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

We would like to thank the PTC team (past and present) for their continuous support. Special mention to Sophie Pain, Sara Hattersley and Pierre Botcherby who have assisted the team throughout the whole journey of bringing this issue to life. Without your support and expertise this issue would not be possible. We are also grateful for the wise words of advice imparted by founding member and editor Josh Patel at the workshop. We hope that this issue is representative of your vision for the JPPP. This issue as well as all other PTC endeavours this year has been kindly funded by the Academic Development Centre (ADC).

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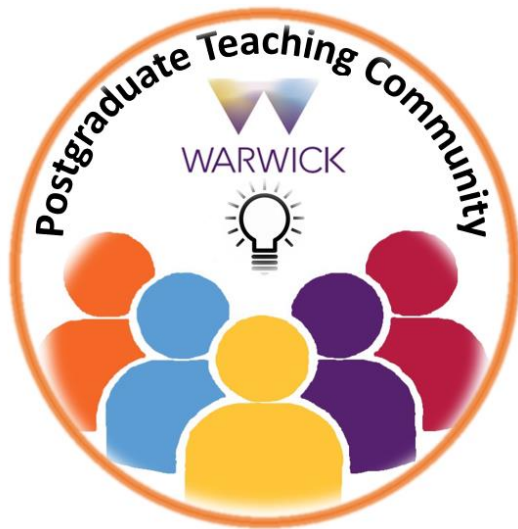
This year we are proud to unveil the new logo for the Warwick post graduate community (WPTC/PTC). The logo was developed by the WPPTC team and incorporates many of the design elements which reflect our values and practices.

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.