discussion. While the researcher may bring some prompt questions, the reflective discussion will be led by you. The reflective discussion will be audio recorded to inform the next stage of the project.

- Up to three meetings between summer 2019 and spring 2020 working with the researcher to produce fictionalised narratives capturing your experiences as a teacher.

You choose which teaching sessions are observed. Information sheets and consent forms have been produced for your students – you are asked to make these available to students before the session to make sure they are happy with the observation taking place. These teaching observations are to stimulate the reflective discussions only, and the recordings (video and/or written field notes) will not be shared with anyone else. While the reflective discussions will be prompted by the observations, they will involve open questions designed to allow you to talk about your experiences in a way that feels most comfortable for you.

Working with you to produce the fictionalised narratives means that your voice is foregrounded in the research as well as that of the researcher. Fictionalised narratives may be shared with the other participants during the creative process with your permission.

7. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is possible that you may feel uncomfortable being observed and discussing your teaching practice. Please be assured that this project is not part of any performance monitoring process and no one will have access to the observation recordings (video and/or written) or the reflective discussions beyond you and myself as researcher. This co-produced nature of this project means that it has been designed in a way that enables you to help shape its direction.

To support you through this process, with your permission you will be paired up with another participant in the research to provide informal buddying opportunities throughout the life of the project.

As this is a co-produced project, it requires some time commitment from you throughout the life of the project as indicated above, which may impact on other commitments you have (for example your PhD). You are therefore encouraged to think carefully about how this project would fit in with other commitments before signing up.

8. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will foreground the diverse voices of GTAs and enable institutions to develop support for GTAs around teaching that is better related to your experiences in the classroom. If you choose to be paired up with other participants as part of the buddying arrangement, you may also benefit from the community support that this opportunity offers. You may choose to waive your anonymity to be named as a co-researcher on any future

publications, although opportunities for future publications cannot be guaranteed at this early stage.

9. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential where possible, unless you disclose any harmful practices to me or I witness any harmful practices that require reporting to protect others. Permission will be requested from your Faculty Director for Learning and Teaching for this research to take place in a department in their Faculty, so your Head of Department will not be informed.

If you are part of the project, you will be invited to select a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. You will not be identified in any reports or publications unless you have given your explicit consent for this, for example to be named as co-researcher on future publications.

Please be aware that as this project involves observations of real-life teaching, your students will know that you are participating in the project. They will receive an information sheet and be asked to sign a consent form promising to protect your anonymity and not discuss the project outside of the classroom, but for this reason complete confidentiality and anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

10. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general. As I will be collecting some data that is defined in the legislation as more sensitive (ie your demographic data collected in the initial form), I also need to let you know that I am applying the following condition in law: that the use of your data is 'necessary for scientific or historical research purposes'.

11. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

All data collected will be stored in a confidential folder under your pseudonym of choice on secure University servers which only I will have access to. The data may be used to inform future publications, conference presentations and other appropriate outputs, and you will be consulted where possible in the production of these.

The demographic data used for selecting participants will be destroyed following the observations for those who are not part of the project and after the project has concluded for those who are part of the project. Recordings (written or video) of the observations will be shared with you securely to inform the reflective discussions and will be destroyed at the end of the project. Other data will be kept until three years after all outputs related to the project have been produced.

12. **Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

It is up to you and your students whether your observed sessions are video recorded. If you choose for your observation to be recorded in this way, the recording will be used only to inform the reflective discussions, and potentially to refer back to when working with you to create the fictional narratives with your permission. The reflective discussions will be audio recorded and shared with you to help create the fictional narratives. No other use will be made of any recordings without your written permission, and no one else will be allowed access to the original recordings.

13. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being conducted as part of an EdD Doctorate in Education at The University of Sheffield. It is not being funded by any other organisation.

14. Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

15. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the School of Education.

16. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research?

If you wish to make a complaint or withdraw your consent for participation, please contact Sarah Moore hip06sej@sheffield.ac.uk in the first instance, or Dr Darren Webb d.webb@sheffield.ac.uk who is supervising the project. If this does not resolve the issue, you should contact Professor Elizabeth Wood, Head of the School of Education e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk. If your complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, information about how to raise a complaint can be found in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.

17. Contact for further information

If you would like further information about this project, please contact the lead researcher Sarah Moore hip06sej@sheffield.ac.uk. You are also welcome to contact the supervisor for this research Dr Darren Webb d.webb@sheffield.ac.uk.

Finally …

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and, if selected for the project, a signed consent form to keep. Thank you for your interest in participating in this project, and I look forward to working with you.

