

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Wearing many hats - the experience of the Graduate Teaching Demonstrators at the University of Greenwich

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**Research Domain:** Student experiences (SE)

**Abstract:** The move to blended learning during the pandemic has been a fertile ground for the exploration of innovative roles and ways of working to address the needs of universities. Drawing on Role Identity Theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978), and concepts of liminality (Winstone and Moore, 2017) and the Third Space (Whitchurch, 2013), this research paper explores the hybridity of roles and identities, and value and complexity of relationships with students and colleagues of the Graduate Teaching Demonstrators (GTDs) at the University of Greenwich, a role introduced in 2020/21 to support staff and students in the move to blended learning. The research explores the experience of the GTDs, and their impact on students and staff who benefited from their support. In addition, it informs practice by providing insights on how to foster successful collaboration with students and generates recommendations to create stronger connections within the community, helping to innovate and inspire.

**Paper:** The changing nature of the higher education sector has always been a fertile ground for the exploration of new ways of working and envisaging new roles that could address the needs of universities in the future. With the advent of the pandemic, creating such new solutions has never been more important. However, the emergence of new roles that embrace new ideas and possibilities also raises questions about assumptions and uncertainties regarding the identities that these roles will entail (Whitchurch, 2013).

With the aim to support recent graduates to start their career, and to support staff and students in the move to blended learning, the University of Greenwich launched the Graduate Teaching Demonstrators (GTDs) scheme in 2020/21. The research project assesses the outcome of the scheme from different perspectives: the experience of the GTDs in relation to their own personal and professional growth and their impact on students; and the members of staff who benefited from the support of the GTDs.

The University currently employs 16 GTDs of which 9 took part in the research project representing all four Faculties. Out of 13 line managers, 11 staff participated in the research. The data collection was undertaken by a student researcher, a current MSc student at the University, who interviewed the GTDs and line managers and facilitated a focus group with GTDs. Two individual semi-structured interviews with the GTDs were conducted in February and May after each teaching term to explore the GTDs' motivations, onboarding experience, and their responsibilities and experience more broadly as well as the impact they felt they had had on students. In addition, the student researcher

facilitated a focus group with the GDTs between the interviews to allow the GDTs to share and compare their experiences and explore their professional identity. The student researcher also conducted individual semi-structured interviews with the line managers to explore their perceptions of the role and the impact GDTs had on the staff and student community in their department. Data are currently analysed using NVivo to identify emerging themes from the qualitative data collected.

To assist with the exploration of some of the main themes identified so far, e.g., the hybridity of roles and identities, value and complexity of relationships, connecting with a wider community, and bridging the gap between academics and students, the paper draws on the Role Identity Theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978) that postulates that one can simultaneously hold and move between multiple identities and roles which are partly determined by the perceptions and behaviours of others (Jazvac-Martek, 2009). The theory will help investigate the multiplicity of the roles taken on by GDTs, the fluidity of identities, the perceptions and acknowledgement of their roles by others, and explore the impact of these experiences both at an individual and a wider institutional level. Adopting liminality as an additional concept, i.e., a position which is 'ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification' (Turner, 1974: 232) may also add to the conceptualisation of the space occupied by GDTs and the hybridity of their roles (Winstone and Moore, 2017).

The discussion will also be supported by the concept of the Third Space (Whitchurch, 2013). Defined as "the emergence of broadly based, extended projects across the university, which are no longer containable within firm boundaries, and have created new portfolios of activity" (ibid: 24), the Third Space foregrounds relationships and knowledge developed within, embraces the permeability between academic and professional domains, and acknowledges the complexity of identities within the spaces they reside (Whitchurch, 2013, 2008a, 2008b). A closer examination of GDTs' identities, activities, and relationships they form with students and colleagues within their Higher Education Institution (HEI) will help address the misconceptions, dilemmas or tensions that accompany these roles, as well as assess the opportunities for both individuals and institutions.

In addition to novel theoretical insights, the research informs practice by providing insights on how to foster successful collaboration with students. Rooted in the literature addressing the Students as Partners (SaP) framework with its underpinning values of inclusion, 'respect, responsibility, and reciprocity' (Bovill, 2017: 1), and extended by exploring the mediatory roles of both the GDTs and the student researcher participating in the project, the research generates recommendations to create closer and stronger connections within the community, helping to innovate and inspire.

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