Editorial: PGR Teachers and the advancement of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

Group Bio:

This year's editorial team is comprised of six individuals (From left to right: Cherisse, Youn, Imogen, Anton, Bhushan, and Yiduo) from across five departments at the University of Warwick. The diversity within the team goes well beyond research disciplines, with four continents represented within this international cast. The team's ethos is to strive in championing postgraduate students' work, in their roles as Graduate Teaching Assistants.

Abstract

In this editorial, we introduce our third issue which focusses on "Advancing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in Postgraduate Pedagogies". We outline how this issue developed, from concept to publication. We reflect on the journal at its third year and the ways forward beyond this issue.

Keyword: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Identity, Postgraduate Practices, Progressive Pedagogies, Interdisciplinarity, Community

i) Kamusta! (Hello!)

Welcome to the third issue of the Journal of PGR Pedagogic Practice (or JPPP to regular readers)! The editorial team are humbled to be able to build on our predecessors' excellent work. Not only has the team grown exponentially (we have six editors this year!) but so have the number of submissions! We thus return with another batch (fresh from the oven) of articles that showcase the exciting work of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and wider postgraduate community. We hope that this issue provides some food for thought as well as helpful ideas that you can take into your teaching practice and beyond.

In presenting issue 3 – "Breaking Barriers and Embracing Voices: Advancing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in Postgraduate Pedagogies", we maintain the core elements of the previous issues of the JPPP, including providing a voice to GTAs and the wider Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) community during a period of instability over the last few years. With a new normality somewhat set, we sought to explore a theme that would speak to authors and readers on a personal level. The authors have emphatically responded to our call, speaking to a range of issues, from the need to improve access in the classroom to the challenges that PGRs face based on their own identity and positionality. We were presented with unique context that GTAs found themselves in such as providing additional support to students beyond the classroom and supporting departments in enhancing their intercultural communication. We are also delighted to present our first international contributions in the JPPP, all the way from the National Institute for Nigerian Languages in Nigeria and Ateneo University in Philippines. This is a continuation of last year's efforts to give a voice to PGRs beyond the University of Warwick and an indication of the growing online presence of Warwick Postgraduate Teaching Community (PTC).

This year's issue includes personal reflections, as well as practice papers which showcase the innovative practices employed by GTAs.

ii) Breaking Barriers and Embracing Voices

This year's journal theme of **Breaking Barriers and Embracing Voices: Advancing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in Postgraduate Pedagogies** was chosen as a way to celebrate the range of identities, cultures and individuals who make up the postgraduate teaching community. According to Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko (2020) despite the important role of GTAs, especially in undergraduate programs, the amount of empirical research examining their work is relatively small. When the editorial team sent out the call for papers on this issue, we were unsure of the appetite among post-graduate teachers to discuss matters of EDI. Among our small group of editors explored and sharing individual experiences was the best way to achieve this. At the end of the call period, we received over a dozen submissions from PGRs within and beyond the UK who wished to tell their stories and share the experiences that they have had within higher education.

Equality in higher education has many layers. As postgraduate students GTAs are in the continuous space of inequality. On one hand we are not equal to our students, they expect us to know more and be better while on the other hand we are not fully considered staff. Instead, GTAs have become a source of part-time teaching staff, cheaper and typically more well motivated than permanent staff and adaptable and flexible as employees to respond to 'growing student numbers, reduced staff-student ratios and deepening resource constraints' (Mazaka 2009; Collins 2021; Slack & Pownall, 2023). Our pay checks do not necessarily reflect the work that we do, the time that we dedicate to this work nor the love that we have for our students. Therefore, we are not equal and in many ways we are voiceless. This journal issue provided a space for GTAs to express how they have been feeling and reflect upon their own practices in a meaningful way.

We felt that diversity is an intrinsic part of higher education and postgraduate studies. Postgraduate students come from so many various backgrounds and experiences that each of their perspectives is valid and deserves to be heard. Pedagogic literature such as that of Collins, Brown and Leigh (2022) recognises that GTAs do not come to their research nor their teaching as blank slates, and that their culture and history impacts their teaching styles, classroom management and engagement with learners. Through the lens of this journal GTAs are able to share specific case-studies of what these impacts look like in practice.

Additionally, for us as a team 'inclusion' was fundamental to this issue; we wanted representation from various subject areas, different countries, genders and as a newer area of opportunity, we were pleased to include neurodiversity and disability among the GTA community. What we learned in going through this process is that inclusivity requires thought at every stage of the process. In the process of producing this issue of the journal the Editorial Team learned how we could be more inclusive and receptive in the future. There are several lessons on what we can do better which we reflect on later in this editorial. This journal remains a product of the postgraduate community, for the postgraduate community. If the writings from this issue can encourage an uncertain postgraduate to join the teaching community, then we have done our jobs.

iii) Fostering Inclusive and Equitable Learning through PGR Pedagogies

The journey towards equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in Postgraduate Researchers (PGR) pedagogies is built by the collective efforts of postgraduate researchers, students, and the wider teaching community. This issue of the Journal of PGR Pedagogic Practice is a celebration of the tireless commitment of postgraduate researchers who have dedicated themselves to fostering inclusive learning environments, navigating intercultural communication, and adapting teaching and learning practices in a manner that befits our diverse and ever-changing educational landscape. These three themes take prominence from 10 articles which make up this issue. Each offers a unique lens through which to provide critical reflections and insights to help PGR teachers thoughtfully adapt their pedagogies and make crucial advancements in EDI to better serve diverse student populations.

Theme 1: Fostering Inclusive Learning Environments

Three articles below this theme address a core question in the EDI field: How can we effectively break down barriers to establish educational environments that not only recognize diversity but actively nurture inclusion? These pieces discuss various strategies and approaches for creating more inclusive educational settings that embrace diversity in all its forms. **Reymark A. Isar**, a student and practitioner from Philippines, brings both academic rigour and practical experience when introduces a systems thinking approach to inclusive education. This perspective offers a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in implementing inclusive practices. As a female Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) in STEM, **Sophie Kempston**'s reflection focuses on gender disparities within STEM and the pivotal role of GTAs in bridging these gaps. Her personal experiences as both a student and a teacher provide valuable context for her insights into practical strategies to empower female students and address gender disparities. **Bing Lu, Ben Sinclair** and **Youn Affejee** describe their efforts to build an inclusive PGR community at the University of Warwick through a series of student-led workshops aimed at generating peer support around the doctoral student-supervisor relationship. Their reflective piece illustrates how educational design research principles guided the development and evaluation of these workshops. This innovative approach embraces diversity, including the incorporation of contradictory views and critical feedback to improve inclusivity. In contemplating these contributions, we discern that fostering inclusive learning environments is a multifaceted endeavour. It necessitates a holistic understanding of educational systems, gender-sensitive strategies in STEM, and the innovation of peer-led initiatives.

Theme 2: Navigating Intercultural Communication

The theme of Navigating Intercultural Communication serves as a bridge that connects diverse voices and perspectives. The three articles within this theme are anchored in the practical application of EDI, focusing on the complexities of intercultural interactions in educational settings. **Hong Song** and **Bing Lu** explore the challenges faced by international postgraduate taught (PGT) students in Education Studies at the University of Warwick. They reflect on the implications of cultural mismatches between students' prior educational experiences and the UK's pedagogical approaches. This critical reflection underscores the importance of understanding and addressing hidden challenges to promote an equitable and supportive educational experience. **Zhaohui Tian** and **Zi Wang** explore the nuances of cultural values underlying teaching practices influenced by both Chinese and British education cultures. They advocate for the adoption of a third culture teaching approach that transcends the boundaries of these two educational systems, offering valuable insights for PGR teachers navigating intercultural communication. **Ya He** brings us into the realm of chemical engineering education at the University of Sheffield through her reflection on the changing landscape of postgraduate teaching shaped by an increasing number of Chinese students enrolling in UK universities. She shares her observations and experiences, shedding light on the evolving dynamics and challenges faced by GTAs and students. Each paper offers a unique perspective on navigating intercultural communication, from uncovering hidden challenges faced by international students to proposing innovative teaching approaches that bridge cultural divides. This theme serves as a reminder to not only acknowledge cultural diversity but also actively engage with it to create inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Theme 3: Adapting Teaching and Learning Practices

Finally, this issue looks at Adapting Teaching and Learning Practices to be responsive to diverse learner needs. Four articles revolve around the challenges and opportunities that educators and postgraduate researchers (PGRs) encounter as they navigate the complexities of pedagogical practices in diverse educational contexts. **Emmanuel Lucas Nwachukwu** from the National Institute for Nigerian Languages explores strategies for addressing unconscious bias, and privilege and promoting representation. His perspective emphasizes the role of educators in creating an inclusive learning environment that can lead to more diverse and representative academic communities. **Giulia Lorenzi** shares her journey of establishing an ongoing dialogue with students to apply co-creative practices in accommodating unique learning needs. Lorenzi's experiences in philosophy seminars serve as an insightful exploration of adapting teaching practices while fostering inclusivity and student engagement. **Deqing Rong** and **Haosen Cui**'s collaborative work highlights the critical role PGRs play in shaping higher education pedagogy. They delve into the challenges PGRs face in preparing, designing, and delivering teaching, with a focus on EDI considerations. Their paper underscores the importance of addressing students' diverse cultures, knowledge, and abilities to ensure equitable educational experiences. **Li Liu**'s reflective study compares teaching small seminar groups of varying sizes, shedding light on the nuances of adapting teaching practices to improve diversity and inclusivity. Her innovative use of technology and anecdotal pedagogy showcases the possibilities of enhancing EDI in different classroom settings.

We finish with an afterword from **Sara Hattersley** that reflects on ongoing EDI issues in PGR teacher recruitment, identities, and professional development, in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability, and socioeconomic status. She explores how EDI can be meaningfully understood in professional learning, by referring to recent institutional case studies. The article concludes by underscoring PGRs' vital contributions to inclusive higher education futures through their teaching practices and leadership.

These articles demonstrate PGRs' commitment to reflecting critically on their pedagogies and intentionally making their classrooms more inclusive. As we traverse the pages of this issue, we invite you to join us in our mission to break down barriers and inspire PGR teachers to continually re-evaluate and adapt their practices to best serve all students. Together, we can advance the cause of EDI in postgraduate pedagogies, ensuring that the promise of inclusive learning environments, harmonious student-teacher relationships, and innovative teaching practices becomes a reality for all.

iv) A growing platform with solid foundations

JPPP has established itself as an outlet/platform for championing GTAs work and the inclusion of work from returning authors (from both the first and second issues) is a testament to this. What began as an unknown dive into postgraduate pedagogies at the University of Warwick, has turned into a well-founded formula that has allowed the journal to celebrate its third birthday. Indeed, this year's format in terms of the submission process to the journal remained largely similar to that of previous years.

Several editors were authors in previous editions and felt that this was the right way forward.

The highlight of bringing this issue to life was the day-long workshop held in August 2023, where nine authors presented their work prior to article submission. Authors had an opportunity not only to gain feedback on their work from peers but also a chance to meet and empower each other. Discussions revolved around a wide range of issues that GTAs face in an ever-changing workplace, such as lower pay than more senior counterparts, as well as ways forward for GTAs, as an instrument of change for the wider higher education sector. On a more fundamental level, we hope that the workshop provided reassurances to authors, some of whom were taking their first steps into the publication sphere.

Considering the topic of this year's journal we also took time to look inward at our practices and asked ourselves how can we do better? How can we be inclusive and diverse? The resulting conversation led to some dramatic changes to the visuality of this edition. Firstly, we decided to use the open resource font 'open dyslexic', a free open source font, this was to ensure that the readability of the journal was open to all and secondly, our major alteration was removal of the two-column layout, this ties into the font choice about making this approachable and readable for all those who may find benefit or interest in our publication. We openly admit that this is only a step in the direction of accessibility to all (we note that some features such as colour filters and font sizing is often now an automatic adjustment by the readers computer and hence not addressed by ourselves) and we shall continue to review these decisions and other for every edition cycle. If you have any ideas to help us achieve that goal, please do get in touch with the editorial team.

Finally, we would like to briefly discuss future directions for the journal beyond this issue. We have been lucky to include works beyond the confines of the University of Warwick in issues two and three. However, we feel now is the right time to go one step further and seek editors and/or reviewers beyond Warwick. We believe this would allow the journal to better serve the wider GTA community. Most importantly though, we would like the journal to continue being an accessible platform for PGRs to share their research and unique stories. We are confident that the next editorial team will not only shape the next issue in the best way they see fit but also build on the community spirit that ignited the JPPP in the first place.

v) Acknowledgements

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Proud to show our new logo!
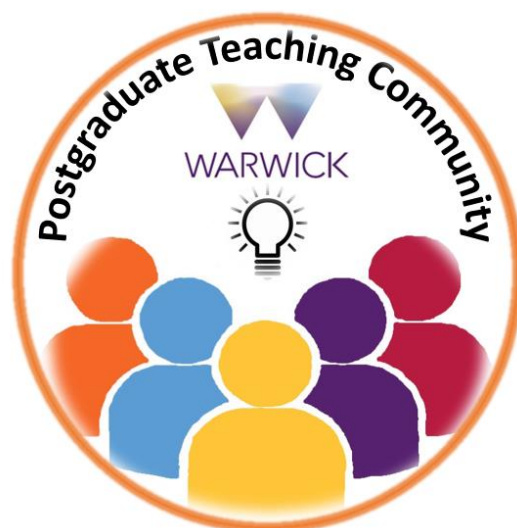
This year we are proud to unveil the new logo for the Warwick post graduate community (WPTC/PTC). The logo was developed by the WPPTC team and incorporates many of the design elements which reflect our values and practices.

The colour pallet – all colours were chosen from the Warwick approved colour pallet, this choice was taken a, because we are a part of Warwick but mainly b, to show how we align ourselves with Warwick's values, aspirations and dedication to support learning.

The border – the circular border is referring to the encompassing attitude and inclusivity in which we strive for, the strong central ring is in difference to the commitment and wholeheartedness we all feel for this, and the inward and outward blur is symbolic of our attempts to grow outward but also to reflect by looking at ourselves and holding ourselves accountable. The orange colour is a bright and warming tone reflecting the welcomeness of the community to others.

The text – The text font and colour were chosen to symbolise the strength and flexibility of the community and our values.

The Warwick logo – This was updated to the latest and most vibrant logo, showing the pride and forward thinking of Warwick university.

The light bulb – Being black and white is a recognition and reminder to the binary thinking of the past, whereas nowadays there is a more open approach to new ideas, and a willingness of trial and error, and learning.

The people figures – These figures represent diversity and inclusiveness, and ideal embodiment of a person, as such they are not perfect figures, they are rough around the edges, imperfect in places. Just like the real people that make up teachers and learners and our unity to strive for better outcomes for all.

Exploring Inclusive Practices in Schools: A Systems Thinking Perspective

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Reymark, is a Master Student in Educational Leadership and Management at the Gokongwei Brothers School of Education and Learning Design of the Ateneo de Manila University. He started his Master in Educational Administration, with the aim of focusing on curriculum for inclusive education. His undergraduate degree motivated him to an interest in pedagogy of educational leadership, and he was awarded a scholarship by ASEAN University Network Disability and Public Policy Network (AUN-DPPnet). Since then, he has taught at various inclusive institutions in the Philippines. He is the current Chairperson of the Ateneo Committee on Graduate Student Concerns representing the five schools of the Ateneo Higher Education. In his spare time, he practices yoga or runs the university grounds for some reflection and relaxation.

Abstract

This reflective paper delves into the examination of inclusive practices in schools through the lens of systems thinking, a conceptual framework. Inclusive education aims to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. However, the intricate nature of educational systems often poses challenges to effective implementation. This paper advocates for the application of systems thinking as a valuable perspective to understand and improve the implementation of inclusive practices in schools. By conceptualizing schools as dynamic systems and considering the interconnectedness of various elements within them, educators and policymakers can gain deeper insights into the factors that influence inclusivity. The paper outlines the fundamental principles of systems thinking, demonstrates its application in the field of inclusive education, and highlights the potential benefits it offers for enhancing inclusive practices.

Introduction

In recent years, inclusive education has emerged as a pivotal force in providing equitable learning opportunities for students with diverse capabilities. The Commonwealth guide (Rieser, 2012) stresses the importance of inclusive education for equal opportunities and rights for individuals with disabilities. It highlights the need for policy frameworks, inclusive school cultures, and collaboration among stakeholders to create an inclusive education system globally, promoting social inclusion and well-being. This reflective account aims to chronicle my personal voyage within the realm of inclusive education, tracing my transition from a conventional educational system to my current role as a graduate student and educator in an inclusive school. Through this narrative, my intention is to highlight the transformative effects of inclusive education, both in shaping my own life and in the lives of the students I have had the privilege to teach.

Early Education: Embarking on a Traditional Paradigm

Embarking on my educational journey, I found myself immersed in the confines of a traditional academic environment, where personalized accommodations tailored to my individual needs were regrettably absent. Galkienė and Monkevičienė (2021) underscore several key conditions vital for successful inclusive education: these include having a strong legal and policy framework based on human rights conventions, providing adequate resources and support services, fostering a positive school culture that values diversity and inclusion, and promoting collaboration among stakeholders. Nevertheless, fueled by an unwavering determination, I fearlessly charted my course through the formidable terrain of primary and secondary education, defying the odds and attaining academic triumphs amidst the scarcity of tailored support. Fueling my pursuit was an undeniable sense of competition, as if the conventional educational system and its unyielding standards harmonized seamlessly with my academic aspirations, driving me ever closer to the pursuit of knowledge and excellence.

Undergraduate Education: A System Lacking Adaptations

Embarking on the uncharted realm of higher education, the journey of my undergraduate studies commenced with a fervent sense of expectation and an insatiable thirst for knowledge. Equipped with an unwavering determination and an indomitable spirit, I fearlessly propelled myself forward, relying solely on my steadfast belief in my abilities. Unfazed by the absence of any special accommodations, I skillfully navigated the intricate corridors of academia, meticulously carving my own path towards triumph.

Through tireless hours of devoted study, late-night cramming sessions, and an unwavering commitment to my coursework, I meticulously laid the groundwork for a profound academic foundation. With each completed assignment and conquered examination, my position among the intellectual elite was further solidified, enhancing my aptitude for critical thinking and expanding my intellectual breadth.

Amidst my personal achievements, I found myself contemplating the prevailing educational landscape that shaped my formative years. Inclusive education, although an invaluable concept, had not yet garnered the prominence and recognition it truly merited. The echoes of traditional conventions reverberated through the esteemed halls of learning, affording minimal space for alternative approaches and personalized assistance.

As my educational journey casts its reflection, it serves as a poignant reminder of the hurdles I encountered, not just as an aspiring scholar, but also as an advocate for inclusivity. It is at the nexus of personal experiences and the wider societal context that the true significance of this narrative emerges. It stands as a testament to the transformative power of education and a clarion call to champion the cause of inclusivity, ensuring that every student embarking on their own voyage of self-discovery and intellectual growth is not left behind.

Graduate School: A Transformative Experience

I found myself utterly enthralled by the boundless possibilities that lay before me. It was during this pivotal phase of my scholarly pursuit that I was introduced to the profound concept of inclusive education. This idea struck a chord deep within me and instigated a profound and transformative shift in my worldview.

In their unyielding commitment and unparalleled dedication, the university's graduate education embarked on a remarkable undertaking to explore the realm of accommodations and support services, even providing scholarships to persons with disabilities. These valiant efforts heralded a groundbreaking paradigm shift, transforming their approach to the cultivation of inclusive learning environments. Thus, the emergence of this extraordinary era signified the commencement of a momentous transformation in my educational journey.