GTA Identity and Classroom Practice Consent Form (Participant)

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated February 2019 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include engagement in an initial meeting and concept mapping, four recorded observations (one of which being a pilot) and accompanying reflective discussions, and co-production of fictional narratives based on my experiences.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other participants will have access to the fictionalised narrative that is constructed from my data and may be named as co-authors on any publications, reports, webpages and other research outputs. They will not have access to the raw data that has informed the narrative.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of participant [printed]	Signature	Date
Name of Researcher [printed]	Signature	Date

Project contact details for further information:
Sarah Moore (Lead Researcher) hip06sej@sheffield.ac.uk
Dr Darren Webb (Project Supervisor) d.webb@sheffield.ac.uk
Professor Elizabeth Wood (Head of School of Education) e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk

Student Information Sheet

1. Research Project Title:

How do Graduate Teaching Assistants' perceptions of themselves influence their teaching practice?

2. Invitation paragraph

Your teacher has volunteered to participate in a research project. As this project involves observation of one or more teaching situations in which you are involved, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the project's purpose?

This research project aims to work collaboratively with Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who are new to teaching in higher education to explore how their understanding of their identities influences their classroom practice. It also aims to identify where (if anywhere) GTAs have agency to shape the learning experience for their students.

This project is part of an EdD Doctorate in Education.

4. Why have I been chosen?

Your teacher has chosen one or more of the teaching situations in which you are a student to be observed as part of their exploration of their teaching practice.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not you are happy for your class to be observed. If you are happy for this to be the case, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You can withdraw at any time without any negative consequences in terms of your learning experience or assessment outcomes. You do not have to give a reason. However, if you wish to withdraw after the observations have concluded, you can only do so if you can identify the aspect of your data that you wish to be withdrawn. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact Sarah Moore hip06sej@sheffield.ac.uk stating your teacher's name and the session(s) in which you were a student.

6. What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

Your classes will be observed up to four times (the first will be a pilot to familiarise your teacher with the observation process). You do not need to do anything, other than to participate in the class as you normally would. The researcher will observe your teacher and their interactions with you, and record their observations. Recording may take place via video and/or through written field notes, but the exact nature of the recording will be negotiated with you and your teacher. You will not be recorded on video without having given your explicit permission for this to happen in advance of the session.

After the observation, your teacher will discuss their perceptions of the teaching session with the researcher. These discussions will be used to create fictionalised narratives about teaching experiences.

7. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

You may feel uncomfortable having an observer in the room. Please be assured that they are observing what is going on, and are not making any judgement about what you are doing or saying during the teaching session. The researcher will work with you and your teacher to make sure you feel as comfortable as possible about the research. There are no disadvantages or benefits to you in terms of assessment outcomes if you take part.

8. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

While there are no immediate benefits for you, it is hoped that this work will lead to more appropriate support for new teachers in future and will therefore have a positive impact on future students.

9. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the observations will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to the researcher. You will not be identified in any reports or publications and your teacher will not reveal your participation to anyone else.

10. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

No personal data will be collected about you.

11. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

All data collected will be stored in a confidential folder on secure University servers which only the researcher will have access to. Elements of the data may inform the fictionalised narratives, and therefore may be indirectly used to inform future publications, conference presentations and other appropriate outputs. Recordings (written or video) will be shared with your teacher securely to inform their reflective discussions and will be destroyed at the end of the project. Other data will be kept until all outputs related to the project have been produced.

12. **Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

It is up to you and your teacher whether your observed sessions are video recorded. If your class is recorded in this way, the recording will be used only to inform your teacher's reflections, and potentially the creation of the fictional narratives with your teacher. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

13. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being conducted as part of an EdD Doctorate in Education at The University of Sheffield. It is not being funded by any other organisation.

14. Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

15. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the School of Education.

16. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research?

If you wish to make a complaint or withdraw your consent for participation, please contact Sarah Moore hip06sej@sheffield.ac.uk in the first instance, or Dr Darren Webb d.webb@sheffield.ac.uk who is supervising the project. If this does not resolve the issue, you should contact Professor Elizabeth Wood, Head of the School of Education. If your complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, information about how to raise a complaint can be found in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.

17. Contact for further information

If you would like further information about this project, please contact the lead researcher Sarah Moore hip06sej@sheffield.ac.uk. You are also welcome to contact the supervisor for this research Dr Darren Webb d.webb@sheffield.ac.uk.

