To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by James Gary Marsh entitled "A Phenomenological Investigation of the Experience of Teaching for Graduate Teaching Assistants." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Mark A. Hector, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

A Phenomenological Investigation of the Experience of Teaching for Graduate Teaching Assistants

A Dissertation

Presented for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

James Gary Marsh

December 1998

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents

Dr. Gary Marsh

and

Mrs. Elaine Bowling

who have helped me create a vision for my life.

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I am deeply grateful to many individuals for their help in the completion of this dissertation. I want to first thank the GTAs who gave of their time and were willing to share their personal stories of teaching.

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Most importantly, I want to honor my wife, Amy Marsh. Her unfailing love for me and steadfast faith in God have been my source of strength to complete this degree.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the teaching experience of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). Six male and six female GTAs from a large southeastern university participated in individual 45 to 90 minute unstructured interviews in which they were asked to talk about their experiences of teaching as a GTA. The GTA participants represented several different departments and varied in amount of teaching experience from three to nine semesters. Participants also represented a diversity of teaching formats familiar to GTAs including lecture, discussion, and lab. The main requirements for participation were that the GTA had primary responsibility for the teaching in that class and had at least two semesters of experience teaching as a GTA. Each GTA was asked to respond to the following statement: "Tell me about your experience of teaching as a GTA." Each interview was then transcribed and analyzed using a phenomenological method.

Analysis revealed a thematic structure comprised of three, main, interrelated themes: (1) Awareness of Self; (2) Awareness of Students; and (3) Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries. The first main theme, Awareness of Self, was described as the participants' awareness of themselves as teachers in the context of their students. This main theme consisted of the following seven sub-themes which represent the personal attributes that participants were aware of in their experiences: Self as Confident, Self as Knowledgeable, Self as Prepared, Self as Authority, Self as Performer, Who I

Am, and Self as Learner. The second main theme, Awareness of Students, was described as the participants' awareness of their students and how the students influenced their experience of teaching. GTAs were aware of their students in ways reflected in the following four sub-themes: Students as Interested/Not Interested, Students as Confrontational, Gender, and Race. The third main theme, Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries, was described as the participants' experience of the relationship between themselves and their students. GTAs were aware of wanting to make connections with their students which was balanced by keeping a boundary that separated "I the teacher" from "you the student".

As one theme became figural, the others became the ground and contextualized the figural theme. As the first theme, Awareness of Self, emerged as figural and participants were aware of themselves in the experience of teaching, their awareness of their students receded and formed the ground from which participants made meaning about who they were as teachers. As the second theme, Awareness of Students, became figural and GTAs focused on some behavior or characteristic of their students, their awareness of themselves receded and became the ground from which they experienced their students. The third theme, Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries, was contextualized by the perceived roles that GTAs and students play which incorporates aspects of both Awareness of Self and Awareness of Students.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION 1
Problem Statement 6

II. LITERATURE REVIEW 7
History 7
GTA Socialization 14
GTA Experiences of Teaching 25
GTA Attitudes and Expectations for Teaching 32

III. METHOD 41
Data Collection 41
Participant Criteria 41
Participant Selection 42
The Interview Process 43
Protection of Participants 44
Data Analysis 44
The Bracketing Interview 44
Research Groups 46
Thematization 47
Obtaining a Sense of the Whole 47
Identifying Significant Statements 48
Formulating Meaning Units 49
Clustering Themes 49
Developing a Structural Description and Confirming the Findings 50

IV. RESULTS 52
Introduction 52
Non-Thematic Aspects of the Interviews 53
Phenomenological Analysis 58
Thematic Structure of the Experience of Teaching: Overview 59
Themes 61
Theme I: Awareness of Self 62
Sub-theme 1: Self as Confident 63
Sub-theme 2: Self as Knowledgeable 65
Sub-theme 3: Self as Prepared 67
Sub-theme 4: Self as Authority 71
Sub-theme 5: Self as Performer 72
Sub-theme 6: Who I Am 74

Sub-theme 7: Self as Learner 76

Theme II: Awareness of Students 79
Sub-theme 1: Students as Interested/Not Interested 80
Sub-theme 2: Students as Confrontational 84
Sub-theme 3: Gender 85
Sub-theme 4: Race 86