Teaching in an Inclusive Schools: An Eye-Opening Expedition

Immersed in the world of graduate studies, an irresistible pull beckoned me back to the realm of teaching, where the warm and inclusive atmosphere of school environments captivated me. Within this nurturing space, I had the privilege of first hand exposure to the resplendent power of inclusive education. Surrounded by a diverse range of students, each with their own unique abilities and backgrounds, I beheld the profound impact of an all-encompassing educational approach. It became abundantly clear that this framework of inclusivity possessed the extraordinary ability to enrich the lives of these students in truly transformative ways.

Inclusive schools transcend the confines of traditional classrooms, standing as beacons of hope and champions for the enhancement of all learners, regardless of disabilities or challenges. These institutions surpass the boundaries of conventional pedagogy, offering a comprehensive array of activities aimed at promoting social integration, personal growth, and the development of vital skills. It was within this inclusive school environment that

the untapped potential of students was unlocked, as they wholeheartedly engaged in extracurricular pursuits, forged collaborative relationships with their peers, and nurtured an unwavering confidence in their abilities.

The experiences encountered during this transitional phase left me in awe each passing day. Students who had once been overlooked or underestimated rose above their circumstances, embracing their unique talents with unwavering determination. These students not only flourished academically, but also developed a deep sense of self-acceptance and empowerment. The inclusive school environment acted as a catalytic force, igniting a spark within each student and guiding them towards a path of personal growth and fulfilment.

Through the studies and the return to teaching, the immense power of an inclusive educational approach has been witnessed. It is a power that transcends conventional barriers, enriches the lives of students with disabilities, and equips them with the necessary tools to thrive. As a fervent advocate for inclusive education, unwavering commitment remains intact in raising awareness and fostering an environment where every learner has the opportunity to shine and realize their full potential.

Systems Thinking: A Foundation for Inclusive Education

The journey towards inclusive education is marked by the fundamental importance of curriculum adaptation, which seamlessly intertwines with the core principles of inclusive teaching. As a university student, I have personally witnessed the profound impact of making contextually relevant modifications to the curriculum in the Philippines, given its complex socio-cultural fabric. These adaptive strategies undeniably contribute to one's educational development. Notably, the incorporation of systems thinking as a comprehensive and integrative pedagogical framework in selected schools serves as a prime example of this adaptive philosophy.
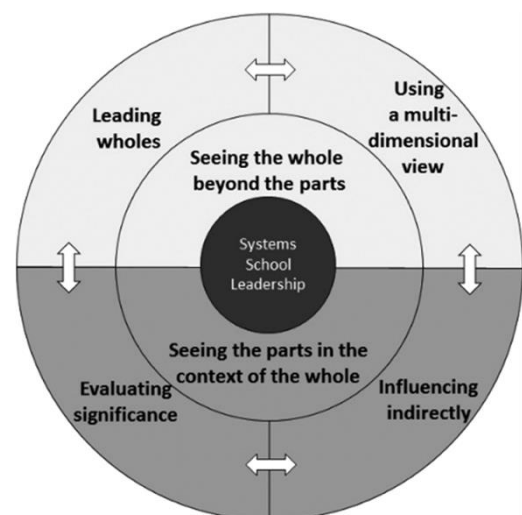
Framework by: Shaked, H., & Schechter, C. (2016)

DeMatthews (2021) emphasizes inclusive leadership's importance, involving engagement with diverse stakeholders and promoting equity. This research adds to inclusive education literature, highlighting leadership and systems thinking in fostering inclusive school environments.

The framework of systems thinking is guiding us on the path towards inclusive education. It encourages individuals to surpass their individual components and instead perceive the interconnectedness of the entirety. By unraveling the intricate tapestry of how these components converge and interact within the broader educational landscape, systems thinking proves to be an influential tool within the realm of inclusive education. Schools are empowered to adroitly shape and embed its principles into their cultural

ethos. The skillful integration of this framework into curricula and instructional methodologies by such schools ensures an educational experience that is not only holistically accommodating but also intellectually enriching in the truest sense.

Key Components of Systems Thinking in Inclusive Education

Recognizing the Wholeness Beyond Individual Parts: Embracing inclusive education necessitates perceiving students as multidimensional beings, transcending the limitations imposed by their disabilities. Systems thinking empowers educators to delve into the unique blend of strengths and limitations that shape each student's learning journey.

Placing Individual Parts within the Broader Context: Providing effective accommodations requires teachers to consider how each student fits into the larger educational tapestry. This perspective allows for tailored support that harmoniously blends with the classroom environment, creating a unified symphony of learning.

Fostering Connections between Multiple Dimensions: Inclusive education thrives on the interconnectedness of students, educators, and support staff. Collaboration among these stakeholders, fostered by systems thinking, creates an environment where all students can surpass their boundaries. This holistic approach forms the foundation of a transformative educational experience.

Promoting Harmony in a Multitude of Dimensions: Students with disabilities aspire to various accomplishments and aspirations. Inclusive education, through the application of systems thinking, a comprehensive approach that encompasses diverse dimensions, enabling students to thrive both academically and personally.

According to Voulvoulis et al. (2022) systems thinking is a paradigm shift that recognizes the interconnectedness and complexity of social, economic, and environmental systems. By adopting a systems thinking perspective, decision-makers can identify root causes of sustainability challenges and design holistic solutions. Systems thinking enables a comprehensive understanding of interventions' implications and identifies potential unintended consequences.

By adopting inclusive education practices and harnessing the power of systems thinking, we can create a learning environment that fosters the growth and empowerment of every student, regardless of their unique abilities and challenges. Through my personal journey and experiences within inclusive education, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact it can have, and I am committed to advocating for its continued advancement.

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STEMinism in the classroom: Reflections from a female GTA

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Sophie Kempston (she/they) is a current PhD candidate at the Institute for Global Sustainable Development at the University of Warwick. Her research focuses on measuring the sustainability impacts of the increase in demand for raw materials as a result of the UK's increasing demand for electric vehicles. This includes forecasting scenarios for EV uptake and battery market shares in the UK, and developing a framework to assess the holistic sustainability impacts of these scenarios. They are also a Graduate Teaching Assistant in the School for Cross-Faculty Studies and are kindly funded by the Leverhulme Trust through the TRANSFORM Doctoral Programme.

Abstract

The need for professionals with a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) background is higher than ever before, and this need will continue to rise in future years, particularly for those with a university degree. Applications for STEM degrees in the UK are at an all-time high; however, women are significantly underrepresented in STEM courses at university, have higher dropout rates from these courses than their male counterparts, and even when they obtain a STEM degree, are less likely to choose a career in this field. These issues have been well-documented in the literature for over a decade, yet these issues still persist in the present day.

This is a reflective piece from my perspective as a female graduate teaching assistant (GTA) teaching in STEM, highlighting the tools I use in the classroom to try and empower particularly female students and equip them for success. It also reflects on my own experiences, both as student and teacher, and discusses how GTAs working in STEM subjects can be pivotal in addressing some of the gender gaps outlined above.

STEM subjects and their representation problem

The need for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills is higher than ever before, and looks set to continue to grow in the coming years. In fact, STEM roles are predicted to grow 10.8% compared to now, versus only 4.9% growth across all other careers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Yet the UK has a skills gap in this area, with 89% of STEM companies reporting difficulties in recruiting staff with necessary skills, leaving an average of 10 unfilled roles per business (IET, 2021).. The reasons for this are varied and multi-faceted, but with women representing just 10% of the workforce (STEM Women, 2022), the gender gap in STEM is seen as a huge problem facing the industry.

Applications for STEM degrees in the UK are at an all-time high (Peacock & Riggers-Piehl, 2023). And yet, women are significantly underrepresented in STEM courses at university. An American study found that while 74% of middle school girls (aged 11-14 years) express interest in STEM subjects, just 0.4% choose computer science as their major in college (Mazenko, 2016). In the UK, the number of girls choosing STEM subjects has risen significantly in recent years, and they are more likely to achieve higher grades in these subjects than their male counterparts (Department for Education, 2021); yet still only 31% of university students in STEM subjects in the UK are women (STEM Women, 2022). This gender disparity is even worse for engineering and technology subjects, with women making up just 21% of these courses (STEM Women, 2023). While the total number of women applying for STEM courses has increased, the number of men applying has also increased, meaning that the percentage of women on university courses of this type has broadly plateaued over the past decade (ibid.).

When women do choose to study a STEM degree at university, they are more likely to drop out before graduation (Herrmann, et al., 2016; Jacobs, et al., 2020; Isphording & Qendrai, 2019). This is despite them having typically higher grades before entering university. One study found that compared to men studying STEM subjects, women are more likely to report a disconnect from their institution and subject (Isphording & Qendrai, 2019). The authors theorise that this could be due to the role of teachers and professors in shaping a student's career decisions; female teachers have been shown to improve women's performance in STEM courses and increase the likelihood of women making it to graduation (Griffith & Main, 2021; Polevoi, 2019). Women are more likely to feel like they belong when there are female role models on display, increasing motivation to pursue studies in their chosen field (Herrmann, et al., 2016; Polevoi, 2019; Griffith & Main, 2021). But with less than 30% of scientific researchers being women (Department for Education, 2021), these role models are often hard to find.

Even when women graduate with degrees in STEM subjects, they are less likely to choose a STEM career. In the UK, women engineers account for just 13% of the workforce, with women IT professionals falling to just 19.5% of the workforce in 2022 (WISE, 2022). This is a worrying trend, especially considering the previously mentioned skills shortage in technology areas. The reasons for women avoiding STEM careers are varied, but many cite a culture of sexism and a so-called "boys club" as being off-

putting to considering tech companies (Khan, 2023). As well as this, gender bias is still widespread – research shows that men's performance is rated higher on average than that of a woman, even in controlled experiments and situations. For example, a 2014 study showed that scientists perceived a job candidate called John to be more competent than a candidate called Jennifer, despite their CVs being identical, and this discrimination can be more profound in face-to-face interviews (Moss-Racusin., 2014). Women can also be discriminated against for requiring maternity leave, and a lack of parental leave can discourage women from entering the STEM workforce to begin with (Correll, et al., 2007).

There are many issues within the STEM education system and industries, and it is important to start addressing these and create more diverse groups working to solve problems in the world today. Research has shown that teams with higher levels of diversity, including teams with women, produce better results and collaboration (Hunt, et al., 2015). Encouraging women to pursue STEM subjects could help to alleviate the UK's technology skills gap in both industry and academia, particularly as the world shifts to require more STEM jobs (UKCES, 2015).

What is STEMinism?

STEMinism is a cross between STEM and feminism, and a STEMinist is defined as "someone who promotes equal opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (known collectively as STEM)" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). The STEMinism movement was created by activists to address the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields across all levels of education, to create a more diverse workforce in STEM areas. In recent years, this has also expanded to pushing for equality for other underrepresented groups, including racial minorities, disabled people, and those who belong to the LGBTQ+ community (Patrizio, 2023).

The STEMinist approach seeks to improve the gender gap in STEM and encourage women and girls to push forward with STEM subjects at university and beyond. The main way STEMinists address this is through the lack of representation, both in textbooks and in classrooms and industry settings. A report by TeachFirst found that no woman's name appears in the national curriculum for GCSE science, and only 50% of British adults can name a female scientist (Sundorph, 2023). The STEMinism movement encourages women already in the field to take up the challenge of teaching where they're needed most, and to talk about the realities of a career in STEM to encourage the next generations (Myers, et al., 2019; Polevoi, 2019; Patrizio, 2023).

There have been critiques of the STEMinist approach, though. Some critics argue that it puts too much emphasis on the individual, without challenging institutional biases that are responsible for many of the barriers women face in STEM subjects, such as being seen as uncapable of comprehending science, or being unable to succeed in the field (Myers, et al., 2019; Popson, 2020). But STEMinism has an important place in allowing young people of all types to see themselves represented, and see the opportunities and careers they might have, without limiting themselves to specific subjects.

Applying STEMinism to university spaces

When I began teaching at university, I was mainly teaching maths and statistics seminars to non-STEM students in their first year of undergraduate studies. It was here where I first really noticed the gender disparity in the classroom. Men were generally the only ones who contributed when I asked questions to the class as a whole. Further, even though there were no real differences in test scores, I found that female students ranked their confidence in the subject much lower than the male students in module surveys.

For me, it was important to try and be a role model in the space to encourage all of my students, as this was something I felt I lacked when completing my own undergraduate degree. It has been shown that having a female role model in the form of a professor can improve STEM retention rates for women studying these subjects (Mazenko, 2016; Sundorph, 2023). I hoped that it would lead to women being more confident to carry on with STEM throughout their degrees, using quantitative methods in future projects and dissertations and further, into the workplace. I implemented small changes that I hoped would make all students feel more included; for example, changing textbook examples to include female names, introducing myself with my pronouns, and encouraging students to bring their own examples of real-world statistics to class to end up with a more diverse set of examples for the class to discuss. Being open to diversity and creating a safe space in the classroom to discuss these issues, even in a subject like statistics where they are little discussed, has been shown to improve retention and grades of students overall, including female students (Peacock & Riggers-Piehl, 2023; Isphording & Qendrai, 2019).

Further, I tried to use a range of tools to get more engagement from female students in my classroom. This included using tools like Kahoot and Mentimeter to ask questions to a class. These online platforms allow students to join on their laptop or smartphone, and they can vote anonymously on the answers to questions, rather than having to put their hand up and answer on their own. Not only does this increase engagement and empower students to contribute without fear of being singled out, it also allows me as the educator to see if there are any glaring problems – if most people are answering a question wrong, it gives me a good indication that we need to spend some more time there (Peacock & Riggers-Piehl, 2023; Ward & Gale, 2016). This method has been proven to be beneficial for students (ibid.), and was well-received in student feedback.

I made sure to offer help in a variety of ways. When I ran office hours in person, I found that only male students would take me up on the offer; however, when I ran them hybrid, I found female students were much more likely to make use of my virtual office hours. I allowed time in class for students to work on problems, and circulated the class to answer questions. I found that both female and international students were much more likely to ask questions in this one-on-one approach compared to when the class was asked as a whole. I also provided online tools and resources for students to access and, where possible, tried to include videos with captions in a variety of languages that were spoken in the classroom. These resources were able to help those

who felt less confident to practice and build their confidence in the safety of their own time, and a few female students would come to me after the module to express how much these helped, particularly resources with Mandarin subtitles. Many of these practices are not exclusive to promoting female participation, but a wider range of minority groups, such as international students, mature students, carers, and others (Ward & Gale, 2016).

Finally, I tried to talk openly and honestly about my experience as a female researcher in a male-dominated field. I attempted to show myself as a competent teacher and researcher, and made sure that students were aware of a diverse range of leaders in fields they were studying. I spoke at induction events for undergraduate and postgraduate students about the career path I took, and discussed the potential options for STEM careers with my class of non-STEM specialists. By equipping students of all disciplines with STEM skills, it can help to alleviate the skills shortages mentioned above, and ensure a more diverse workforce in academia, industry and beyond (Department for Education, 2021; STEM Women, 2023).

Conclusions and personal reflections

As a woman who has gone through a STEM undergraduate degree and master's programme, and is currently researching in a highly scientific field, I can understand how hard it is to excel in a male-dominated field. I struggled to see a future for myself in STEM due to a variety of factors during my undergraduate degree. One of the main ones was the lack of female professors and role models that I saw excelling in my department — in my first year at university, I was taught by more men called Oleg (3) than women (1)! When it came to choosing a career, I ruled out most STEM ones, even though a degree in Mathematics and Statistics would have made me more than capable to take them on, and decided that once I had completed my master's I would move into a policy-related field rather than a scientific one.

However, during my master's, suddenly I was being taught by a variety of professors from across STEM fields. These were powerful professors in the classroom that showed me an untraditional career path, crossing a variety of industries and academic departments. Our course was led by a female engineer who shared openly the highs and lows of working in the field, and we were able to listen to a diverse set of speakers in the classroom, who were honest about the challenges facing the field but hopeful about the future opportunities. I started to see a career path for myself in STEM, and began to believe that it was possible for me to succeed in those fields.

When I started to teach, I wanted to bring this approach into my classroom and open up STEM subjects for women the same way those female professors opened them up for me. As a woman teaching, it can be very discouraging — there are many reports that female professors are ranked worse than their male counterparts even in controlled studies, and consistently get worse module feedback from students, which can affect career progression (MacNell, et al., 2015; Moss-Racusin, et al., 2012; Khazan, et al., 2020). But change is being made. I believe that with more women and diverse populations

teaching students these subjects at all levels, suddenly students can see a pathway for people that look like them in academia, in STEM more broadly, and in any career, that women will start to see themselves in these careers. The change is beginning, with 40% of STEM doctorate degrees being awarded to women (Nature, 2017), but we still have a way to go.

The STEMinist movement allows for female researchers and industry professionals to inspire women and young girls to see what a life in STEM could be like. However, this needs to be coupled with a push for institutional change. Only by combining these two things can we expect real and lasting changes to be made, with the STEM gender gap reducing and even being eliminated entirely). Women are capable of succeeding in STEM, and while we are on the right path, more must be done to encourage them to stay in STEM fields. This push needs to come from everyone involved in the STEM field and not just women; by attending outreach events, highlighting female contributions and challenging gender biases in the classroom, male professors and GTAs can also encourage women to consider a career in STEM. Further, STEMinism needs to also push for more disabled representation, more LGBTQ+ representation, and more minority representation in general, to ensure that STEM can be as diverse and inclusive as possible.

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Designing and evaluating the Supervision workshop series – embracing overlapping and contradictory views

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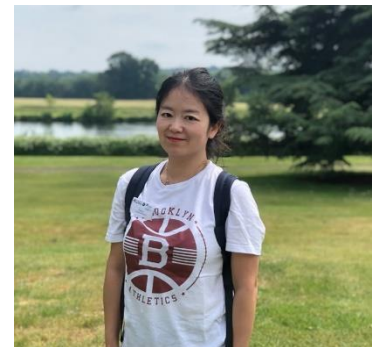
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Abstract

This reflective piece focuses on the workshops of the Superb-Vision Network: a series of student-led workshops to support doctoral students' learning of their supervision experiences. As a continuation account of the writing in the previous volume of this journal, this piece introduces how the development and evaluation of the workshops has been informed by the principles of educational design research (McKenney & Reeves, 2018) throughout. As a co-created work between three authors, who acted as facilitators and participant in the workshop, this writing discusses how the multiple evaluation/reflection cycles break down facilitator-participant barriers and contribute to methodological inclusion in terms of improving the future workshops. This writing recognises various challenges in incorporating various feedback when evaluating the workshops and centralises inclusivity when facilitating innovation, such as how to embrace participants' contradictory views and critical feedback. In the spirit of educational design research, the other goal of this piece is to balance the need to develop a quality 'product' whilst simultaneously formulating broader design principles to contribute to 'scientific understanding', benefiting the development and evaluation of other peer-based learning initiatives.

Introduction

This paper is a continuation of a previous writing published in the 2nd volume of JPPP journal, which explained how the series of student-led workshops to support doctoral students' learning of their supervision experiences was founded through the collaborative effort of two PhD students from different backgrounds (Sinclair & Lu, 2022). This piece focuses on the workshops themselves, how they were designed and delivered, how the participants responded to them, and how the three authors evaluate and reflect on the responses to implement changes in future workshops.

This article introduces educational design research (McKenney & Reeves, 2018) which lends its pragmatic, iterative, inclusive and solution-focused approach to the design and the development of the Superb-Vision workshops. Adapting the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) (Vitae 2010) to suit the need for guiding discussions about doctoral supervision experiences, the workshop series benefit from a consistent application of an interactive version of RDF throughout. At the same time, the workshops have captured the diverse voices of student participants, reflecting the complexity of doctoral students' needs in terms of supervision. This complexity is evident in the frequently overlapping and even contradictory views expressed by the students.