Finally …

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and your consent form to keep. Thank you for allowing your classes to be observed for this project.

GTA Identity and Classroom Practice Consent Form (Student)

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated February 2019 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to my teacher taking part in the project. I understand that the teaching sessions in which I am a student will be observed, and that interactions between myself, my peers and the teacher may be recorded, discussed among participants and analysed.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time before [date of final observation agreed with participant] or after the observations have concluded if I can identify the data I wish to be withdrawn; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be collected.	☐	☐
I agree to protect the anonymity of the teacher and will not discuss the project outside of the teaching situation.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words and interactions with the teacher may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of Student [printed]	Signature	Date
Name of Researcher [printed]	Signature	Date

Project contact details for further information:
Sarah Moore (Lead Researcher) hip06sej@sheffield.ac.uk
Dr Darren Webb (Project Supervisor) d.webb@sheffield.ac.uk
Professor Elizabeth Wood (Head of School of Education) e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 5: Email to Faculty Directors of Learning and Teaching regarding participants taking part in the project.

I am writing to you as a researcher conducting a project in the School of Education with Graduate Teaching Assistants new to teaching to explore how their understanding of their identities influences their classroom practice.

Following an email sent out to GTAs across the institution, [number] GTA(s) in your Faculty have volunteered and been selected to participate in this project. I am therefore asking permission from you for this research to be carried out in your Faculty. I am approaching you rather than asking permission from Heads of Department due to the small number of GTAs that may be working in individual departments and the ethical need to preserve anonymity for those GTAs as far as possible.

This project will involve working with a small number of GTAs across the institution to develop fictional narratives about their teaching experience through a process of concept mapping, teaching observations and reflective discussions. Full details of the project can be found on the attached information sheet which I will send out to participants. While the thesis will be embargoed for three years following publication, I hope that it will inform the support that is offered to GTAs across the institution in terms of their professional development as teachers.

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethical Review Procedure, as administered by the School of Education.

Please could you confirm by return email that you are happy for this research to take place in your Faculty.

If you have any questions about this project, or would like any further information, please feel free to ask, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Sarah Moore, EdD Student

Appendix 6: Email to GTAs across the institution (via institutional email list)

Dear all,

I'm writing in my capacity as a student researcher on the EdD Doctorate in Education (Educational Studies) to invite you to participate in an exciting research project working with Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who are new to teaching in higher education to explore how your understanding of your identities influences your classroom practice.

For this project, we'll be collaborating to develop stories based on your teaching experience through the following activities:

- A meeting in January to explore your role and discuss the influences on your teaching
- Observations of four different sessions in which you are teaching during Semester 2 (one 'pilot' observation, and three for the research). These won't be shared with anyone else.
- Four meetings of around 45 minutes which will take place after each observation to discuss and reflect on the observed session.
- Up to three meetings between summer 2019 and spring 2020 to develop narratives of teaching.

I'm looking to work alongside a small number of participants who have been teaching in UK higher education for less than two years (if you've taught in other countries, or other settings such as schools that's fine), and who are teaching at least four sessions in Semester 2. Teaching can include (but isn't limited to) lecturing, seminar/workshop facilitation, lab demonstration or project supervision.

As this will be a co-produced project, it's been designed in a way that allows you to help shape its direction. This is a safe space that will enable you to express your own experiences in a way that is meaningful to you. You'll be supported throughout this project by the researcher and through informal buddying opportunities.

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethical Review Procedure, as administered by the School of Education.

If you're interested in taking part, please fill out the form at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc2g6p7MRN0ydcvG0nyWgJcftWx31yHmjd7adscd0-m2SYkgg/viewform which also contains a link to the information sheet with full details of the project. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this project please don't hesitate to contact me, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Sarah Moore, EdD Student

Appendix 7: Ethics Approval Letter from School of Education

Downloaded: 27/11/2018
Approved: 26/11/2018

Sarah Moore
Registration number: 160242759
School of Education
Programme: EdD Doctorate in Education (Educational Studies)

Dear Sarah

PROJECT TITLE: A critical exploration of if, and if so, how, Graduate Teaching Assistants perceptions of their identity in UK Higher Education influences their classroom practice as teachers
APPLICATION: Reference Number 023641

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 26/11/2018 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 023641 (dated 08/11/2018).
- Participant information sheet 1052884 version 1 (08/11/2018).
- Participant information sheet 1052882 version 1 (08/11/2018).
- Participant consent form 1052885 version 1 (08/11/2018).
- Participant consent form 1052883 version 1 (08/11/2018).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

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