Theme III: Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries 87
Sub-theme 1 of Making a Connection: Getting Through 88
Sub-theme 2 of Making a Connection: Going Beyond 89
Sub-theme 3 of Making a Connection: Seeing it in the Eyes 91
Sub-theme 4 of Making a Connection: Use of First Names 92
Supervisors: Being There – Not Being There 100
Thematic Structure of the Experience of Teaching: Revisited 103

V. DISCUSSION 109
Final Thoughts for GTAs, Faculty and Administrators 139

REFERENCES 144

APPENDICES 155
Appendix A: Letter Inviting Participation in Study 156
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form 158
Appendix C: Sample Interview 161
Appendix D: Confidentiality Guidelines for Research Members 177
Appendix E: Cover Letter and Description of Thematic Structure Sent to Participants 179

VITA 191

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are an important part of the instructional staff in higher education across America and have been for a long time. Housed primarily in research universities, the GTA system provides an inexpensive source of instruction for a growing body of undergraduates and a source of relief from teaching duties for faculty involved in research activities that have traditionally paved the path toward tenure. As John D. Andrews notes, "The role of teaching assistant (TA) is one of the most creative inventions in the history of higher education " (Andrews, 1985, p. 1). Andrews goes on to note the reason why: The teaching assistantship provides financial support for graduate study and helps relieve the problem of a high faculty-student ratio. Many benefits exist for both the institution and the individual graduate student which is why the system has been intact for many years. Furthermore, as noted by Nyquist, Abbott, Wulff, and Sprague (1991), although all GTAs do not become professors, practically all professors have been a GTA and report this experience to be their main form of preparation for teaching as faculty members.

The extent to which GTAs are responsible for undergraduate education varies from one university to the next. Nyquist et al. (1991) report that GTAs account for about 25-38% of undergraduate instruction. Smock and Menges (1985) reported that studies show in larger universities that GTAs teach nearly

38% of classes in a particular semester. At some universities this percentage may be even higher. For example, in 1985 it was reported that teaching assistants handled 58% of the lower-division classes at the University of California-Berkeley (Berkeley: The Training Project of the Graduate Assembly, 1985). Proportions of GTA teachers are significant at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) as is the case at other large research universities. At UTK GTAs make up 47% of the instructional workforce and teach 26.7% of undergraduate classes (The Graduate School, 1996).

As the percentage of classes taught by GTAs increases so does the attention to this group and their impact on the quality of undergraduate education. Furthermore, with 500,000 new professors needed by 2014 to teach undergraduates (Nyquist, Abbott, & Wulff, 1989) the urgency of researching, preparing, and training this group of individuals as teachers becomes even more important.

Researchers have responded to the need for studying how GTAs will become the teachers of the future. Probably the largest body of research has focused on the effectiveness of different types of teacher training (Abbott, Wulff, & Szego, 1989; Carroll, 1980; Levinson-Rose & Menges, 1981). For the most part, these studies have yielded inconclusive evidence about the components of training that produce better teaching. Other researchers have focused their attention on the classroom behaviors of GTAs such as argumentativeness (Roach, 1995a, 1995b), the use of behavior alteration techniques for classroom

management (Roach, 1991), and strategies for the first day of class (Hayward, 1993). In addition to classroom behaviors, researchers have also studied subjective experiences associated with teaching such as anxiety (Williams, 1991) and self-efficacy (Prieto & Altmaier, 1994) as well as the more general experience of teaching itself (Boehrer & Sarkisian, 1985; Worthen, 1992). Furthermore, researchers have investigated GTA attitudes toward different teaching styles and teaching as a career goal (Bomotti, 1994; McDowell, 1993), and also compared the teaching effectiveness of GTAs to faculty (Harper, 1991). One final area of research which has produced a strong interest is the process of socialization by which GTAs become members of the professoriate (Myers, 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Pavalko & Holley, 1974; Staton & Darling, 1989).

Some researchers have called for the use of qualitative methodologies to compliment the quantitative studies dominating the field of college teaching. Levinson-Rose and Menges (1981) stated that quantitative methods,

> ...tend to distance [the] researcher from participants in the name of objectivity and control. Seldom do data reveal the world-as-experienced by the teachers and students we study. To advance the field we need careful classroom ethnographies, disciplined case studies, and sensitive clinical interviews as well as rigorous experimentation. (p. 419)

Even though this statement was published over fifteen years ago, very little has changed regarding the nature of the research methods used to study GTAs and their teaching.