Informed by the educational design research, this article makes an approach in terms of involving two reflection cycles in evaluating the workshops designed. One cycle is describing the development and observation of the activities during the workshops by the two facilitators, with its own logical chain of structure, before addressing the second cycle, which involves the reflective accounts of one participant, as the third author of this article, in terms of his own experiences of attending the workshops. This article attempts to demonstrate how the two cycles should be considered separately and interactively, with the purpose of balancing the need to develop a quality 'product' whilst simultaneously formulating broader design principles to contribute to 'scientific understanding'.

Designing the workshops

"I attended all 5 face-to-face sessions of the Superb-Vision Network (SVN) workshops, just a few months in my PhD journey. Due to COVID-19 restrictions still being in somewhat in place at the time, I missed out on face-to-face induction unlike other PGR[1]s. SVN workshops was the first instance I met other PGRs in a face-to-face setting. Given that it was held in the library, it also helped me get to know the PGR community which in turn allowed me to settle in campus life." — Youn

The design of the workshops involved modelling of the five sessions, unpacking the actual topics (networking, collaboration, problem-solution, self-reflection, and work/life balance) in the context of doctoral supervision, designing sessions and the dissemination While this process is itself pedagogically oriented, aiming for a three-step process

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[1] PGR refers to Postgraduate Graduate Research students as an acronym used in many departments at Warwick University.

(unpacking-designing-dissemination), the two facilitators had considered how the sessions would work in practice, including the unintentional results (Schoenfeld, 2009). The previous piece describes the consistent session plan applied in all the five workshops (Sinclair & Lu). Meanwhile, the post-Covid context was given special consideration, manifested in the intentional choice of starting the workshop series with 'networking' as the first theme.

The main task of the workshops was facilitating conversations around Warwick doctoral students' supervision experience. On the other hand, the workshop design went beyond this pedagogical mission, carefully considering other 'hidden enzymes', including the length/frequency, the venue, the catering, and a departmental mailing list encompassing the contact of 34 Postgraduate Directors from the three Faculties at Warwick. The two facilitators also recorded a short video to introduce the aim and the arrangement of the workshop series, which was promoted on the main webpage of Warwick Doctoral College as part of the SkillsForge[2] sessions.

The workshop design also took into account the diversity of doctoral students at Warwick. We have predicted our participants could come from different levels of study, disciplinary background, as well as the departmental culture Therefore, the design of the activities in the workshop was kept open-ended, displaying examples from different student bodies. As the above paragraph shows, the workshop seemed to have created a community of development; for first years, participating the workshops also complemented their overall induction experience.

Observing participation

"My most vivid memory from the SVN workshops was the situational conversations regarding you and your supervisor. Contemplating on light-hearted (or maybe not) situations such as if your supervisor invites you for dinner as well as more serious (and perhaps more feasible) whereby you have a disagreement with your supervisor on thesis topic was a unique experience to say the least. It really made me reflect on my relationship with each of my supervisors, recognising that whilst each relationship can be so different, it is a two-way relationship. In other words, we are always taught throughout our educational journey, but supervision is slightly different in that supervisors are also learning during supervision. This means that the relationship can be moulded by both student and supervisor. SVN made me realise that it is important for PGRs to make an active effort to do so, to get the best out of the relationship. This has served me well since, but I do wish that SVN sessions was extended to supervisors as well as I believe this 'realisation' needs to be two-way." - Youn

Delivering the workshops was a combined experience of interaction, analysis and retrospection. In spite of the various attendance of each session (from five to over 20 students), the workshop series had witnessed the richness of participants' conversations about their doctoral supervision experience. It was noted that such diversity influenced each session in terms of interactional style, as well as the focal debates, such as the preferred supervision mode (individual or team supervision) and the purposes of doctoral

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[2] Warwick SkillsForge is a platform that advertises professional development courses for doctoral researchers.

education. The dynamics of such influence was too complex to prototype. Even one of the authors has substantial expertise in supervision research per se, familiarising with the main strands of literature, they were amazed by the new interest/issues emerging from students' conversation each time, due to the highly contextual nature of every discussion.

One noticeable observation of the sessions is how participants had contradicted views in terms of supervision. The situational conversations, as Youn reflected in the above account, often elicited most contradictory accounts. For example, one of the designed situations was inviting participants' opinions on a variety of situations with their supervisors, including what if the supervisor invited you for dinner, and what if the supervisor cancelled a supervision session in the last minute. The reactions to these situations were different — positive, negative, no comments, never happened on me. On the other hand, these conversations often ended up reflectively — many participants demonstrated a process of coming to terms with their own situations, which of course did not mean that institutions do not have to avoid the responsibility to tackle the mentioned issues.

The other observation is the frequency of participants overlapping their comments across different sessions. Similar issues around supervision were pointed out repeatedly, from lack of support and isolation. This almost sits at the opposite side of diverse views — students collectively and consistently long for more support from supervisors and departments, keen in a secure community for concrete connection, with the entire PGR stakeholders including supervisors. Regarding these contradictory and overlapping views, the two facilitators strove to adopt a neutral position, 'no advice is to be given', as also advised by staff members in Doctoral College. However, is it realistic not to take any side during the conversations as cool outsiders? Did we manage to do so successfully? Seen from Youn's account above, participants could often think through their 'problems' through communicating with others — they were not really seeking 'advice' but 'understanding' in many cases.

Evaluating and reflecting

"Whilst I enjoyed most SVN sessions, I felt that at times some of the conversations were too theoretical and/or abstract, which was hard to follow as a first year PhD student. An example of this was the presentation of the 'problem continuum' by Welsh whereby a park and wilderness metaphor was used to describe issues in a PhD journey. I appreciate the intention in doing so, but the constant attempt to work within a framework to link theory and practice was perhaps too academic and did not match the informal nature of the workshop. However, at other times this was more fitting, including the use of the SWOT analysis on your supervisory relationship. This allowed for a quick reflection and gave a sense of where you are at within your relationship."
- Youn

Evaluating the workshops is not only for the purpose of producing a quality 'product', but also formulating broader design principles to 'advance scientific understanding through

iterative testing and refinement during the development of practical applications' (McKenney & Reeves, 2018:9). The term evaluation in this piece is broadly and informally approached, referring to any conscious attempt to collect reflective insights that could inform the design of future workshops. On the 'scientific' side, it is hoped that this case study will provide other doctoral students the inspiration and tools to develop their own practice in a reflective and value-based way, exerting 'an external scientific community of the results and their possible utility for others' (McKenney & Reeves, 2018:161).

As part of the workshop design, each session intentionally sought participants' feedback at the end through a QR code directing to a short questionnaire. However, this purposeful approach did not generate enough empirical evidence to inform the understanding of participants' experience. Then the two facilitators reflected on their own observation and notes kept during the workshop in a retrospective way, including the main activities and outputs generated by the participants. After that, individual participants were approached for their comments, as is shown in the above accounts.

According to McKenney and Reeves (2018), 'reflection is benefitted most when approached through a combination of systematic and organic techniques' (p.86). One important consideration is how the multiple evaluation cycles should be interpreted so that they can be of value to improve the future workshops. For example, in the above account, when a critical comment was received about the obscurity of some terms used in the workshops, such as 'problem continuum', or a preference of the SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat) analysis, how these feedback should be addressed? Likewise, when the facilitators observed the repetitive and contradictory views during the sessions, how these views could be incorporated to enhance participants' experience in the future workshops? Seen from the various feedback received, the anonymous questionnaire, the on-site observation, and the individuals' critical accounts, methodological inclusiveness comes to centre of attention, sometimes comprising a systematic and rigid model. In addition, various barriers preventing the evaluation cycles need to be recognised, with developer-participant barrier the most salient, due to the two parties' different 'positions, perspectives and identities' (Cook-Sather, 2015, p.2), including different interests, purposes, and time constraints. For example, participants may seek short-term, on-site 'diagnosis, whereas the developers may be more interested in the long-term agenda to facilitate change. The power dynamics in the sessions also need to be recognised.

This piece demonstrates an effort in addressing the complexity of multiple evaluation cycles by breaking the facilitator/participant barrier. As a participant, Youn's reflective and critical accounts exist independently of the workshop development which would be taken into consideration in the future workshop design. Involving multiple actors in the evaluation cycle contributes to the methodological inclusion. On the other hand, the two facilitators' original workshop design, anticipation of the potential results/challenges, observation during the sessions, have their separate space. For example, both facilitators realised that eliciting participants' contradictory views through purposeful activities during the sessions has its own function. The workshops provided a space exposing doctoral students to different views, inviting them to stand back from their own supervision

experience behind the doors and connect with each other through exploring subjects that matter.

Implementation

 "*The most important aspect of SVN to me was the fact that it brought together PGRs from different backgrounds and disciplines, in an informal setting which allowed them to converse freely. In that aspect, I found it very similar to courses such as APP PGR[3], which on top of having an agenda, provides a space for PGRs to meet and converse. This allows participants to not only benefit from the session content but an opportunity to build their network and foster a 'community' feeling. All in all, SVN was a brilliant series of workshops and I wish that it was extended beyond those 5 sessions as the sense of a strong community was just starting to forge.*" - Youn

There was no internal agenda between the three authors when they reached the same conclusion about how the exposure to a wider doctoral community could benefit the participants immensely. Even though actual implementation has not happened until next time the relevant parties sit together to plan for the sessions. This piece has served the purpose to think through multiple evaluation cycles in the spirit of educational design research. In addition, this joint effort made by both the facilitators and the participants has reflected on the workshop experience, anticipated possible changes and next steps. Besides the major takeaway which is embracing the diversity of participants' views, the following implementations have been drawn:

- Sticking to a prepared consistent session plan with flexibility in terms of length/order of activities;
- Observing the sessions attentively and keeping notes actively after obtaining consent from the participants;
- Highlighting the peer-based, cross-disciplinary, informal nature of the session whilst promoting the development purpose;
- Inviting different stakeholders in designing, leading and evaluating the sessions.

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[3] APP PGR refers to the Academic and Professional Pathway for Post-Graduate Researchers which is a course offered to PGRs at the University of Warwick that help develop and build confidence in their teaching. Successful completion of the course leads to participants being awarded the Associate Fellowship by the Higher Education Academy.

Conclusion

This reflective piece brings together the three authors as facilitators and participant in the Superb-Vision workshop series and demonstrates the significance of inclusivity facilitating innovation in terms of session design and evaluation. Informed by the spirit of design-based educational research, this piece shows the value of *multiple evaluation cycles* conducted by different actors involved in the same situation and advances a combination of systematic and organic approaches in term of collecting feedback. As a small-scale programme, the workshop series do not aspire to achieve national wide impact, but we do aspire to develop some effective interventions that could assist the development and wellbeing of doctoral students and could be implemented in some departments at Warwick. In addition, the other goal of this piece is to provide some basic principles through this case study to help other students who would like to design and develop similar peer-based learning initiatives. We hope both goals could be achieved through this writing in the foreseeable future.

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From Learning to Teaching: Incorporating Cultural Familiarity to Enhance GTA Support for International Students' Learning

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Abstract

The Inclusive Education Model (IEM) is stated as one of the priorities of the Education Strategy at the University of Warwick, and is aimed at enhancing students' learning experience. Although significant progress has been made in the development of inclusion in education, there are still challenges to overcome to ensure that all students, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, abilities, or circumstances, have equitable access to quality education and are fully included in the learning environment.

To better support inclusive education, the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) scheme at Warwick was implemented with the aim of providing various types of teaching support to postgraduate taught (PGT) students. While carrying out our GTA jobs, the authors noticed that the international postgraduate taught (PGT) students in Education Studies were experiencing some challenges during their studies, often caused by the mismatch/incompatibility between students' previous education experiences in their home countries and the pedagogical approaches adopted in the UK context. Arguably, these challenges could lead to various barriers that might hinder the students from the current educational environment.

Through this critical reflection, we aim to raise awareness of hidden/invisible challenges that may have been overlooked. As international students are among those who may not feel fully included when pursuing studies in a host country, our objective is to raise awareness of hidden or invisible challenges that might have been overlooked through critical reflection. Our intention is to contribute to establishing an equitable and supportive educational experience for international students with diverse needs and backgrounds. We intend to contribute to the establishment of an equitable and supportive educational experience for international students with diverse needs and backgrounds.

Introduction

The Inclusive Education Model (IEM) is a strategy that Warwick prioritises to provide funding and support aimed at helping students engage with diverse communities. The Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) is a widely used teaching scheme in universities that aims to engage postgraduate students by providing various types of teaching and learning support. The Inclusive Education Model (IEM) is a strategy that Warwick prioritises to provide funding and support aimed at helping students engage with diverse communities. With the growing momentum of IEM, the Department of Education Studies (DES) is also strengthening its GTA scheme through the Enhancement Tutor Scheme (ETS) by allocating extra support hours for students who need additional assistance for their academic progress. These students include those with failing assignments and those who need to improve their grades. In this piece, the two authors reflect on their GTA roles as ETS Enhancement Tutor and as MA Dissertation Supervisor, focusing on how their own experience as international students deepens their understanding of the specific needs of the international Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students and improve their pedagogical approaches accordingly.

This reflective piece first reviews some literature on how GTAs supervise international PGT students in UK institutions, followed by section 3 explaining how this piece is informed by cultural learning theories and the concept of hidden curriculum. Section 4 illustrates the identified challenges shared by all some international students and some specific challenges related to different GTA responsibilities. This reflective piece also makes some practical recommendations for addressing the identified challenges in section 5.

GTA supervising international PGT students

Overview of the GTA role

There exist previous studies investigating the role of GTAs in UK Higher Education (HE) institutions within the entire teaching and learning system (Park, 2002; Muzaka, 2009; Cho, 2011). These studies explore the responsibilities, rights, work patterns and various concerns about GTAs through empirical case studies conducted in different UK universities. These studies identify the 'deficiency' narrative around GTAs in the department, as non-experts who have to routinely deal with the 'donkey' job (Park, 2002). On the other hand, these studies provide implications for better supporting the development of GTAs through well-planned programmes, such as shifting away from deficiency concerns and moving towards growth concerns through promoting GTA efficacy and recognizing GTAs' value of teaching practices (Muzaka, 2009). This reflective piece builds upon the existing literature, focusing on what international GTAs could offer in terms of effectively supporting international PGT students' learning experiences and outcomes.

Challenges of International Students

International students' challenges in UK institutions have been well documented in previous studies, mainly represented in following the academic norm that they are less familiar with, such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF). This situation can be attributed to factors such as a lack of prior academic writing training in their educational background and the process of adapting to the UK education system. As an important aspect of learning, academic writing poses various difficulties for international students, impacting students' achievement in HE (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010; Cennetkuşu, 2017; Singh, 2019). For example, a fundamental aspect of academic writing involves students' capacity to locate pertinent references and assess them, and the ability to integrate diverse viewpoints to cultivate their unique perspective (Al Fadda, 2012). However, these criteria do not work equally across different student populations. Referencing and citations are reported in the list of the challenges commonly encountered in academic writing (Al Badi, 2015). The consequences of failing to cite sources properly can be severe, it could lead to suspicion of plagiarism beyond assignment failure.

Another challenge arises from assessment criteria poses another challenge, which requires students to adopt a specific writing style for their learning process to be acknowledged (Northedge, 2003; Bloxham & West, 2007). For international students, unfamiliar academic language, vague terminology, or expressions open to interpretation may cause misinterpretation or incomplete comprehension of the expectations of the assessment criteria. The authors notice that linguistic, educational, and cultural differences all contribute to the challenge of adapting to a new academic community for international students.

The context

In the DES at the University of Warwick, ETS, a new GTA scheme, provides additional academic support and guidance to individual students through one-on-one meetings to help them with their further studies. A particular challenge, for many PGT students, is tackling a resubmission for a failed assignment whilst trying to complete their dissertation. Noticeably, international PGTs require additional learning support due to their underperformance in both module assignments and dissertation writing. Arguably, GTAs offer students more specific help in terms of flexibility, less formal approach and more recent postgraduate experience (Muzaka, 2009). These are all particularly valuable to international students.

Cultural learning theory and hidden curriculum

Our reflection on the challenges international students encounter through our tutoring process is informed by two teaching/learning theories in HE: culture learning theory and hidden curriculum.

Cultural learning theory, as a concept advanced by Pacheco (2020)and often referred to as 'cultural-based immersive experiences', includes sociocultural adaptation and psychological adjustment. This theory has been found to have a positive effect on promoting beneficial personal growth and identity development. Sociocultural adaptation pertains to the competence to blend in a different cultural environment, and effectively manage daily tasks. Psychological adjustment encompasses the emotional and psychological well-being during the process of transitioning across cultures (Wilson et al., 2013).

The hidden curriculum can be described as 'informal tacit learning through socialization' (Elliot et al., 2016, p.738). They argue that the hidden curriculum serves as a valuable resource not just for international students to manage and survive in academia, but even more significantly, to excel in it. As a concept, hidden curriculum complements the formal curriculum and informal curriculum, serving as 'the various unintended, implicit and hidden messages sent to students—messages we may not be even aware we are sending' (Leask, 2015, p.9). Both theories pertain to the discussion of international student experience as they recognize how the 'third space' (Elliot et al., 2016) and globalization shape learners' experiences.

It is noticed that the challenges shared by international students, such as language barriers, task and criteria comprehension, academic integrity, critical thinking skills, and analytical thinking skills, could be better understood through culture learning theory. Other challenges are more closely tied to the concept of the hidden curriculum, including effective communication, time management, institutional awareness, and independent learning.

Reflections on identified challenges

Shared challenges

The two authors found that the challenges of international students described in the literature are reflected to varying degrees while tutoring and supervising their students.

Maintaining academic integrity is a shared difficulty for international students. The challenge is multifaceted and can be attributed to a lack of understanding of the assessment criteria and a lack of appropriate literature citations to support ideas. International students may face challenges with unfamiliar academic language, vague terminology, and open-to-interpretation expressions, which can result in misinterpretation and incomplete comprehension of assessment criteria. Meanwhile, some international students may inadvertently fail to attribute credit to the original authors. Referencing and citations are reported in the list of the challenges that international students commonly encounter in academic writing (Al Badi, 2015). The reason for this could be their continued adherence to the citation habits acquired during their undergraduate studies in their home country, without awareness of the variations in citation norms and practices in the host country. However, the consequences of failing to cite sources

properly can be severe, it could lead to suspicion of plagiarism and possible assignment failure.

Lack of critical thinking is another shared challenge affecting international students' academic performance. The absence of critical thinking is a primary cause of their grade deductions while their assignments/dissertations are evaluated. Many international students come from countries whose education system is exam-oriented. In such systems, achieving good exam scores often requires strong memorization of the knowledge they have learned, and they are expected to provide standardized answers rather than demonstrating their critical thinking abilities. Language barriers may also add challenges to students' critical analysis, as they may not be able to express their thinking as coherently as they would in their mother language.

The two authors reflect on how their own experiences of being international students make them able to identify with the challenges mentioned above, as they have experienced or are still experiencing similar challenges themselves. The following section illustrates how the two authors with different responsibilities incorporate their own experiences as international students to better comprehend the reasons behind the challenges encountered by international students they have tutored.

Specific challenges for different tasks

ETS tutoring

'Don't take it for granted that they should know.'

--Hong Song

The ETS students who need to resubmit assignments are those who have failed their first submission. They indicated that it was difficult to fully understand the expectations for each grade level, and they did not understand how to properly cite the literature or demonstrate a deeper understanding through synthesizing and critically analyzing existing literature. Some students were even unaware that they could find relevant information, such as citation formats available on the library website. It is also found that international students might hesitate to express uncertainty or seek clarification from their professors and lecturers regarding the criteria due to various reasons from motivation to institutional awareness.

ETS tutoring is necessary in terms of providing students with individualized support in terms of signposting them to relevant resources. Considering the effort the department has put in through the welcome week and through the introductory module sessions, this information could be taken for granted that students know what they are and how to make use of them. ETS tutors could help students specifically in terms of reminding them of required tasks and available resources, including key dates for submission and who they can turn to seek help from. From our own experience, some international

students might hesitate to express uncertainty or seek clarification from their professors and lecturers regarding the criteria due to various reasons, ranging from motivation and different cultural expectations to institutional awareness. As a result, students might not get the help in time and effectively.

Dissertation supervision

'You have to be an efficient multitasker keeping an eye on your calendar.'

--Bing Lu

Supervising MA dissertations is a comprehensive task which requires developing a professional/supportive supervisory relationship, mediating between the students and the department, as well as understanding the projects themselves and providing advice and guidance. We have noticed that international students, including the various challenges described in 4.1, often struggle with time management and independent learning.

As for time management, international MA students find it difficult to coordinate various deadlines regarding their thesis and other assignments in a relatively short period of time. As have been mentioned in 4.2.1, some students even have to manage to resubmit the failed module assignment within the last few months in the third academic term, described by some students as 'a rollercoaster experience'. For international students, due to their lack of various 'literacies' in a new country, including digital and social, reasonably managing their time to accomplish required tasks can be daunting. Procrastination is common, but the extra challenges involved in doing degrees in a new country add extra tasks for students, for which they might not have developed strategies yet.

The other observation is issues around independent learning, by which we mean how much PGT students are expected to manage some learning on their own with the guidance of academic staff. In other words, students might be less familiar with concepts such as self-directed learning, self-efficacy in learning, and problem-based learning, which have been discussed immensely in the UK HE. A lack of understanding of the host countries' educational approaches could affect international students' independent learning development.

Practical recommendations

As international GTAs, we have all experienced, through our won Master's studies, the challenges that our international tutees encounter while studying in unfamiliar cultural environments, alongside the ensuing anxiety. This shared experience shapes our understanding of the specific needs of international PGTs and motivates us to explore more practical solutions to help international students more effectively. In addition to helping students in the sociocultural adaptation aspect, the two authors also recognize

the importance of assisting them in the psychological adjustment aspect through their different roles.

Outputs from EST tutor

As enhancement tutors, we accompany international students to go through their resubmission journey. Approachability, accessibility, trustworthiness, humility, and genuine concern, are the traits listed as characteristics of students' favorable tutors (Li, et al., 2018). To build a good rapport with the students, we assure the students that they are not alone and that they can seek help whenever needed from the very first meeting. We feel that pastoral care is a significant aspect of delivering support to international students, which is expected to make them feel more comfortable and assured when asking questions and seeking assistance. As international GTAs, we can offer more specific help to assist international students to blend in the new cultural environment by sharing our own experiences. It is also evidenced by my own students' improvement throughout our work together.

Outputs from dissertation supervisor

As discussed in 4.2.2, we recommend that improving international PGT students' time management skills and independent learning awareness are of significant concern. To address the two interrelated areas, we need to figure out the mechanisms involved in students' overseas learning, especially for a relatively short program, such as the 10-month MA study. We feel that a reflection on our own PGT experience, as a recent experience, could help us to forge a nuanced understanding of the development of time management strategies for PGT students per se. In terms of independent learning, the department could offer additional sessions focusing on academic writing to improve students' pedagogical literacy skills. Arguably, improving these two aspects immensely could help international students manage their learning in other relevant areas, such as understanding task specifications, supervisory relationships and learning from feedback.

Conclusion

With our unique position as both tutors and researcher students, the international GTA job allows us to play an important role in fostering inclusive education for international students in various ways. We facilitate to generate a conversation that promotes cross-cultural understanding and empathise with the academic difficulties encountered by students, which helps to bridge potential communication gaps. Finally, we recognize our relatively limited experience of working with mainly Chinese PGT students, the experience may not be generalized to the wider international PGT students. This reflective piece is to serve as a resource informing our future practices. Additionally, we hope that the insights gained here can potentially help other GTAs in developing effective mechanisms for working with international students who do not share previous educational training in the UK HE system.

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Creating a third cultural space: What role does intercultural communication play in PGR teaching?

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Abstract

As an internationalised space, the University of Warwick has over 9500 international students and more than 40% international academic staff. Thus, intercultural encounters are ubiquitous on campus, including teaching spaces. Among all the international student groups, the Chinese student community emerges as one of the largest at Warwick. This offers a unique teaching experience for those who are involved in teaching this group at Warwick. Therefore, in this reflective piece, we draw on our own cultural experiences as Chinese PGRs teaching Chinese PGTs in a UK-based university, with the aim to reflect on the different cultural values underlying our teaching practices influenced by both Chinese and British education cultures. We also reflect on Chinese students' learning behaviours based on our observations and how those are formed and negotiated by us as Chinese teachers/students in a multicultural communication space at Warwick. We propose the adoption of the concept of third culture teaching, a teaching practice that goes beyond either Chinese education culture or British education culture. In particular, we use two examples to discuss the relevance of intercultural considerations in PGRs' teaching practices, one targeting the perceptions of student-teacher relationships in supervision and the other on the concept of classroom engagement. With this discussion, we make suggestions for the intercultural-related areas for PGRs to ponder upon and prepare for better teaching practices encompassing a wide range of learning needs.

Introduction

The topic of interactions between people from different cultures, or intercultural communication, has been gaining attention in discussions of the UK Higher Education system. Specifically, in the teaching space, this discussion mainly focuses on students' intercultural learning in language education and their intercultural communication in group work. Not much importance has been attached to teacher-student intercultural encounters. As authors, both of us have had the experience of studying in the UK as international students. Moreover, we have been delivering teaching to international Postgraduate Taught students (PGTs) as international Postgraduate Research students (PGRs) on Graduate Teaching Assistant contracts (GTA, and thus we have often been referred to as the GTAs). Therefore, we are conscious of the influence of culture on teacher-student engagement. As intercultural communication has always been one of our reflection topics in the authors' teaching practice, in this reflective piece, we want to present some of our thoughts on teacher-student interaction.

Considering the context of Warwick University, a reflection on the role of culture in our teaching practices is very much needed. The University of Warwick has over 9,500 international students (University of Warwick, 2023) and more than 40% international academic staff (University of Warwick, 2021), making it a teaching space where a great number of intercultural encounters occur. As a result, internationalisation strategy has always been one of the four key pillars of Warwick University's educational strategy (University of Warwick, 2023). By reflecting more on our cultural perspective in teaching practices, we hope to contribute to a more internationalised and inclusive environment for everyone at the university.

In the rest of this reflective writing, we will ponder on student-teacher relationships and classroom engagement. It is worth mentioning that, while our reflection is based on personal examples, in order to make our students unidentifiable for ethical considerations, we decide not to specify which reflection is based on whose experience and have minimised details of the story. Then, we will conclude with some suggestions for PGR teachers teaching in intercultural settings.

We are aware that some of our discussions regarding cultural influences may appear essentialist to some readers. We understand that culture does not have a deterministic influence on people. However, we have to admit that as "a complex set of meaning systems", culture has its influence on people's behaviour and interpretations of the world and its influence is "shared to varying degrees" by its members (Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021, p. 45). Therefore, in our reflections, we use those generalised ideas to discuss cultural tendencies.

Reflection 1: Student-teacher relationship

Let us start our reflection on the student-teacher relationship with a story from one of us4:

> When I was teaching as a GTA, one of my teaching responsibilities was to supervise PGT dissertation writing. During the process of dissertation supervision, a PGT supervisee did not engage with me at all. Later, I was informed that the student applied for an extension due to mental health issues. I was a bit disappointed that the student did not tell me about their struggle. In my later communication with the student, I got to know that they did not even tell their family, because they would not want them to worry.

In the story, we, as supervisors, had the disappointment because we hold the belief that teachers are friends to students and thus, students should feel free to share anything with us. Even though we would never be able to find out what was behind the student's consideration, based on our communication, we think that there are a few possible explanations for the student's non-engagement and non-disclosure:

1. It could be because mental health is considered a stigmatised topic by the student and thus, they did not want to discuss it with their supervisor. They might have concerns that revealing their mental health issue would lead their supervisor to doubt their academic ability and mark them less favourably.
2. It could also be because they saw their supervisor as a parental figure. As they would not like to inform their family, they did not want to share their life challenges with their supervisor.

Either way, the student was likely to see the student-teacher relationship differently from the supervisor. This could be interpreted with reference to the information (even though limited) we received from the students together with the Chinese cultural beliefs. Under the influence of the Confucian tradition, respect for teachers is a core learning virtue in China (Li, 2012). There is much similarity between the teacher-student relationship and parent-child relationship, evidenced by an old Chinese saying that goes, "Once a teacher, always a parent". Teachers and parents are authoritative figures in the student's life and should be treated with respect. Therefore, worrying those authority figures with personal challenges can be considered inappropriate.

However, our experience in the UK education culture and the teaching practice have impacted our expectations. As can be seen from the above example, we were expecting the students to be open to us about mental health struggles. Generally, the pedagogy in the UK is more learner-centred than that in China, and students are encouraged to be

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4 Please note that this is a rather brief version of the story. The detailed interactions between the supervisor and supervisee cannot be shared for ethical reasons.

challengers (Zhang, 2021). Therefore, it is rather common for students to bring up issues or challenge our current supervision focus to take mental health into consideration. Both the supervisor and the student are Chinese nationals in the UK, and we should have access to the Chinese and UK cultural understandings of the role of supervisor and supervisees and the associated rights and obligations. However, there were still some communication challenges between us Chinese nationals in the UK, which shows that we adopted those two cultural perspectives to different degrees.

It should also be noted that the supervisor and the student in the story have different lived academic experiences as PGR students and as PGT students respectively. As a PGR teacher, the supervisor has already had the experience of working closely with a supervisor at Warwick, while the PGT student was new to the supervision experience in this institution. Those experiences are part of the university educational culture that the supervisor carries and inevitably influence their expectations and assumptions about what their students know about supervision practices. However, at that point, it is not clear whether the student carried a similar or different university study culture. The supervisor may have brought into the supervision the assumption that the student would know about supervision practices as much as they do and thus missed the opportunity to provide more timely support and interventions.

To conclude, in this example, we see that from the outside, even though the supervisor and the student share cultural similarities, there are still differences in their understandings of the appropriate ways to manage mental health and supervision. If we imagine the two approaches to the situation under discussion as the two ends of a continuum, then the supervisor and the student were in different places of the continuum. The difference in their perceptions of the student-teacher relationship possibly led to the perceived lack of communication regarding mental health concerns by the supervisor.

Reflection 2: Concept of classroom engagement

The second example we want to share is related to the widespread complaints of the lack of student engagement among Chinese PGTs in lectures and seminars. We have observed from our own teaching experiences and heard from other PGR teachers that Chinese international students are not active in classroom engagement (e.g., responding to questions) and are prone to stay quiet. Therefore, we would like to explore the cultural perspectives behind such a phenomenon. As cultural insiders ourselves, we are aware of our traditional educational system where students are taught to listen quietly to the teachers and only speak up when being called upon so as not to disturb teaching (Li, 2012). At the same time, we are also familiar with the expected frequent classroom engagement in the UK. Therefore, we had conversations with students after the seminars to explore the reasons and possible solutions and whether we needed to adapt our practices.

Interestingly, after speaking to students about such matters, we discovered several reasons behind the silence:

1. Confusion in understanding the task caused by language issues,
2. Lack of confidence in their own oral English and concern of their English being judged by course mates afterwards of their oral English skills
3. Worries of standing out. For example, speaking up may set a student apart from their peers, which will later on make them unfavourable outside the classroom.
4. Silence is the result of the overall silence. Those who are able to understand the task and the question and have the ability to speak up, start to have second thoughts of whether they haven't thought through because no one would answer even a seemingly simple question.

Interestingly, especially in the case of not understanding the task, very few students would take the courage to ask questions to clarify the task, even if we would ask several times whether they understood the task or not. They would still perform the task in confusion and clarify with other coursemates using the time allocated to the task itself.

By reflecting upon the reasons, we realised that different from our expectations as tutors, students display a broader consideration over their learning experiences. To illustrate, the above reasons (particularly 2 and 3) exhibit students' concerns after and outside the teaching space. They influence students' social relationships and group work experiences, and coursemates' support and knowledge exchanges. These learning experiences are often neglected by us as tutors. What we focus on tends to be whether we achieve our learning objectives or not, which is limited to the classroom space. We expect the students to show full comprehension of the knowledge we teach, and classroom engagement is a way to show such understanding. Therefore, from the teaching point of view, there is nothing wrong with the encouragement of classroom engagement. However, from the student's perspective, this seems, to a certain extent, to contradict their interests beyond the classroom. The cause of this phenomenon is also related to the overall structure of GTA teaching in that we are not responsible for the full learning experience of our students but for a confined period. Sometimes we tend to forget that students' learning does not stop after one lecture or seminar. Consequently, silence in one session does not always indicate poor learning. There can be more for us to understand in the broader learning context.

There are also culturally related interpretations for us to reflect on in these perspectives. From reasons 1-2, we can observe the overly quoted issue of language proficiency among Chinese international students. As cultural insiders and cultural researchers, we are aware that language is never about the simple understanding of words and sentences. As teachers, "every time we use language, we perform a cultural act" (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999, p.113). The meaning we convey through language and the logical structure are all culturally ladened. Thus, the success of our teacher communication lies in the understanding of culturally situated meanings, and we need to be aware that this is often hard for

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international students. In addressing the issue of cultural communication, the students can gain valuable experiences. In the meantime, we as teachers need to constantly reflect on our design of the content and the language we use and how we can create a gradual process for our students' learning curve to grow. Reasons 2 and 4 also present students' cultural understanding of learning in that it reflects their understanding of the tolerance of imperfections or mistakes in the classrooms. It can be seen that for Chinese international students, the tolerance is relatively low, whereas in other cultures it might be more acceptable to make mistakes.

Reflection and Conclusion

In both our examples, we have observed different understandings with regard to learning caused by either original cultural background or university-level experience. This is deemed inevitable as there are always two expectations: the UK and the Chinese perspectives on learning and education. The UK perspective is rooted in our immediate environment and the Chinese perspective is what our students and us carry. It is unrealistic to ask students to adapt fully to the UK standards and at the same time insensitive in the spirit of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Moreover, those cultural perspectives can never be static, and it is challenging to know the extent to which our students have adopted certain cultural perspectives.

What is more interesting is that the examples also seem to indicate that the space we are teaching is an unsafe space for students. Students have reservations about their mental health struggles and their responses to the classroom questions. Of course, the issue is not solely on the teachers. As we argue, there are the cultural factors behind each example. Therefore, it relies on us to explore the options of reconciliation, and under this context, we propose the idea of third culture teaching.

The concept of a third space is not new, but it is still growing in great popularity (Bhabha, 1994; Gutiẹrrez, 2008). It is often used in areas of immigration and national identity (Wilson, 2000) and recently in English language teaching that intends to take culture into pedagogical consideration (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999). As we argued before, whenever we teach English, either as first-language users or second-language users, we will always engage with culture to a certain extent. For those who use English as their second language, the cultural situation will be even more complicated, as they are engaging two cultures: that of their mother tongue and that of their working language (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999). This engagement of culture applies to both the teachers and the students. In other words, both us and the students are in between cultures. We are neither in 100% UK culture (due to our background), nor in 100% Chinese culture (due to the language we are engaging with). Automatically, we're in a third space.

Because of this, when approaching students, we need to let go of the cultural assumptions we carry and create a third culture space between students and us. From the examples,

we can see that we as PGR teachers have had our perspectives based on our background and thus have expectations around students' behaviours in formal teaching. We have the tendency to miss out on the exploration of the variety of possibilities because our cultural background has taught us about right/wrong behaviour. However, forming a constructive mindset for the building of a third culture will make us open to more students' voices and alternative worldviews and challenge our long-held beliefs (Ikpeze, 2015).

In light of the above discussion, we make the following recommendations:

1. Be aware of the student's cultural and our own cultural and educational backgrounds and reflect on how these experiences might have influenced our assumptions and expectations.
2. Question our understanding of educational procedures and practices, rights and obligations of different roles, learning and teaching experiences etc., and whether these are the same as those of our students.
3. Question the way we use language, design teaching content, make references etc. Question if any of the above usages are culturally specific and if our students have the same culturally specific understanding. Be aware that culture is everywhere, sometimes even rooted in our unique personal experiences.
4. Clarify our expectations and engage in open discussions with students in a way that we let down our rooted cultural assumptions and build new third cultures with students.

In conclusion, this reflection work draws attention to a neglected aspect of teaching-student engagement. It uses two authentic examples to demonstrate how culture can complicate the teaching environment. Through the recommendations provided, this work contributes to the development of PGR teachers for inclusive teaching practices.

Acknowledgements

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Unveiling the Crossroads: Reflections on Teaching Chinese Master's Students in Chemical Engineering Labs

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I am a PhD student in Engineering Education from Sheffield. My PhD research is focused on investigating overseas students' learning experience in engineering master programmes at UK universities. Before joining the Department of Chemical and Biological Engineering at the University of Sheffield, I worked as an educational consultant in China. Alongside research, I worked as a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) in clean energy, gas boiler and thermodynamics labs in the Faculty of Engineering. Also, I joined a research group of inclusive research culture in the Department of Electronic and Electric Engineering in Sheffield.

Abstract

In recent years, the number of Chinese students enrolled in one-year postgraduate taught (PGT) programmes in UK universities has continued to increase, making graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) need to teach in a more international and diverse classroom environment. Such changes have impacted students' learning expectations and the GTAs' teaching experiences. Therefore, this reflection paper is based on my personal experience as a GTA to discuss the current situations and problems of teaching PGT students in engineering and provides insights for PGR teachers involved in teaching based on classroom observations and teaching reflection.

Keywords: Chinese students; postgraduate taught programmes; graduate teaching assistants; Higher education.

Chinese students at UK universities

Chinese students are the largest cohort of overseas students in the UK, especially those enrolled in one-year postgraduate taught (PGT) programmes (Universities UK, 2022). They have brought significant socio-economic benefits and cultural development to British local communities (Hillman, 2021). However, due to the differences in education and cultural backgrounds between China and Western countries, they will face difficulties in adapting to the Western educational environment and mode (Wu and Hammond, 2011). The academic performance, learning experience and cognitive abilities of Chinese students in Western universities have also aroused the worldwide interest of education researchers (McMahon, 2011; Gu and Maley, 2008). Due to differences in language, culture and behavioural habits, Chinese students usually feel challenged to adjust and adapt to changes in the external environment quickly (Andrade, 2006; Gareis, 2012; Cheng and Erben, 2011), which may lead to their failure to achieve the expected academic performance (Anderson, 1993; Rao and Lei, 2014). Consequently, for Chinese students to survive in Western classrooms, they have to spend more time exploring, learning, changing and developing their own learning styles and strategies (Wang and Byram, 2011).

Chinese PGT student in Engineering Practical Labs

In the CPE6311 Applied Energy Engineering teaching labs (a compulsory PGT module for MSc Environmental & Energy Engineering and MSc Environmental & Energy Engineering with Industrial Management at the Department of Chemical and Biological Engineering in Sheffield), most of the students enrolled in this module are overseas students, and most of these overseas students are from China. Classroom interaction is a necessary element of a practice-based classroom in higher education, but based on my observations what I have seen is that there are some limitations to student-instructor interaction in the PGT lab sessions. For example, Chinese students were hesitant to answer the teacher's questions and needed more time to think about the appropriate answers during the question-and-answer (Q&A) session; and Chinese students preferred to use Chinese to communicate with each other in private rather than discussing or asking questions with the instructor.