Only two qualitative studies have focused on GTAs' experience of teaching. Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) and Worthen (1992) employed qualitative methods to examine the experience of teaching for GTAs. Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) investigated the total experience of being a GTA and focused on issues such as the GTA's view of the job and relation to the institution. One part of their study was devoted to the experience of teaching in which they interviewed three experienced GTAs about their experiences of teaching and identified the following themes: assumed competence, knowing and telling, teaching role, responsibility for student learning, and the individual's own voice. Worthen (1992) used teaching logs, interviews, and group discussions with seven GTAs in a speech communications department to investigate the experience of teaching for GTAs. Themes were developed from data gathered from each of the three sources and further translated into a list of needs to inform future training purposes. Worthen presented the following themes from his study: need teacher preparation, frustrating experience, beneficial and rewarding, role conflict, cares about students, and miscellaneous.

Qualitative methods can provide the richness of experience from the GTAs' own description that is often missing in quantitative analyses. Further research on the GTA experience of teaching needs to continue building on the themes discovered by these two studies. The purpose of the current study was to describe the experience of teaching for GTAs from their own perspective using their own words. Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) and Worthen (1992) have both

used qualitative methods to describe the GTA experience of teaching. Both studies have produced a list of themes that are useful for describing the experience and, in the case of Worthen, identifying the needs of GTAs for future training. In terms of the experience of teaching for GTAs, Boehrer and Sarkisian devoted part of their study specifically to the experience of teaching for GTAs which is similar to the purpose of the current study. Although both of these studies have similarities with the current study, there are four major differences that exist. The first major difference was that the current study focused only on the experience of teaching for GTAs. The other studies have focused more broadly on the overall experience of being a GTA in terms of how GTAs experienced the role of teacher and how they experienced their relation to the institution. Boehrer and Sarkisian briefly focused on the experience of teaching in their study. The current study focused specifically on the experience of teaching and described the meaning of that experience. The second major difference was the current study included twelve GTAs with at least two semesters of teaching experience. Worthen's study included seven Master's level students with six of them having no prior teaching experience. The current study used experienced GTAs who have taught at least a year with the intent of describing the experience of teaching beyond the initial experience. The third major difference was that GTAs from various academic disciplines and teaching formats were involved. GTAs with primary responsibility for leading lectures, discussions, and labs were asked to participate. Worthen (1992) included GTAs

from only one academic discipline who used a lecture format. The fourth major difference was that the themes describing the experience of teaching were derived from the GTAs' own descriptions and not from the researcher's personal experience or preconceived notions about what the experience of teaching is for GTAs. Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) interviewed three GTAs and incorporated their personal experiences as consultants with the interview data of the GTAs.

Problem Statement

Most of the literature on GTAs has been directed toward program development and evaluating the effectiveness of different training methods to improve teaching (Abbott, Wulff, & Szego, 1989; Carroll, 1980; Levinson-Rose & Menges, 1981). Nothing has been done with phenomenological research to investigate teaching as experienced by GTAs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate and describe the experience of teaching for GTAs from their own perspective and using their own words.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

History

Allen and Reuter (1990) have written a history of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) in higher education. The GTA system originated in the mid-nineteenth century and has increased in prevalence over time (Allen & Reuter, 1990). It was probably around the year 1850 when educators determined that love of knowledge was not a sufficient enough incentive to draw students into graduate school and decided to offer financial support for students to continue their studies at the graduate level (Storr, 1953). A few years later in 1876 at Johns Hopkins University, twenty fellowships were offered to attract graduate students. Other schools began to follow suit; the University of Chicago offered stipends in the range of $400 to $500 a year. At the time these stipends did not require services in return. Even with such financial incentives, the amount was not sufficient to meet the living expenses of students which led to students working extra jobs to make money. This paved the way for graduate students to work as teaching assistants as a source of additional income (Chase, 1970).

The GTA system may have started in the nineteenth century, but it wasn't until after World War II that the system flourished across the country. After World War II, a unique situation faced American universities. Approximately two million veterans entered college due to funding from the GI Bill (Chase, 1970).