In a chemical engineering lab session, students are typically required to work in small groups. Regarding the performance of Chinese students in a group, I found that some Chinese students showed a high learning initiative, and these students were willing to actively participate in teaching and learning activities regardless of their English proficiency. If the entire group consists of Chinese students, there will usually be one or two students representing the group and often interacting with instructors, while the others will remain relatively silent. Whereas the silence I am mentioning here is limited to when communicating in English, these students show more initiative when communicating in Mandarin within the group.

Compared with the group of Chinese students, the group composed of Chinese students and other students will form two other modes of interaction within the group. In the first case, all students cooperated well with each other no matter where they came from. As a result of this mode, a more positive learning initiative and attitude can be promoted within the group, and all students are more willing to participate in teaching and learning activities. In the second case, the students from different backgrounds remained a certain distance from each other and formed several sub-groups within the group. In this kind of group, learning activities were carried out in sub-groups, and usually, only parts of the students interacted and communicated with instructors and GTAs.

Another observation from the lab session was that students were increasingly using digital devices and technologies (such as smartphones and tablets) in the classroom as platforms to access learning resources. However, for Chinese students, I found that the digital technologies they mostly use are translation apps. They will use these translation apps to translate the English material directly into Chinese. This digital support may make it easier for overseas students to adapt to bilingual learning. But it also raises additional questions for overseas students. If they study in their native language at a Western university, their English learning process may be affected, and whether this effect facilitates or hinders the learning remains to be explored in the future.

Problems Faced by GTA in Teaching Overseas Students

For most Chinese PGT students, the language barrier is the first problem they must overcome. Although they are required to provide proof of language proficiency qualification such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test, before entering a UK university, passing such a general English language proficiency test may not fully represent that an overseas student has the academic English skills to conduct professional learning and research in academia (Clark and Yu, 2020). Through my classroom observation, the reality is that the English level of Chinese students participating in practical labs varies. For example, some students were able to express themselves to the instructor fluently in English, but some were unable to even understand a question like, "Did you preview the course material and complete the pre-lab activity in advance?" In actual teaching, the limited language ability of these PGT students makes it difficult for instructors and GTAs to teach complex concepts to them effectively. From the perspective of students, they sometimes cannot accurately express their problems and have doubts about the course progress, further leading to misunderstanding, affecting their classroom engagement, and learning experience.

Moreover, through my classroom observations and conversations with Chinese students after class, I found that most Chinese students entering this PGT programme completed their undergraduate studies in China. These students also said that studying in a British classroom made them feel that the culture and style of Chinese and Western education are

different. Because education in China is mostly passive, it makes these students more accustomed to passively receiving knowledge rather than engaging in interactive discussions with their educators (Watkins and Biggs, 1996). Thus, it would also make most of them unable to understand and meet the course requirements of UK universities in a short period of time due to these cognitive differences in learning and teaching. This is especially true in the case of UK master's degree programmes, which often last only one year, making it challenging for Chinese students to quickly get used to and develop Western learning behaviours. In addition, according to the students' post-course feedback I received, the Chinese students indicated that they had not received any courses or training related to explaining the learning requirements or marking criteria expected in the Western education system. This also may lead to a big difference between what they expect from their learning and what they actually get. Thus, considering from a GTA's side, we need to understand the differences and doubts that Chinese students will experience in Western classrooms in advance to minimise miscommunication and adjust teaching strategies to meet the different learning needs of various students.

As a GTA in laboratory teaching courses, in addition to teaching and guiding students to learn and practice the corresponding knowledge and skills, we need to form our teaching strategies through teaching practice with various overseas students. GTA is also one of the main teaching participants in the class, so we should pay more attention to improving our communication and expression skills and make sure they are clear and concise enough for different students. It is indeed challenging to teach better as GTAs, but we can also introduce new technology (such as visual aids and AI technologies) to help us improve the quality of teaching outside of simply lecturing or demonstrating.

Reflections on Teaching in Chemical Engineering Labs

To ensure that all students have a successful laboratory experience, instructors and GTAs should provide clear learning guidelines and create a conducive learning environment to maximise practical engagement and learning outcomes. Before the lab session begins, for instance, it is necessary for instructors and GTAs to establish clear teaching expectations and goals for students to achieve while also checking the learning progress to ensure that students understand what is expected of them. In addition, we can also create a supportive and welcoming teaching atmosphere to the extent of our ability (which, as a GTA, requires a willingness to do more or not depending on our working hours, teaching style and personality), encourage students to ask questions and engage in activities and discussion. Then, when the lab teaching takes place, GTAs can engage students by asking open-ended questions that facilitate them to think critically about the learning materials. However, in the aspect of critical thinking, Chinese students may not be familiar with this learning skill (Fakunle, Allison, and Fordyce, 2016). Thus, GTAs can provide some examples appropriately or participate in the students' Q&A interaction to lead their thinking. Then, moving into hands-on activities and experimental operations, we should provide practical opportunities

that correspond to the concepts being taught as much as possible and encourage students to work in groups and cooperate with peers. Moreover, students' passion for participation and interest in learning could be maintained and improved via timely encouragement and guidance. Also, by forming and participating in groups, students can learn from each other, share their knowledge and ideas, and develop essential teamwork skills. For example, using the Belbin Team Role test to help students foster effective communication and improve collaboration by identifying each team member's distinct roles and contributions to the team's success (Aranzabal, Epelde and Artetxe, 2022), consequently leading to more effective learning outcomes.

At the end of the lab session, the instructor and GTAs can try to provide summative feedback and constructive comments to help students improve their understanding of the learning materials and review their performance during the lab work. As far as possible, we can also provide specific feedback for students on areas for improvement and suggest additional resources to further their self-study afterwards. For example, in collaboration with the module leader, I designed simple post-session questionnaires to ask about students' perception of how much course content was learned and in what areas they expect us to improve, as well as finally informing students of how and when they can get in touch with the instructor and GTAs for follow-up feedback. Within the scope of GTA responsibilities and working hours, providing feedback to encourage students to reflect on their own learning, as well as sharing practical experiences for them to relate to the practical implications of their future careers, can help enrich the overall learning experience of overseas students.

Conclusion

In the classroom of Higher Education, it is vital for educators to develop an understanding of cultural and linguistic differences that exist within the student cohorts to teach effectively. By recognising and appreciating these differences, teachers and GTAs can adapt their teaching approaches and techniques to reach Chinese students as well as other overseas students effectively. To accomplish this, we can adapt and implement targeted teaching strategies and assistive technologies according to different students' learning needs and backgrounds. Additionally, as GTAs, in addition to continuously upgrading our teaching skills, developing the skills of classroom management and engagement is equally critical to our personal growth. By effectively managing classroom dynamics and engaging students in the learning process, we can create a positive and productive learning environment for various students to improve their overall learning experience.

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Co-creative teaching practice and active learning: the opportunity of small group teaching in philosophy

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Abstract

Co-creative pedagogy practices, where the students occupy a central role in shaping the sessions acting as partners in teaching, have an enormous potential in fostering inclusiveness and equality in the academic setting. Giving the students a voice and a role to play in designing and delivering teaching interventions, indeed, ensures that their unique interests and their needs as learners are taken on board, valued, and acted upon. Yet, it is challenging to implement co-creative practice while also following principles of active learning. Engaging students in deep learning through activities and "doing" tasks usually requires a certain degree of preparation which ends up creating a structure for the sessions that is less flexible than hoped, and more difficult to be permeated by and open to students' individual needs and interests.

In teaching seminars in philosophy, I have found myself juggling the challenge of combining co-creative practice and active learning principles. Considering philosophy more as a practice rather than a discipline, I have always thought to my seminars as the ideal space for my students to exercise philosophical skills whose development, strength and autonomy constitute a core element of the learning expected from a philosophy graduate. For this reason, active learning has always been a pillar of my teaching practice. Yet, I was finding difficult to connect it to a co-creative approach to teaching.

In this piece, I am going to explain how establishing an ongoing, honest dialogue with my students has revealed to be the solution to my problem.

Keywords: co-creative practice, active learning, seminar teaching, GTA pedagogical practice, teaching philosophy

Introduction

Co-creative teaching practice, such as the one employed at the University of Warwick to create resources targeted to incoming arts and humanities students (Woods & Homer 2021), gives a voice and a central role to students to play in seminars and classes. At the core of this approach to teaching, there is the idea that students can act as partners in creating learning resources and shaping classes, seminars, and lab sessions. Giving a central role to students in shaping sessions and teaching materials, co-creative teaching practice has an enormous potential to foster inclusiveness and equality in pedagogical spaces. Giving the chance to students to act as partners in designing and shaping seminars and classes, indeed, ensures that students' unique learning interests and needs are considered, and acted upon.

However, I found it challenging to implement a co-creative approach to teaching in my practice while also following principles of active learning. Active learning is generally taken to be the acquisition of new knowledge through active engagement (see Konopka et al. 2015, Freeman at al. 2014, Gibbs 1988) with new concepts, practices, and information. In active learning, students, doing something, acquire new information about the world, and their discipline. Active learning is considered as a desirable learning method since it is thought to lead to deep learning (see Marton and Saljo 1976), namely a type of learning that allows students not just to remember information but also creatively and critically employ their newly acquired knowledge.

To foster active engagement in my seminars, I tend to create tasks and exercises that prompt my students to do something regarding the new concepts, and information that they are encountering. I ask them to evaluate views, consider cases, judge situations, rate theories and so on. I want my students to be in the position to be active agents who can tackle problems and engage critically with what is presented to them in our sessions.

Yet, the creation of tasks and activities that can prompt active engagement which can then lead to deep learning requires a level of structure that initially prevented my sessions to be more open, sensible, and receptive of my students' individual needs and interests. Creating activities and exercises, accurately and carefully planning my seminars, was leading to sessions that presented a rigid structure which prompted active engagement but was difficult to adapt on the basis of the individual uniqueness of people involved.

In this paper, I am going to explain how I changed my teaching practice by implementing a co-creative approach in teaching seminars in the Department of Philosophy at University of Warwick without renouncing to active learning principles and practices. I am going to explain how this change was prompted by feedback that I received from a teaching observation, the analysis of the results of a mid-term and a final term survey and a positive referee experience. I am going to conclude showing that the solution of my case was embedded in

the concept of co-creation and concerned the ability of keeping an open ongoing dialogue with my students.

Initial way of planning and leading seminars in philosophy

Teaching practice in philosophy are based on scholars' individual understanding of what philosophy is. Different academics, scholars and philosophers can hold quite different views regarding what philosophy is and what it should aim at. Clearly, a different understanding of the nature of the discipline, its aims, as well as its methods deeply impacts pedagogical interventions, methods, and goals.

To explain my pedagogical practice in philosophy is then helpful to say from the start that I consider philosophy more as a practice than a discipline. This means that in my teaching I am strongly concerned about facilitating my students' acquisition of skills that enable them to *do* something in addition of guiding them to access new information. The acquisition of familiarity with philosophical literature and debates (see point 1 below) that I would like my students to enjoy is aimed and oriented, in my practice, at the development of their ability of exercising, doing, practicing philosophy (see point 2 below). In other words, in teaching seminars in the Department of Philosophy, I am usually guided by two main aims:

1) familiarise my students with philosophical literature and debates – in philosophy a type of knowledge defined as "knowing-that",
2) facilitate my students' practice and exercise of philosophical skills such as critical thinking, formulation of arguments, ability to close read philosophical papers and many more - in philosophy a type of knowledge defined as "knowing-how" (Pavese 2021).

Ideally, I would like my students to become rigorous, independent thinkers able to consider views, arguments, debates, and objections engaging critically, and questioning their formal aspects and their contents.

In order to pursue my teaching goals, I usually implement active learning practices. I want my students to exercise their skills and abilities to get better at doing philosophy, doing it together, with other students and with me. For this reason, I try my best to create a welcoming, positive, friendly environment in my seminars which could allow my students to feel safe in expressing themselves and their views. I praise my students for their contributions and notice how their thoughts can prompt even more interesting discussions on topics at hand. In case of a misunderstanding of the readings or lectures' materials, I turn the situation into an opportunity to clarify philosophical views. In doing so, everyone has the opportunity to grow. I also significantly employ small-groups and pairs work which allow students to feel less under pressure than having to present, report or engage with the entire seminar group.

Furthermore, I design activities and tasks centred on the materials chosen by the module leader, that can prompt reflections, debate and discussion and can feel fun and engaging from my students. I employ activities such as debates, live Vevox polls and Q&A, conceptual treasure hunts, peer-to-peer presentations, poster crafting and philosophical bingos. It has been observed that active involvement (Konopka et al. 2015, Freeman at al. 2014, Gibbs 1988), in pedagogical and learning settings, can lead to a deeper learning (see Marton and Saljo 1976) experience which allows students to better retain information, critically engage and develop their personal knowledge.

Guided by the same goals that I outlined at the beginning of this section, I also promote opportunities of fostering peer-to-peer learning (Assinder 1991) creating instances for my students to dialogue with their peers and assess each other's presentations and contributions. This type of practice has the advantage to make my students actively engage with philosophical debates and materials from a first-person perspective. It also helps them to develop their autonomy in both understanding and engaging with philosophical views and debates. Furthermore, it also takes away the pressure from them of being assessed and judged by me as a teaching assistant.

In concrete terms, to prepare for seminars, I usually design activities and tasks around the reading and the lectures materials provided and chosen by the module leader. I make it clear from the beginning of the seminars how the activities, that I am asking my students to engage with, are intended to create an opportunity to acquire, practice and exercise skills that are essential for both practising philosophy in more general terms and perform well in their exams. I also explain the link between the activities I created for the seminar and the specific skill that each of them aims at developing and practicing.

I collect all the exercises I created for a session in a handout which provides both information about how to carry out the activities and the reasons for which I designed them. I make sure to distribute the handout in advance of each seminar, avoiding taking people by surprise and making them feel unease during our sessions. The early distribution of the handout also helps those students that prefer accessing the seminar materials in a digital form due to various reasons including specific learning needs or other accessibility issues.

Below you can see a two extracts coming from two different handouts which I designed respectively for a seminar for a first-year module, and a seminar for a second- and third-year module. From a visual perspective, I always make sure that handouts provide manageable questions, and enough empty spaces for my students to write down their notes and replies. Psychological research has proved, indeed, that testing students on the knowledge acquired (e.g., asking them to write down what they can recall) increases the ability to remember those contents (Roediger III & Karpicke (2006)). Thus, I make sure that

the materials that I create for the sessions maximise the benefits that my students can get from seminars including spaces for notes and written reflections.

The first extract below concerns a task structured around an online poll where I asked my students to rate philosophical theories of perception on the base of how convincing they sounded. I then asked my students to work in small groups and comment on the results. I provided a series of questions (point a,b,c,d,e,f in the picture) that could help students reflecting on the results of the poll to kick out the discussion in the small groups. The handout presents an initial QR code to the Vevox poll, proceeded by a short explanation of what the poll consisted of. After the QR code, I wrote a couple of lines of instructions regarding the small group work. I finally listed a series of questions (from a) to f)) which invited students to reflect on few, specific aspects of the theories and I included some empty lines where students could write their notes and replies.

Task 2 – Theories of perception – class poll + work in small groups - 5 + 10 minutes

Poll: You are asked here to rate various theories of perception, give a rapid think about what you know at this point about perception and give each theory a number of stars: 1 star = the theory is not at all convincing, 5 stars = the theory is extremely convincing

Link: https://warwickuni.display.vevox.com/#/present/255463/86M1ITOIO4KGPDMXFOJZ

At vevox.app – ID: 186 -513 - 802

Small groups: Time to think a bit more about theories of perception and why you find them more or less convincing. Consider the results of our poll, do you agree or disagree with the average reply?

_____

WARNING: Try to think critically to each theory before replying to the previous question:

a) What is the main problem for a naïve realist?
_____

b) What led philosophers to formulate the sense-data theory? What is the main idea of this theory?
_____

c) What led philosophers to formulate disjunctivism? What is the main idea of this theory?
_____

d) Can you mention some problems of the sense-data theory?
_____

e) Can you mention some problems of the disjunctivism?
_____

f) (challenge) Can you imagine at least a problem of the adverbialist theory?
_____

The second extract that I include below presents a task which concerns an in-class presentation. The handout presents a couple of lines where I initially explained which skills the task was aimed at developing, such as the abilities of close reading a paper, recognising concepts, presenting philosophical concepts clearly, and so on. Following the explanation concerning the targeted skills, the handout presents a couple of lines with instructions regarding the task, namely the request of reading carefully a passage of the philosophical text provided by the seminar tutor and discuss with peers how to present the passage to the rest of the group. In the handout, I finally provided some written questions to help my students shaping their presentations and some suggestions about how to assess other groups' work. Visually, I made sure to leave some empty lines where my students could write notes, replies and reflections.

Week 4 – Seminar 3 - Module: Making Decisions

Transformative Choice

Task 1 – Presenting a Paragraph Competition – group work + class presentation – 10 + 15 minutes

Why ?: develop the skills of close reading a paper, recognising concepts, presenting them clearly, evaluating if and when a presentation is clear and effective

Task: your group receives an extract from the paper, read it carefully and then present it to the rest of the class

Preparation: organise your presentation thinking that other people in the room did not have the chance to read your bit of text and taking into account the following questions:

What is the main idea/claim here?
_____
_____

Is there an essential concept that is very important for the understanding of this bit of text and needs a clear explanation? What is it? How would you explain it in your own words?
_____
_____

Can you put your paragraph in the context of the entire paper? What is the function of this specific bit? Where it appears and why?
_____
_____

Evaluation: Take into account the same questions outlined above to decide which groups you want to vote for the best presentation. Remember that clarity and effectiveness should be the main parameters for your choice

Reminder about other pieces of the paper:

Scenario = A couple who has no children sit down and think about the idea of having one. They can choose to either have a baby or not have a baby

Mary's story = Mary is a person who grew up closed inside a black and white room. She knows everything about colours under any possible physical description, but she has never experienced a colour before

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I usually design three or four different activities for each seminar. So, the handouts usually look like a series of three or four tasks. The expected duration for the activities is purely indicative and just helps me structure the sessions. I tend to explain all the activities at the beginning, linking them to the skills that are intended to help developing, to allow my students to decide what they want to start with. I never aim to finish all the exercises that I prepare, especially considering that a seminar is just about an hour long.

However, I think there is a series of advantages in providing more than one option of tasks. Firstly, the variety of exercises give students the chance to decide among several options what they find more interesting and helpful to engage with. This allows space for at least a certain degree of engagement on their side in shaping the seminar making sure that their interests and needs are considered.

Secondly, this practice helps them to notice the main three or four points of the reading or lecture materials that I considered worth focusing on. Even if we do not engage together with all the elements that I considered important, the handout and the designed activities can lead them to reflect on the selection that I made on the contents of the weekly materials, giving them an example of how to engage with the readings. The activities highlight for them the main concepts, views, and objections that the materials present. They also guide students' engagement, structuring their interactions with the texts, and breaking down the issues in more manageable chunks, while still allowing space for their personal reflections.

Finally, I hope that providing a series of exercises that are meant to be enjoyable and able to prompt philosophical reflections could lead students to either engage further with the materials on their own following the suggested exercises or autonomously continue the conversations started inside our seminars still being somehow asynchronously guided.

Feedback

The positive

I have received a variety of positive feedback concerning my teaching practice through emails, in person conversations with students and module leaders, formal and informal observations carried out in the Department of Philosophy and a variety of surveys organised autonomously by myself, by the module leader or the Department.

In a survey I distributed, some students reported that they enjoyed the seminars for the level of engagement and interaction that the tasks I designed have imported into our session. Other students flagged how the activities I used helped them engaging deeply with the philosophical views discussed and clarified the contents of the lectures.

Another student particularly praised the handouts for their ability to highlight, through exercises and tasks, the main points of the reading materials. For the same reason, someone else also wrote that the handouts have been a useful tool not just during the seminars where they prompted lively debates, but also for the phase of revision since they constituted a basic summary of what was discussed. Someone else emailed me asking if it was possible for me to circulate the handouts outside my seminar groups since they came across them speaking with their peers and they found them useful.

In the end of term Departmental Survey, more than 80% of my students "definitely agreed" (5 over 5 points) with the statement that seminars helped them to understand the topics better and made the topics interesting [the rest, less than 20% "mostly agreed" – 4 points over 5]. The 90% "definitely agreed" (5 over 5 points) with the statement that seminars were well structured and prepared. Module leaders in different teaching observations also noticed that the activities that I designed allowed my students to deeply engage with the philosophical readings and prompted serious reasonings about the topics at hand. When asked to comment in particular on structures and exercises, they flagged them as "well crafted" and "perfect" to get students to reflect on the concepts, views and materials.

The negative

On the other hand, some students, module leaders and reviewers of my pedagogical reflections signalled a problem with the rigidity imported in my sessions by the structure of the seminars, the exercises and the tasks. Individual differences, in terms of learners' needs and desires, were emerging from my students and more flexibility was required to meet them. Some of my students were asking to receive more suggestions on a topic or another. In an anonymous survey, one of my students, for example, wrote that they wanted more guidance about how to construct arguments. Another student said that they would have liked to engage with more close reading tasks. Furthermore, in submitting a piece of writing concerning my teaching practice, one of the referee wrote that the packed structure of my seminars could potentially prevent a more student-centred approach. Furthermore, they suggested to consider using less strict plans for my sessions allowing broader room for my students to shape our sessions.

Finally, a module leader I worked with, in a teaching observation, suggested I could allocate a more extended portion of time in the seminar to hear from students if they had any questions they wanted to rise or any points that they really wanted to discuss with their peers or with me.

Reflections and adaptations

In reflecting on my teaching practice, in light of the feedback that I received, a puzzle started emerging for me...

On one hand, I could appreciate a series of relevant positive aspects embedded in my teaching practice. Firstly, my way of approaching seminars seemed to have a positive impact on my students' learning experience. My handouts have received an impressive number of positive feedbacks especially recognising the support and help that they could provide in guiding students in engaging with the philosophical materials. Students were also reporting finding tasks and activities useful to deepen their knowledge and understanding. Secondly, tasks, activities and exercises have proved, in practice, to be useful tools to prompt discussion making of my seminars very lively session and allowing me to follow my pedagogical intention of actively engaging my students in philosophical discussions. Finally, designing tasks, activities and exercises has been of great help for me to set both philosophical and pedagogical goals for my seminars. On one hand, reflecting on the creation of activities prompted me to think about the philosophical concept, point or view that I wanted my students to familiarise with. On the other hand, designing an activity around a main philosophical point made me reflect on the pedagogical aim that I could embed in that activity such as, for example, prompt the exercise of close reading or the development of the ability of constructing a good argument.

On the other hand, however, I recognised a series of aspects that could be improved in my practice. A better student-centred approach could lead me to more inclusive sessions that could value students' uniqueness more. My students could feel more involved, seen and heard in their learning path creating an even more welcoming environment in the seminars. Furthermore, an enhanced degree of flexibility in designing and delivering seminars could create a space for my students to express their creativity and respect their specific needs and interests more deeply. Finally, a student-centred approach could allow my students to develop more autonomy as readers, writers, and thinkers. Giving them the chance to shape their sessions could make them take more responsibility on their educational path and become more self-reflective on what truly help them learn and grow.

Initially, adapting my teaching practice felt very difficult, if not impossible. I did not want to stop producing handout with tasks and activities that were recognised as so helpful and supportive and fitted my teaching style very nicely. At the same time, being keen in supporting inclusiveness and equality, I was committed to try developing and employing a better student-centred approach to teaching. Yet, the two aims looked in contrast to me and I was struggling in finding a way to combine them in the practice.

I reflected on my teaching aims, intentions, and practices for some days without reaching a satisfactory solution, until I did not recognise that the way out of the impasse was part of the student-centred approach itself. Entering my following seminar I opened a discussion

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with my students regarding the format, the structures, and the activities I was providing during seminars. I explained that I would have liked to make my seminars more inclusive, open, and receptive of their needs and interests. I also explained in the long run I would have liked them to become more autonomous thinkers able to engage with close reading tasks, to structure their arguments and recognise their point of interest and frictions with philosophical debates.

My seminar groups were very enthusiastic of being involved in the dialogue concerning the shaping of their seminars. At that point, I was working with second and third-year students who were, at least in a certain extent, experienced in engaging in philosophical discussions and knowledgeable about seminar dynamics, practice and goals. Our conversations allowed me to come up with some practical solutions that we tried out together testing what was working better and what was less fitting for them.

The positive environment that I was initially keen in creating in my seminars for the benefit of my students' ability to serenely engage with their peers and me discussing philosophy, ended up being also a fantastic opportunity for me to involve them as active creators in my pedagogical efforts.

A renovated practice

The ongoing dialogue I established with my students has led me to a renovated practice. Now, I send to students in advance a series of very broad questions, intended to prompt the individuation and selection of main points of interest inside the materials. I ask them to consider which ideas, concepts, or arguments they would like to see explored inside the seminar. On the day of our session, I then allow them to choose what we are going to focus on.

In more details, I provide in advance of the seminars what I call "empty handouts", which usually display some boxes in which I ask students to list concepts, arguments, or views that they individuated in the reading and lecture materials or to reply to some very broad questions concerning those materials. This allows my students to reflect on both what the materials are about and what they want to focus their time and interest on. It also put them in the position to be the active agents in selecting and highlighting the main points, views, arguments, and objections present in the materials. Inside the seminars, I then ask them to share their selections, we discuss the choices that they made together, and we then decide together what we want to discuss further in terms of contents. Once we decide together what is going to be the main focus of the seminar, we think together how to implement an activity around it. The task can be just a small group-work aimed at revising and presenting to the whole seminar group different points of a view or its objections. In other cases, we can establish a debate between small groups concerning the structure and understanding of a certain argument.

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In this way, they do not miss out on the main aims of familiarising themselves with the literature and exercising philosophical skills. On one hand, they need to read through the materials and engage with the contents of the lecture to be able to fill in the "empty handout". On the other hand, there are exercising the ability of recognising crucial elements of a philosophical work, and the one of individuating weak and strong points of a view that they want to push or enlarge on. Inside the seminar, they exercise a higher grade of autonomy in deciding the focus while still being in the position to engage deeply with philosophical contents.

At the beginning of the introduction of this renovated practice, some students felt the need to ask for confirmations. They wanted to know what I would have picked if I prepared my handouts following my initial style. They wanted the reassurance that they were working philosophically in the right direction, and they also wanted to be comforted that there was a planned structure behind my sessions even though seminars have become more open and flexible. Yet, I did not want to step back in the progress of offering them a co-creative, more inclusive space and the opportunity to exercise their autonomy. Thus, what I ended up implementing has been a joint, mixed practice.

I distribute "empty handouts" in advance of the seminars, but I also create for myself a handout following my initial style. I work with "empty handout" and co-creative practice inside the seminars at the synchronous level. I then distribute, in case it is requested by students, and as late as possible in the seminar or even afterward, the handout designed following my initial style. This way students can still feel that they can eventually access a guided approach into the reading and lecture materials.

Below you can see two extracts: one from an "empty handout" and another from a handout for the same seminar that I designed following my initial style. They were employed in a seminar for a second- and third-year module.

The extract below, from the "empty handout", presents three questions which ask students to:

1) list the essential concepts of that week reading materials,

2) list which concepts among those are not clear,

3) list essential arguments and cases from the readings.

Visually, in the "empty handout", three blank boxes follow the questions and I leave plenty of space for comments and notes.

The extract from the handout which followed my initial style, instead, presents two different tasks. The first requires students to work in small groups and fill in a table explaining five essential concepts that I individuated in the reading materials intended for that week seminar. The second task is constituted by a series of questions regarding philosophical views and arguments presented by two different philosophers whose works were discussed in the lectures and the reading materials. The questions of the second task were intended to practice the ability of clearly presenting philosophical views and the ability to reconstruct the steps of an argument. Once more, I made sure to visually leave space in the handout for personal notes and comments.

Week 9 – pre seminar tasks

Construct your ideal seminar for this weekly materials

replying to the following questions

1. Write below all the concept you think are essential to understand this week paper:

2. Write below all the concepts you think that are not very clear and you would like to discuss:

3. Write below a list of arguments/examples/cases or steps of the argument that are essential to understand this week paper:

Construct your ideal seminar for this weekly materials

replying to the following questions

Task 1 - Essential Concepts – try to explain in your own words:

Regret	
"Twice miserable"	
Agent regret	
Reasonable person in Bittner sense	
Identity as an agent in Bittner sense	

Task 2 - Reconstruct the passage of the following arguments:

What does Spinoza state about regret?

_____

Spinoza on regret:

5. _____
_____
6. _____
_____
7. _____
_____

What does Bernard Williams think about regret?

_____

What is the relation between Williams' idea and Bittner's idea?

_____

Conclusion

In this piece I started presenting my teaching practice which was initially centred around principles of active learning. I explained how active learning allowed me to reach my pedagogical goals and how I practically implemented it in teaching seminars in philosophy. I recognised, however, that helpful feedback that I received on several occasions prompted me to rethink my teaching practice in order to give a more central role to my students in their learning.

Based on that feedback, I then started considering how to implement a co-creative approach to teaching. Yet, I initially found difficult to engage students as active partners in shaping our seminars, while also continue to employ active learning strategies. I realised just after some reflections that the solution to my puzzle could be found in the co-creative practice itself. It was through establishing an ongoing, open and honest dialogue with my students that we formulated some possible solutions to the case. We tried out some of them together and we ended up keeping what was more suitable for them for the rest of the term.

In nominating me for a teaching award at the end of academic year, someone wrote that they appreciated my efforts in changing activities in my seminars and acting on feedback positively. I considered those lines as the confirmation that keeping an open dialogue with students, trying to understand their perspectives, and giving them the chance of playing an active role in shaping seminars was the right route to take.

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Navigating Challenges in Postgraduate Pedagogy: An EDI Consideration to Preparing, Designing, and Delivering Teaching by PGRs

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Abstract

Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) play an integral role in shaping the pedagogical landscape within Higher Education despite encountering several challenges as they prepare, design, and deliver their teaching. This paper explores these challenges, focusing on the advantages of advancing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in postgraduate pedagogies. Except for barriers from literature, this paper will also include authors' personal teaching experiences in the module Technology Management for one and a half years.

When PGRs prepare and design for the session, they should be aware of EDI issues since students may have different cultures, knowledge, and personalities. Therefore, it is a challenge to prepare and design the teaching to ensure all students can easily understand, participate equally in the session, and have an equal chance to express or share their thoughts and ideas with others after the session. By addressing this issue, this paper will explain things that PGRs should be concerned about and the challenges they face, such as how they would split students into each group, how they support different students with different characteristics, such as disabilities and how to innovate in the method of teaching, etc.

PGRs should also consider EDI in their teaching practices, which can be more complex than preparing due to unexpected situations that arise during actual practice. Therefore, PGRs should seek to learn from others' teaching experiences and seek support when needed. This paper will illustrate challenges aligned with EDI issues that have been faced, such as arguments between students, sensitive questions asked by students and reports from students, and, more importantly, how to perfectly deliver the knowledge that has been prepared and designed to ensure that students can feel that EDI is also a challenge that PGRs faced.

Introduction

In the previous decade, certain challenges have been raised by students who are undertaking postgraduate studies, including concerns related to inequality, intolerance, and limited participation (Hinton et al., 2022). Consequently, an increasing number of universities have begun actively addressing equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) matters within postgraduate pedagogy to foster a strong sense of belonging and appreciation among students.

As a response, some educators have embarked on a quest for innovative teaching methods that facilitate full engagement, recognising the vital role such engagement plays in establishing a high-quality learning environment accessible to all students (Messiou et al., 2016). As shown in Table 1, the University of Warwick set goals for improving EDI issues, including the 2030 Plan, social inclusion, participation, race, etc.

Table 1: An example of the University of Warwick EDI plan

2030 Plan	The strategy is supported by the following strategic priorities: Innovation, Inclusion, Regional Leadership, Internationalisation, and Sustainability. Moreover, the objective is to increase the diversity of staff and students to maximise creativity and innovation, develop a culture that supports our students and staff to achieve their potential and become an internationally recognised leader in inclusion.
Social inclusion	The strategy will help Warwick to re-imagine the original purpose of setting up the University in 1965, to 'increase access to higher education'. Warwick aims to remove economic, social and cultural barriers that have prevented people from working, studying, and succeeding at Warwick.
Widening participation	In 2022/23, the POLAR Q5: Q1 ratio was 6.6:1 at the University of Warwick. They are committed to narrowing the gap in participation for students to 4:1 by 2025.
Black awarding gap	The black awarding gap was 7.7 percentage points in 2021/22, which decreased 4.1 percentage points since 2018/19. They are committed to eliminating the warding gap between black and white students by 2025.
National centre for research culture	In July 2023, Warwick launched their new National Centre for Research Culture, the first in the UK. The Centre will aim to improve research culture across the UK's Higher Education sector, providing a hub for knowledge curation, training, and innovative research.
Disabled Students Code of Practice	The Disabled Students Code of Practice provides a framework for implementing inclusive practice and reasonable adjustments to support disabled students. It covers inclusive teaching and

	learning approaches through curricula design, delivery, and assessment methods.
Improving equality impact assessments	The university has condensed the EIAs into fewer questions and included prompts and examples to support a meaningful review of potential equality implications. We've also added some new guidance on how EIAs fit into decision-making processes and when they should be completed.

To more deeply understand EDI barriers based on literature and personal experience, this paper will be divided into three parts: designing, preparing, and delivering. The literature was searched with the keywords "Equality", "Diversity", "Inclusion", "Postgraduate pedagogy", "Teaching process", and "Barriers in education" from ProQuest and Warwick University Library. In this paper, "Professional Educational Institutions Theoretical and Practical Basis of Development of the Content of Pedagogical Activity of Teachers of Information and Information Technologies" is mainly used, and all other support documents and literature can be found in Reference.

EDI consideration in preparing

The preparation for GTAs serves as an avenue through which Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) can gain insights into their students. This entails acknowledging the students' diverse backgrounds, knowledge bases, and learning requirements (Tondeur et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that some educators tend to focus solely on the students' learning experiences. Mansurjonovich (2022) contends that this tendency often arises due to inadequate training, leading to a lack of awareness about EDI among PGRs and students. To effectively prepare for teaching sessions, PGRs must familiarise themselves with the components encompassed by EDI to foster greater awareness in this context.

In the realm of postgraduate pedagogy, "equality" signifies a commitment to affording every student equal opportunity to access, participate in, and benefit from the educational experience. This commitment ensures that no student encounters disadvantages based on their individual circumstances or attributes, such as their backgrounds, identities, abilities, or life situations (Bursuc, 2013). In the context of an inclusive philosophical framework, the term "diversity" takes on a broader scope, encompassing variations in abilities, gender identities, and differences in sociocultural backgrounds (Moriña, 2017). Some individuals also regard race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and geographical location as significant facets of diversity (Dhaliwal et al., 2013). Dhaliwal (2013) further asserts that each Higher Education institution is expected to formulate its distinct definition of diversity, tailored to its unique nature, historical background, mission, traditions, and geographical context. Every student, regardless of their individual distinctions, should be entitled to the right and opportunity for integration into a standard classroom setting. Additionally, they

must receive the necessary support to ensure unimpeded access to the learning environment and associated resources (Shyman, 2015).

Drawing from my teaching experience in Technology Management for one and a half years, the preparation for teaching was meticulously organised under the guidance of the course leader, constituting a training process preceding the initial session. During this training session, we were instructed to review students' profiles, which encompassed information such as their gender, race, and student ID, which are crucial for EDI to ensure fair representation, track diversity metrics, and foster an inclusive academic environment. Furthermore, we scrutinised all instructional materials to ensure that the language and examples used were ethical and non-offensive. However, I encountered challenges in gaining comprehensive knowledge about the students before the session commenced. Firstly, the photos in their profiles were uploaded by the students themselves, and some of these images were unclear or digitally altered. To prevent misidentification, certain universities capture photos when students register their student cards. Secondly, the students' nationalities were not listed in their profiles, potentially leading to misunderstandings. For instance, some PGRs might incorrectly assume that all students of Asian descent are from China, while there may be Korean and Japanese students who could feel offended by such assumptions if they are misidentified as Chinese. Therefore, we should not define students based on our judgment before fully understanding them.

EDI Consideration in designing

When considering design for teaching, many things are included, such as readings, assessments, and activities to "reflect a diverse array of identities and perspectives" (Gannon, 2018). Barriers can arise from the use of exclusionary language and subtle discriminatory comments, often associated with specific characteristics such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, or disability. These barriers have the potential to discourage engagement and attendance among targeted groups (Harrison & Tanner, 2018). Research by Brescoll (2011) highlights that male voices are often perceived as having greater authority and impact compared to female voices. Hence, it is essential to incorporate gender equality considerations into the design of educational activities. Therefore, we should keep the awareness of gender equality through the readings provided by the university or the gender of the instructor.

Additionally, careful attention should be given to the design of teaching materials and activities to avoid inadvertently offending students based on their language, nationality, or beliefs (Howard, 2019). For instance, avoid perpetuating stereotypes when using examples in economics or social studies, like portraying certain countries as always impoverished or backwards. Moreover, if discussing religious festivals or rituals, present them in a respectful and accurate manner, avoiding any tone that could be perceived as mocking or dismissive.

Drawing from my teaching experience, I was tasked with organizing students into different groups for various activities. In the course I teach, the majority of students are from the same country or share the same language, especially during the pandemic when the university shifted to online teaching to accommodate students who could not physically attend in the UK. For instance, I conducted two online sessions for students from Hong Kong and Thailand, where the majority were local students, with only a few British students participating. In light of this, ensuring that all students could actively engage in the class was a primary consideration. I made an effort to include at least one British student in each group to promote a diverse learning environment.

Furthermore, I aimed to balance the gender composition within each group. However, I encountered a challenge in both the Hong Kong and Thailand sessions, where the number of male students exceeded that of female students. Achieving a perfect gender balance within each group was not feasible, so I aimed to strike a balance as much as possible. For example, I aimed for a composition of four male students and two or three female students in each group to foster a more equitable distribution.

EDI Consideration in delivering

The process of delivering a lesson can be more challenging than the initial design phase, primarily because unexpected situations often arise in real-world teaching scenarios (Bragg, 2021). In the classroom, educators may notice that some students face difficulties in grasping the material based on their individual learning backgrounds. While the design phase typically assumes that all students possess similar levels of prior knowledge, the actual progress and depth of understanding may vary among students (Palardy & Rumberger, 2008).

Furthermore, the emotional and psychological well-being of both students and educators can present unexpected challenges during teaching sessions, often influenced by their daily emotional states. Stress, anxiety, and other emotional hurdles can hinder the teaching and learning process (Dewaele, 2011). Therefore, effective teaching goes beyond the mere delivery of pre-designed content; it also involves equipping educators with problem-solving skills to address such challenges (Kozikoglu, 2019).

In my teaching experience, I encountered more barriers than initially anticipated. As mentioned during the design phase, I made an effort to include British students in each group to encourage the sharing of innovative ideas rooted in their cultural and educational backgrounds. However, I was disappointed to observe that most groups were comprised of local students who predominantly used their native language for communication during activities. This linguistic divide made it difficult for the British student to actively participate in the discussions, despite my repeated encouragement to use English. Although this situation is something I had to accept since I cannot control how many British

students are in the class, the session's rules can be stricter, such as talking more seriously to non-English speakers to use English during the class.

Additionally, I observed that emotional and psychological issues could significantly impact students during lessons, affecting their concentration, interpersonal communication, and emotional expressions. For instance, I encountered a situation where two students engaged in a heated argument regarding their ideas of the activity during one of my classes. Given the abrupt nature of the argument, I addressed the class, emphasizing the importance of respecting each other's opinions and consciousness. After the session, I spoke individually with the students involved, and they revealed that their argument stemmed from feelings of depression related to their assessments and having had a particularly challenging day. They clarified that they had not intended to offend each other. Based on my experience, GTAs should care about students' emotions and provide suitable help, such as the university psychological help centre or suggest they contact their personal tutor for further help.

Discussion and recommendations

According to Mcguire and Scott (2006), it's essential for teachers to avoid providing a one-size-fits-all solution and instead employ adaptable strategies that can be customized to meet individual needs. Drawing from insights gleaned from the literature and my personal experiences, I believe that the teaching process can be distilled into three key phases: preparation, design, and delivery.

In the preparation and design stages, PGRs should strive to acquire comprehensive knowledge about their students by collecting students' feedback. This information can then be leveraged to facilitate their active participation in the classroom. Additionally, throughout these phases, it is imperative to remain attuned to factors such as gender, race, nationality, disability, and beliefs. This ongoing awareness of diversity and inclusion is crucial in every step of the teaching process, ensuring that students consistently experience EDI.

Furthermore, the training provided to PGRs should extend beyond the preparation and design stages and also encompass the delivery phase. While unforeseen challenges may arise, course leaders and training teams should share real-world cases and individual experiences to equip PGRs with problem-solving skills. When delivering instruction in the classroom, PGRs must remain vigilant, recognising that new challenges may emerge and require adept handling. As highlighted by Dierking and Fox (2013), delivery should not rigidly adhere to the initial design; instead, teachers should be open to making provisional decisions if they perceive that the planned methods are not suitable in practice. Although GTAs have a limited ability to make these kinds of changes in some contexts, adjusting the approach to activities, literature, or assessments can be a possible solution.

Conclusion

The concept of EDI is one that should remain at the forefront of our minds to ensure that all students consistently experience a sense of belonging, equality, and understanding. While many schools have embraced EDI initiatives and incorporated them into their educational approaches, in some economically disadvantaged or less developed schools, the full popularization of the EDI concept may still be a work in progress. Furthermore, it's crucial to acknowledge that the challenges related to EDI will evolve over time, reflecting changes in students' circumstances, learning environments, and perspectives. Therefore, those involved in the field of education must continue to play their part in fostering an inclusive environment where every student feels a deep sense of belonging.

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What 'Teeny' Group Seminar Teach Us: Enhancing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in Small Group Seminar through Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) and Anecdotal Pedagogy

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Abstract

This reflective study delves into the nuanced impact of varying class sizes on the pedagogy of teaching literary theories and explores the ways of improving diversity in different classroom settings. It is based on my comparative analysis of the outcomes from teaching two different sizes of small seminar groups previously: one with eleven students and one that had between two and four students in regular attendance (what I term as a 'teeny group'). To empower students to better empathise with the racial and gender inequalities portrayed in theoretical texts, and to facilitate a friendly and open dialogue for students to share their own perspectives and experiences, I employ technological tools such as Padlet and Vevox as well as my own perspective as anecdotal pedagogy, namely, the inclusion of personal experience into teaching methods and contents. In doing so, I create an online platform to allow my students to share their opinions anonymously and visually and make use of my identity as an Asian woman to encourage underrepresented marginalised groups to get involved in discussions. This reflective piece draws on the article ''Violating Pedagogy' by Heather G. S. Johnson (2015) as a theoretical framework to demonstrate both the strengths and limitations of the teeny group in comparison with the normally small group and further to evaluate different pedagogic methods in advancing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) from a unique perspective. In doing so, this article contemplates the optimal classroom sizes for effective teaching and examines how various pedagogical approaches counteract the differences in class sizes.

Introduction

'Literary theory *hurts*', blatantly claims Heather G. S. Johnson (2015: 39, 61) – she finds that literary theory inflicts 'pain (obscenity, degradation, violation)' upon not just students but also professors. Not as an (under)graduate nor a professor, but as a non-permanent graduate teaching assistant, I note that Johnson's argument resonates with my experience. It is not just because of the theoretical confusion and the paradoxical balance between 'relinquishing enough intellectual authority' and 'maintaining enough professional authority' that have been noted by Johnson (2015: 65), but also due to the age of my students and the different sizes of two seminar groups that I tutored.

At Warwick, I was allocated to teach the module about literary theories, named 'Modes of Reading', where my students are predominantly first-year undergraduates. They were arranged into two groups: one with eleven students, which will be referred to as Group A, and another with ten students, which will be referred to as Group B. Despite the similar group size, the majority in Group B, because of various personal or medical issues, could not attend seminars regularly. Thus, Group B seminars normally had between two and four students present. The literature is contradicting in defining Group B as a small group. According to Jean Rudduck (1978: 1), the 'seminar' approach is characterised by the group size of 'at least four students and not more than sixteen'. Rudduck (1978: 55-56) further points out that, in an adolescent group of five or six members, 'there is no diversity of experience and style to bring vigour and surprise to the enquiry' and 'There is a consensus that the optimum size for small group teaching, in general'. Kate Exley and Reg Dennick (2004: 2) take account of group size, too, 'is between five and eight per group', and '[w]hen group membership falls below five, the diversity and variety of interpersonal interaction diminishes'. Given the *tiny* size of Group B, along with the more evident *teenage* attributes of this group, which I will elaborate below, I coin the term, 'teeny' group seminar, to allude to theory teaching in Group B, in contrast with 'small' group work in Group A.

Albeit in different sizes, both groups are organised in a way that Johnson arranges her undergraduate theory course, although my class meets once a week, whereas Johnson's meets twice a week. Johnson (2015: 47) splits her teaching process into 'period 1 'Comprehension Day' (minimal lecture and active discussion of theoretical ideas & questions) and period 2 'Application Day' (review of primary text, group work, and discussion of possible applications)'. This essay, therefore, discusses the different performances of the students from two groups, in terms of their 'comprehension' period, 'implication' period, and after-seminar activities (such as their assignment submission and engagement with my office hours). In doing so, I argue both small group teaching and 'teeny' group teaching carry their own virtues and downsides in the aspects of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). And technology-enhanced learning (TEL), 'the application of information and communication technologies to teaching and learning' (Kirkwood & Price, 2014: 6), and anecdotal pedagogy,

the combination of pedagogy with anecdotal theory that emphasises 'the inclusion of personal details' of tutors and students into 'content, style, and method of pedagogy' (Bihan, 2011: 50), can counterbalance the distinctions.

Comprehension Period

As shown above, Rudduck (1978) and Exley and Dennick (2004) have observed the lack of 'diversity and variety' in a group of fewer than five students, and indeed by comparison with Group B, Group A provides more theoretical perspectives and subverts the dominance of one specific theoretical school during the 'comprehension' period. Yet, for a teeny seminar group, the tutor's authority to a degree diminishes, and therefore a student-led discussion of theories as well as inclusive education are more likely to happen. One of the difficulties of theory interpretation is what educationalists call 'the language of theory', which refers to the opaque slippery language of literary criticism caused by a 'rather clumsy' translation and the use of 'field-specific jargon' (Byrne, 2011: 119; Johnson, 2015: 38; Eckert, 2008: 111). However, with eleven students attending, Group A is more adaptable in this respect.

Firstly, there are more possibilities that the students can master French or German, so they can read the original texts. For example, students in this group proudly shared their own understanding of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *The German Ideology* (2014 [1845]: 31-41) and Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (2010 [1899]: 121-145) based upon their learning of their German versions. More tellingly, a class with more students perhaps introduces more counterarguments about the chosen theory, given their various educational backgrounds. On one hand, exchange students from German or French universities may be familiar with 'internecine conflicts' among different theoretical frameworks (Bradford, 2011: 167). On the other hand, even in England, the set texts at A-level and GCSE could also be varied (Elliott, 2021: 73, 75). In the case of Group A, students, due to their studies at A-level, was able to decode impenetrable expressions of Louis Althusser (French philosopher) and paraphrase them for their peers, thereby boosting the teaching outcome. This benefit of the command of 'the language of theory' is almost unattainable for students in Group B.

It does not mean 'teeny' seminar teaching by no means has an edge over small seminar teaching. Rudduck (1978: 59) has recognised the significance of the seating pattern for small group work, claiming that 'it is unfortunate if the allocated working space with its arrangement of chairs does not [...] allow face to face interaction among all members of the group'. For students in Group A, their seminars are arranged into a tiered classroom where chairs and tables are fixed to the floor. They can barely communicate face-to-face, particularly considering the social distance rule amid the COVID-19 pandemic, until I divide them into pairs or trios during the 'implication' period. Yet, it is not an issue for Group B. With a 'teeny' group, I can simply drag a chair and sit with the students, pretending to be a member of the seminar rather than a seminar leader. In doing so, I can to the greatest extent avoid intimidating my students with teacher authority and somewhat transform

'teeny' seminars into leaderless tutorials, in which students will not fear asking foolish questions but 'will raise questions of genuine concern to them rather than ones they think the teacher would like to hear' (Tiberius, 1999: 102).

By way of illustration, students in this group often felt comfortable interrupting me to ask for a more detailed explanation of key concepts, such as 'deterritorialization' or 'logopoeia', or tweaking the structure of seminars by asking questions about the musicality of poetry because, as adolescents, they had an intense interest in dub music or reggae. This kind of active involvement in the comprehension of theory can hardly be identified in Group A where students may be reluctant to interfere with teaching in front of a larger class and their tutor. As such, both small and 'teeny' groups demonstrate their own strong and weak points in grasping the main meaning of theoretical texts.

The employment of technological tools, such as Vevox[5], can help to improve this situation. First, quizzing my students with Vevox helps me to figure out the levels at which my students comprehend the reading materials and lecture videos, thereby allowing me to promote the equality of learners in my teaching. Second, it attracts my students' attention to my teaching content and motivates them to engage in discussion through a game-based competition. I found that using Vevox was helpful to engage with quiet students, international students, and students with learning difficulties or auditory impairments in Group A. According to Bipithalal Balakrishnan Nair (2022: 1), the elements of playfulness can 'enhanc[e] student engagement, participation, and motivation' and 'embrac[e] diversity and inclusion'. Thus, the traditional hierarchy between tutors and students are disrupted and more students in Group A can join in class discussions. Third, the digital tools allow me to save the discussions from Group A and present them to Group B, and further enhance the diversity in Group B by establishing an asynchronistic debate.

Implication Period

Larger class size also affects the students' implication of theory in literary texts with regard to 'diversity and variety'. For academics, the key to teaching theory is to keep open to all theoretical systems and to adopt various theoretical lens. 'To struggle with a literary theory', David Gershom Myers (1994: 333) shrewdly notes, 'is to scramble for counterarguments'. To do so, Johnson (2015: 42) further encourages theory teachers and students to embrace 'theoretical opportunism', that is, 'to accept a multiplicity of constantly changing interpretations, to not insist on a particular perspective (or particular combination of perspectives) as inherently right or proper and to distrust any single grand narrative capable of systematically explaining 'Literature' or 'Culture''. For this theoretical opportunism, I have organised my seminars around some specific terms that our chosen theories construe in some way. Dealing with the unit themed 'poetry', I led my students to

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[5] Vevox is a digital platform that has polling and survey capabilities.

challenge 'binary oppositions', including 'poetry/prose', 'men/women', 'black/white', 'life/death', 'human/nonhuman', to name but a few.

However, as Johnson (2015: 62) highlights, 'theoretical opportunism involves the selection of stances based on individual interests and particular expediencies'. The premise of this pedagogical approach is the possibility that the students have discrepancies in stances. In a 'teeny' group, there is more likelihood that its members cannot curb a dominant voice and thereby cannot 'find the content which will support depth of learning' (Rudduck, 1978: 55-56). There is also a probability that group members frequently agree with each other, thus 'directing comments at the teacher who either has a different point of view or is able to adopt one' (Tiberius, 1999: 112). Therefore, unsurprisingly, it was in Group A, not Group B, that students argued against my feminist reading of *The Gathering* by Anne Enright (2008) or analysed 'In A Station of the Metro' by Ezra Pound (1913) from an ecocritical perspective, a theoretical perspective that I had not introduced.

Due to its limitation on the aspect of the multiplicity of viewpoints, I draw on anecdotal pedagogy to trigger counterarguments in the 'teeny' group. Benefited from a physically closer distance from students in Group B, I avoided the impasse that Jill Le Bihan (2011: 59) has encountered—to 'provoke emotion, anger in fact', towards gender inequality among her students within a short period, she must resort to outrageous statistics about the abuse and discrimination of women. For me, it was much easier to provoke emotion and share personal experiences in a group of three or four.

Nonetheless, akin to Bihan (2011: 55), I did register the same concern as 'to understand them as an attempt to enter the debate (however irrelevant their words may at first seem)', and to understand 'the experiential testimony of students' as 'a methodology appropriate to the seminar room'. For instance, in a relaxing stimulating atmosphere, one student in Group B mentioned their father's response to the poem, '—', in *Surge* by Jay Bernard (2019), a poetry collection in our syllabus. In this case, I needed to guide the student to link Bernard's indignation about public silence on the 'New Cross Massacre', a suspected racist attack, with their father's unwillingness to discuss the tragic event. I led them to discover how their experience interestingly mirrored the poem, in which a ghost victim child was trying to talk to his father, while outside the poem, they, a real child, was trying to talk to their real father. In doing so, I encouraged my students to crush the binary opposition between fiction and reality as well as life and death, as Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren (1976: 15) have argued in *Understanding Poetry* (which has been studied by students too), not only 'understand' poetry but also 'experience' poetry. Hence, with the tutor's guidance, 'teeny' seminar work may create a more equal and creative situation to implicate theory with literature.

After-Seminar Activities

The control and freedom that students in the 'teeny' seminars enjoy further influence the students' performance after seminars. According to Mary M. Reda (2009: 90), due to the 'asymmetrical relationship of power between teacher and student', her student performed '[s]cared stiff' in the compulsory office meeting. In my case, students in Group B were more willing to meet me during my office hours, whereas no student in Group A has attended my optional office meetings yet. My assumption of the difference is that I am less intimidating to students in the 'teeny' group than those in the small group, and the more accessible tutor image spurs more students to meet me after seminars. In this way, I created an anonymous survey via Padlet[6] to encourage my students to share their opinions and ask their questions openly and freely. Nevertheless, the problem arises in Group B, too. 'In undergraduate classes', as Johnson (2015: 64) finds, 'deeply undercutting professorial authority can be dangerous' and undergraduates may feel 'uncomfortable and potentially counterproductive when they feel empowered to challenge their grading procedures or their classroom rules'. Indeed, in contrast with the full submission of formative essays in Group A, only a couple of students in Group B handed in their essays because the assignment was not mandatory. Furthermore, during my office hours, the adolescent students in Group B may occasionally change the subject to their hobbies, such as reggae and anime. It required me to reconnect these subjects to literary theory by, for example, associating reggae with the musicality of poems and anime with graphical novels that the students read in the second term.

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[6] Padlet is a digital platform that allows users to create and customise interactive boards for collecting, organising, and presenting various types of content.

Conclusion

This reflective essay argues for a reconsideration of the desired class size and intends to inspire academics to think if it is feasible to incorporate 'teeny' seminar teaching methods into the widely accepted seminar pedagogy or vice versa. Although a seminar group of eleven may bear virtues of diversity and variety, teeny seminar work empowers students to manage the class, engage in discussion, and make use of after-seminar resources more openly and actively. The use of various pedagogic methods can help to weaken the adverse effects of different class sizes, too. My teaching in this way reflects exactly what Johnson (2015: 66) claims: 'the value in the theory course is precisely that it is painful, that it hurts. It creates a discomfort that is productive, leading to deeper self-reflection for teacher and student alike'.

Acknowledgments

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Advocating for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Postgraduate Pedagogies

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Abstract

I have come to the realization that equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are critical components of a good postgraduate education. However, EDI can be difficult to achieve, especially in postgraduate pedagogies that are frequently characterized by hierarchies and power asymmetries. This review paper explores some strategies and practices that can be employed by postgraduate teachers to advance EDI in postgraduate pedagogies. These include: confronting unconscious bias, privilege, promoting representation and embracing students' voices, and implementing support structures to address the unique challenges faced by students in postgraduate pedagogies. Furthermore, I will discuss the benefits of implementing an EDI-focused approach in postgraduate education. This will highlight how EDI can foster interdisciplinary collaboration and inclusive education system that will consequently lead to a more diverse and representative academic community, contributing to the development of inclusive practices in various professional fields beyond their institutions. The study uses secondary sources, such as journal articles and focused research findings on the topic. The sources used aim to highlight existing issues in postgraduate pedagogies as related to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion-EDI. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for concerted efforts from postgraduate teachers to prioritize and advocate for EDI in postgraduate pedagogies, because an EDI-focused postgraduate education can become a catalyst for producing graduates that will contribute to the development of inclusive practices in various professional fields beyond their institutions, and this will truly reflect our diverse and multi-cultural society through the ideals of education.

Introduction

Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in postgraduate pedagogies are critical elements for promoting a just and equitable educational environment. It is about ensuring that all learners (postgraduate students) have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or identity. While many previous and present works discuss postgraduate pedagogies from the angle of postgraduate research-PGR students who are also staff and deliver teaching, this study focuses on the teachers. Warwick University has worked tirelessly to increase inclusion, equality, and diversity among postgraduate students, but this topic has received less attention at various other universities around the world. Warwick-Booth, (2022) observed that despite efforts by higher institutions to widen inclusion, diversity and equality in Higher Education (HE), evidence suggests that exclusion and inequality in postgraduate educational experiences, progression and attainment remains an issue for some groups, as a result of their social divisions. Similarly, Watson, et al (2023) reported that HE in the UK and across the globe continues to prioritize EDI, but stark inequalities still exist, and non-inclusive cultures persist. This has repeatedly led to exclusion, and can created barriers to learning, interdisciplinary collaboration is frequently characterized by hierarchies and power asymmetries between teachers and the students, and development of inclusive practices in various professional fields beyond the institutions. (Dignath, Rimm-Kaufman & Kunter 2022) EDI is used in both undergraduate and postgraduate learning but the specific application and focus in postgraduate leaning makes it distinct.

The Challenge of Hierarchies and Power Asymmetries in Postgraduate Pedagogies
It is well documented in the literature that postgraduate education is frequently characterized by hierarchies and power asymmetries between teachers and the students. Hyatt & Hayes (2020) address power imbalance as a model that needs reconfiguring. They note that the traditional relationship between postgraduate students and teachers in terms of its power differential is often characterized as an asymmetric, hierarchical expert/novice dyad, which can trap such relationships in a one-way transmission mode that does not support collaboration. They further suggest how this power imbalance can be rethought and disruptedin postgraduate pedagogy, to build a more collaborative, collegial 'decentred' approach to postgraduate education. Janks (2010) discusses issues of power and identity within university and school classrooms and the need for balance to create and foster an EDI friendly environment. Bartlett & Mercer (2000) used an experiential and feminist methodology to discuss postgraduate pedagogy through analyzing the relationships between postgraduate teachers and students. Their study revealed that the hierarchical model and power imbalance was often combative, oppressive and patriarchal. The challenge for education is not only to embed understanding of these issues in various programmes, but also to embody them through their own teaching.

Hierarchies and power imbalances present a number of challenges to achieving EDI in postgraduate pedagogies. It creates unsafe and unsupportive learning environment because

teacher of postgraduates holds a great deal of power in the relationship dynamics, treats students with bias based on their social background, race, gender and they can often be resistant to change. Asymmetric power dynamics frequently result in the marginalization and discrimination of students from underrepresented backgrounds, including those based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and so on. This suggests that minority students are more likely to suffer discrimination, bias, and prejudice from their PG teachers and peers, which can limit their academic and professional chances. There is a vast body of research that reveal a highly concerning outcome for Black, Asians and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students in postgraduate education. A report by Hancock, Wakeling & Chubb, (2019) highlighted how sex, ethnicity and socio-economic background interacted in creating inequalities in access to postgraduate studies. The report also states that, in the UK, "graduates who are female, of Black African, Black Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi ethnicity, or are from lower socio-economic backgrounds, have low or exceptionally low rates of progression to doctoral level study. This gap reflects the inequalities in postgraduate education, which can make it difficult to adopt EDI initiative that question the established quo. This eventually leads to a culture of exclusion with little or no collaboration, where students are not provided with a support system to excel in their studies and even in professional careers. Burke (2019) citing the report by Universities UK (UUK) states that substantial inequalities persist and the attainment gap exists across UK HE institutions. This reveals that the rate of progress is slow and HE has a long way to go. As a result, addressing power inequalities through equality, diversity, and inclusion activities in postgraduate education becomes critical for building a fair, inclusive, and stimulating learning environment that benefits both individuals and society as a whole.

Strategies and Practices Needed to advance EDI in Postgraduate Pedagogies

In the light of the challenges that hierarchies and power imbalances presents in postgraduate pedagogies, institutions are expected to develop its own strategies and practices to EDI and unique approach to embedding inclusive practice within existing structures, cultures and strategies (Moody, Galvin, & Kumar, 2021).

Florian & Pratt (2015) stated that the ideal place to focus on embedding an equalities perspective in postgraduate education is in the pedagogical approaches to teacher education and professional development where issues pertaining to teaching diverse groups of learners are taught and can be modeled. This implies that postgraduate teachers should be uniquely positioned to adopt EDI-focused strategic approach.

The postgraduate teachers should possess an appreciable level of self-awareness, knowledge and understanding of their teaching practices, especially in relation to equality and diversity and the ways in which this can pave the way for transformational teaching. It has been established that bias and privilege are a reality in postgraduate education between teachers

and students. These biases can have a significant impact on students' learning experiences, and it is important to confront them in order to create a more equitable and inclusive learning environment. Poitier (2022) notes that global conversations about inequities in HE have grown significantly. These conversations include critical discourse about the impact of inequality that manifests in socio-cultural and political structures and our HE institutions. As HE institutions consider ways to improve equality, diversity and inclusion, postgraduate teachers must be deliberate in the tools and techniques used to drive equality, diversity and inclusion.

It is also important to create a safe space where students feel comfortable talking about their experiences without the barriers of bias and privilege caused by power imbalance in the teacher-student relationship.

Changing the structure of postgraduate pedagogies is another way to combat unconscious prejudice and privilege. It involves broadening the curriculum, hiring more diverse faculty, and developing more inclusive learning environments. Therefore, institutional effort is required to achieve this beyond the postgraduate teachers.

Institutions should improve the representation of all groups, especially those that are underrepresented. Underrepresentation of some groups in HE seems to be consistent across institutions. For example, underrepresentation is recorded across minority ethnic groups such as students from Asian, Black and mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds, also some students are marginalized and underrepresented based on gender, social and economic background. Williams et al (2019) observed that underrepresented groups like minority ethnic students and those from low socio-economic backgrounds tended to be excluded more than their White and socio-economically advantaged peers, placing them in a disadvantaged position when it comes to postgraduate studies. Underrepresentation of students from different groups represents a barrier to creating diversity and inclusion in postgraduate education. But promoting representation will create equal access to opportunities, ensuring that all groups are invested in the process and that their voices are heard. Diversity and inclusion initiatives that impact the experience of underrepresented groups are more likely to make headway when the progress of institutional programs and objectives are dependent on real and sustainable EDI changes (Vaughan & Murugesu 2020). Broad representation of underrepresented groups can help to build relationships with these groups and make sure that the institution is responsive to their needs.

Institutions should also embrace students' voices; this is important for creating a more equitable and inclusive learning environment and can provide all students with the opportunity to succeed. This approach can improve the quality of postgraduate education by incorporating students' perspectives into the process. This approach will help to ensure that students are engaged in the process and that they feel like they have a stake in the process, where students feel like they are heard and respected, and create a more democratic learning environment.

Another key approach to implementing and improving EDI is through implementing support structures that address the unique challenges faced by students in postgraduate education. This remains a core idea for improving EDI in postgraduate education. As Warwick university scholar Strongylakou (2022) pointed out, the postgraduate teacher should often question their role inside the classroom: "am I a teacher or a facilitator? This question is important to know whether the teachers are there to just teach their modules or facilitate understanding, support and experience of postgraduate education beyond the classroom". Ono-George (2019) highlights the prevalence of racism and negative experience of students and staff of colour in HE institutions and the need to not only change the pedagogy but also decolonize the institution. The advocacy for equality, diversity and inclusion should not end in the classroom. Getting the necessary support is key for postgraduate students to navigate the opportunities and experiences of postgraduate education (Lindner 2020). Active supports structure may include mentoring, sharing resources and opportunities that will help postgraduate students in their studies and career. This will provide the students with a huge repository of rich experience that places them in a good position to make incremental changes in their study and professional fields.

Benefits of Implementing EDI-focused Strategies in Postgraduate Education

Students benefit from EDI-rich environments because they are exposed to a wide range of perspectives and experiences, which can help them enhance their learning outcomes and build critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Students are more motivated and engaged because they have a strong sense of belonging and value (UNESCO, 2017).

Firstly, postgraduate students' academic performance improves because they feel included and tend to perform better academically. Beyond academic performance, an EDI-responsive learning environment automatically exposes students to a broader range of career opportunities based on an established intercultural and diverse community that offers support and encouragement throughout the educational process, fostered by diversity and inclusion (Wolbring &Lillywhite 2021).

Implementing EDI-focused strategies can also foster interdisciplinary collaboration and inclusive education system that will consequently lead to a more diverse and representative academic community, contributing to the development of inclusive practices in various professional fields beyond their institutions. Postgraduate pedagogies should aim to increase and democratize student involvement and collaboration as part of a broader strategy in fostering an inclusive and diversified postgraduate education. Such EDI-focused approach minimizes the impact of teacher bias, drives student engagement, improvement and collaboration.

Conclusion

Creating a learning environment that is welcoming, supportive, and inclusive for all learners is central to postgraduate pedagogies. The need for concerted efforts from postgraduate teachers to prioritize and advocate for EDI in postgraduate pedagogies should be emphasized, because an EDI-focused postgraduate education can become a catalyst for producing graduates that will contribute to the development of inclusive practices in various professional fields beyond their institutions, and this will truly reflect our diverse and multi-cultural society through the ideals of education.

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Afterword: EDI and the PGR teacher experience: issues, opportunities and aspiring to an inclusive future in Higher Education

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Abstract:

PGR teacher 'liminality' is well documented, but when seen through the lens of equality, diversity and inclusion, the story becomes more nuanced. This Afterword looks through this lens, considering affordances, opportunities and issues arising for PGR teachers, thinking about their place in a sector which increasingly seeks inclusion. The author makes observations relating to recent institutional evidence and published literature, as well as considering how EDI can be most meaningfully understood in professional learning. She concludes with a celebration of PGR contributions to EDI and a stance that PGRs need to be central to the ambitions of inclusive University futures.

It is a privilege to be invited to write the Afterword for the JPPP, the third issue of this journal and, therefore, the third year of the Warwick Postgraduate Teaching Community (WPTC). Building on the eloquent contributions of our PGR authors in this issue, I would like to conclude with some thoughts about the wider context, the issues related to PGRs and equality, diversity and inclusion and how this fits with my own work, in professional learning.

Building inclusion at Warwick

I started my teaching journey (over 25 years ago!) as an adult literacy and language tutor in adult, community and further education. I saw first hand the impact that things like poor schooling, inequality of opportunity, neurodivergence, disability and having English as an additional language had on an individual's ability to succeed in education. When I joined the Higher Education sector, I was surprised at how little the notion of inclusive education was a part of the discourse. I think that has radically changed. Inclusion is a central pillar of the **Strategy at Warwick** and you'll find similar commitments at other UK HE institutions. Warwick has made tangible improvements, some of which are outlined in the **Social Inclusion Annual Report** (University of Warwick, 2023). Reading this report, it's clear how wide-reaching the work is, with some key achievements and targets, for example, Warwick has closed the Black awarding gap and pledges to eliminate this disadvantage completely by 2025 (yes, that's only two years away...). But how does this relate to postgraduate researchers? And to those who teach? This summer, Warwick launched the **National Centre for Research Culture** imbued with a sense of partnership, cross-institutional working and collaboration. This could be an exciting place for PGRs, with a number of initiatives which seek to widen opportunities and open doors (for example, Burford's work on transparency in the doctoral recruitment process; Meurer's initiative for PGR careers and skills in Chemistry; Koresteleva's promotion of international sustainability training for early career researchers). And work is continuing on **Warwick's Inclusive Education Model**. But in my pursuit of where PGR teachers fit into this, it gets more fuzzy. Warwick recognises (and I agree) that in order to build a more inclusive institution it needs representation at the top and ambitious KPIs in the social inclusion strategy focus on those colleagues in leadership roles (e.g. by 2030 a pledge to have 50% women professors, 25% BAME and 18% disabled colleagues at professorial level): the right kind of promotion and recruitment is a priority. In the comments for a recent WONKHE piece (Waring: 2023) discussing traits in Higher Education leadership (including 'passionate curiosity', 'team smarts' and 'fearlessness'...) a fellow reader notes the absence of diversity, *"One of the challenges with HE which isn't shared with many other sectors is the homogeneity of its leadership. I'm referring to their career pathway and experience. For HE to thrive and innovate requires a broader set of skills and experience."*

PGR liminality and equality, diversity and inclusion

So how do we get there? How does this consideration for inclusivity in recruitment to leadership roles relate to those academics at an earlier point in their career, like postgraduate researchers who teach? Some call this the 'pipeline'. Reflecting on access to teaching for international GTAs at a UK University, Winter et al (2014) surmise that recruitment was largely based on immediate need, without a thought for the 'future of academia', highlighting in their study that the opportunities to teach, for international GTAs, were less. Although almost 10 years ago, I am wondering how far we have moved on. Winter's assertions about inequitable recruitment chime with those found in the WPTC

Survey of PGR Teaching from 2021. It found discrepancies in recruitment practices, with some respondents noting a lack of transparency and one pointing to similar appointments of convenience: "*I got my teaching jobs on a basis of 'who you know, not what you know'. While I feel like my experience was fairly successful, it feels like there is a light nepotism culture for PGR teaching.*". Furthermore, when correlated with EDI data collected in the survey there was evidence of disadvantage in recruitment relating to gender and ethnicity, one example being: "*I was chosen for a position of responsibility (sort of spokesperson for the PGR teachers in my dept\ where the choosing criteria was ostensibly how many years of teaching experience I had. However, there was a female student of Asian-British ethnicity of identical experience who was seemingly not considered.*". The survey's nuanced look at the relationship between PGR teaching and protected characteristics revealed other factors. The survey found that higher numbers of female PGRs and non-binary/third gender PGRs felt that their interactions with students had been affected by their gender, sexuality, ethnicity or disability. In particular, female, BAME PGRs were more likely to experience less respect from students, for instance; "*Some students may address female staff in a less formal/respectful way. I also remember a couple of comments in the evaluation form being awfully rude*" and "*Some students seemed much more likely to listen to fellow PGR teachers who were male.*". Age and relative teaching experience were other emergent findings, with mature PGR respondents noting that they had not only less opportunities to teach but a lack of recognition of their existing teaching experience, "*I have lived experience and professional experience of the areas I am researching and motivated to teach, I was unaware of the teaching opportunities when they arose...I felt overlooked...*". Comments that particular impacted me related to the fact the professional learning opportunities were not designed for those with existing experience of teaching. It's true so say that in the Academic Development Centre our professional programmes place emphasis on 'current experience' (a preference of our accreditors, Advance HE) and although previous teaching can be evidenced (and specifically built upon through the <u>APP EXP pathway</u>), there is no real acknowledgement, accreditation of prior learning or experience (APEL) or validation of that in the eventual qualification outcome.

I feel there is more to interrogate here. Much of the literature relating to PGR teacher identities notes the 'liminal space' that they occupy as both 'staff' and 'student'. However, looking at the PGR teacher experience through the lens of equality, diversity and inclusion, we realise that this liminal space cannot simply be understood as professional identity. Intersectionality needs to be surfaced and understood both in relation to teachers and their teaching identities, and their access to teacher education and opportunities. Some recent publications provide insights. Huang et al (2023) describe the marginalised nature of Chinese, female GTAs and call for "*Higher education practitioners and scholars (to\ avoid bias by learning to better individuate—focus on GTAs' unique experiences rather than their group membership.*". Dillard et al (2023) point to undergraduate student perceptions of international PGRs as 'less relatable' and discuss whether this has origins in cultural difference or a lack of confidence; a confidence that might be addressed through professional learning

opportunities. Winter (2014) earlier, explored the teacher development needs of international GTAs and their experience of professional learning, which could be seen as a 'double foreign language' and I know that the focus on narrative and reflections which is ubiquitous in programmes like mine does sometimes seem like an unfamiliar genre. The internationalisation of Higher Education means that intercultural understandings of PGR teaching are becoming more surfaced I perceive. But looking at EDI more widely, there are other lenses too. Hastie (2021) describes an absence of discussion in the postgraduate pedagogies literature of the impact of socio-economic background and describes (as a working class PGR) their experience of class in relation to liminality weighing up noteworthy disadvantage (imposter syndrome) with more positive and enabling characteristics (approachability). In fact, they assert, being working class and a GTA might just provide the perfect 'training ground' for a future career in academia. And like the JPPP editors, I too read the paper by Slack and Pownell (2023) but was particularly struck (apart from the great title!) by the examples of PGR teachers managing their identity in the teaching space to positively impact and advocate for their students, for example "*introducing themselves as a disabled person...*". I find this urge to be human, relatable and 'legitimate' to undergraduates as very familiar: I see it in the work of the PGRs I teach all the time, through their narratives of professional practice and programme journals.

Professional learning, PGRs and EDI

So what then is the best way to support and develop PGR teachers in the space of equality, diversity and inclusion? I have often found this troubling as a course leader; worried that, as a broad-ranging topic, I would not be able to do it justice or somehow end up being tokenistic. But I think I have settled on something now: that professional learning in this space is an authentic and discursive practice. And that's different from 'training'. Hassenfeldt (2019) in investigating GTA understanding of autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) in students calls for better training and resources. This is a request I have seen at Warwick through my work with the Doctoral College, for example, where academics have asked for more training on ASD in relation to supervision and where, as part of the forthcoming PGR strategy, the notion of 'what training is needed for PGRs' has recently been a hot topic. The trouble with training is that it implies a 'one and done' opportunity. It's a good starting point, for sure. But it does not really help us to get to a point of real understanding, where we can adapt, question and challenge our practice as a result.

On the subject of ASD, the recent, brilliant **Neurodiversity toolkit** offers helpful resources…but much more than that. As an initiative co-produced with neurodiverse students, this tells the stories behind the difference. As these materials launched, I attended a WIHEA masterclass with students who shared their authentic experience of disseminating their diagnosis through formal university processes. They described systemic challenges which are not only inefficient, but exhausting to the individual. As someone 'on the other end' of

those systems, I could immediately and more deeply understand their challenges. This year, for the first time in my 20 years at Warwick, I received a disability statement for a participant from Disability Services. It was really helpful. But I know there will have been others that simply did not make it to me. In the absence of such information, I have always requested, at application stage, that my participants share anything they feel is relevant which means I can make reasonable adjustments on the programme: anything from beliefs, caring responsibilities, disability or simply preferences. And I act on those. But as we know from the BAME attainment gap, issues do not only exist solely on entry: they manifest through the processes of curricula, which needs to be continuously checked. A good example of this came this year when a neurodivergent student on APP PGR explained the challenges with my flexible approach to online work. In trying to be kind, and account for the difficult balance of work I know PGRs face, I had inadvertently disadvantaged this individual by not adhering to firmer deadlines. This led to a nuanced discussion, shared understanding and, for me, a new way of thinking about how I manage the online work of my programme to be fairer to all. No 'training session' could have done that; it relied on authentic dialogue alongside someone with lived experience.

All teachers, not just PGRs should consider their positionality and how it impacts on their practice. I now begin the APP PGR programme with this activity (based on Jacobson et al, 2019), having been through it myself with colleagues as a developmental exercise in the Academic Development Centre last year. I found this process both painful and revealing, as I understood, 30 years after my own undergraduate journey, where my lack of cultural capital as a first generation, working class female in a Russell Group university left me with an imposter syndrome I still struggle to shake off. But by sitting with these feelings, I have begun to realise how they have come to form my identity as a teacher, where they might lead to unconscious bias and where they also, to a degree, provide an opportunity, aligned with Hastie's assertions; a kind of pedagogic superpower.

PGRs and their impact on EDI

Returning to the issues of equality, diversity and inclusion more widely, I wanted to conclude with a reflection on some of the positive examples I have seen from our community this year related to, or initiated by, PGRs. Becky Vipond's tenacious work advocating for an international Warwick scholarship PhD student of lower economic status, enabling them to receive financial support from the University to cover relocation costs (against much challenge) was something I truly admired. The Active Bystander for PGRs programme, developed by former WPTC member Pierre Botcherby, has provided a bespoke and sustainable programme with PGR teachers in mind, which can now be a source of continued professional development for future generations. Reading Decoloniality is an interdisciplinary reading group and open source publication founded by recent PGRs, to enable critical dialogue and engagement around themes of decolonisation in the literature. The

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WIHEA-funded project Building Values-Based Learning and Pedagogy in Sports Coaching, led by Youn Affejee used pedagogical principles to bring increased inclusion in sports coaching, and is now being disseminated to specialist 'activator' sports coaches by colleagues at Warwick Sport. Recently, Bing Lu's Inclusive Education Best Practice Toolkit 2023, co-created with staff and students, seeks to bring recommendations to the fore about inclusive practices in the Faculty of Arts. Finally, I want to acknowledge the current members of WPTC whose decision to focus on issues of EDI this year has permeated their work, with nuanced changes such as improvements in accessibility to this journal, and to appropriately re-branding our community of practice to better speak to a wider variety of PGRs at Warwick.

What these initiatives all have in common is authenticity, collaboration and dialogue. They are just some recent examples, alongside which there are countless, unseen pedagogic practices by PGRs who teach, seeking to foster inclusion, understand diversity and bring equality into Higher Education. I know this, because I read it in this issue and in almost every submission on the APP PGR programme. Advance HE refreshed its professional standards in 2022 (Baldry et al, 2023) with a greater emphasis on participants needing to demonstrate that their practice is inclusive and effective in order to achieve the relevant professional status. This will be no problem for PGR teachers. Institutional strategy and KPIs are one thing, but they cannot be achieved without the actions of individuals and engaged groups. The landscape of EDI seems varied and challenging but by hearing each other, being curious, sharing authentic stories and experiences and making an active effort to 'join the dots' we can keep improving. I am hopeful that Warwick Postgraduate Teaching Community and the Journal of PGR Pedagogic Practice continue to give voice and advocate for change. I also call upon my colleagues, those in more senior roles, to recognise both the challenges and affordances of PGR teachers within the realm of equality, diversity and inclusion. Because we cannot achieve the inclusive Higher Education we aspire to without developing (to quote Sian Waring) the 'battle-hardened confidence' of our PGR colleagues. And if they (those featured in this issue and beyond) represent the future of Higher Education, from what I have seen, the future of HE leadership is bright. I do hope they'll stay.

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