This influx flooded many universities with more students than they were prepared to handle. As William Lnenicka (1972) stated about this period in history, "The faculties of most of the major universities in the United States were stretched near the breaking point in the five years following World War II" (p. 1).

Other major events were factors in the increased role of teaching assistants. In addition to the number of veterans returning to college, the government began pouring money into the educational system in response to the Soviet launching of Sputnik. The Space Race had begun and the federal government wanted to keep pace with the Soviet Union. One way of doing this was by creating teaching assistantships, fellowships, and traineeships to entice the best students across the United States (Chase, 1970).

Faculty salaries were another factor influencing the educational system and the use of teaching assistants. After World War II;

> ...faculty salaries of the day were so low that almost a whole generation of teachers was lost to industry and business. Class sizes became larger and larger, the need for faculty members more desperate year by year, and as an emergency measure, graduate, and even senior undergraduate, students were thrown into the gap as teaching assistants. (Lnenicka, 1972, p. 97)

Teaching assistants were meeting the demands of an increasing number of undergraduates because there simply weren't enough doctoral degree holding graduates to fill the teaching slots in universities.

Around the same time that the GTA system began to flourish in higher education, questions and concerns began to surface about the preparation of

college teachers and the efficacy of using graduate students to teach undergraduates. Many began to question the ethics of using graduate students to teach. William Lnenicka (1972) stated, "The pseudo faculty status conferred upon these individuals provided then, and provides today, a cover for incompetence in the classroom, and those who pay the price are the undergraduates" (p. 97). Lnenicka is only one of several who questioned the GTA system and saw it as damaging to the overall enterprise of education. More recently, in 1992, Martin Anderson wrote a book, Impostors in the Temple, which questions the current role of GTAs in college teaching and suggests that the GTA system is now out of control.

However, these complaints were not new. Questions had been raised as early as 1930 about the ability of graduate students to teach undergraduates and what was being done to prepare graduate students to fill their future roles as professors. The individual that began raising these questions early on was Dr. Laing, Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Chicago. In 1930, the Administrative Officers of Higher Institutions in Chicago held a series of meetings concerning the state of college teaching. Laing's focus was on the preparation of future teachers. Most of his questions were about how departments in different graduate schools were preparing their students to become teachers. He asked questions such as, "What sort of college teachers do our Doctors of Philosophy make?" (Laing, 1930, p. 51). Such questions did not go away and they began to emerge repeatedly over the years in conferences in the 1940's, 1950's, and

1960's. Wise (1967) noted that at a conference in 1949, speakers were lamenting that college teachers were not being prepared to do their job. In fact they recognized that the role of a graduate education was to produce scholars and then hope they could become a good teacher. This ideology remains with us today:

> The emphasis on the graduate school experience is still focused on graduate study and research, and graduate students are provided only limited preparation for the teaching duties they assume. Laing's (1930) questions remain unanswered in 1989, nearly sixty years later. (Nyquist, Abbott, & Wulff, 1989, p. 8)

Educators have responded to the challenges and made significant attempts to train graduate students to teach. In fact, the literature is full of program descriptions, training modules, seminar ideas, and workshop topics on how to train GTAs to fulfill their duties as teachers. In particular, the late 1960s produced an abundance of such program descriptions for training GTAs to teach (e.g., Buckenmyer, 1972; Rose, 1972; Siebring, 1972). In addition to the numerous program descriptions, research on the effectiveness of training programs dominated the literature from the late 1960s through the 1980's (Carroll, 1980; Nyquist, Abbott, Wulff, & Sprague, 1991). Both research reviews came to the general conclusion that training increased the overall teaching effectiveness of GTAs, however, little is known about what components of the training programs are most effective at producing the improved teaching results.

Interest in GTA issues has greatly increased. Evidence of increased attention comes from three main indicators: national conferences devoted to

GTA issues, major publications, and the recent events surrounding labor union disputes involving GTAs. The first indicator comes from several major conferences devoted to GTA issues. There have been five major conferences held in the late 1980s and early 1990s devoted solely to the employment, training, and education of GTAs. The first national conference was held in 1986 in Columbus, Ohio at The Ohio State University. One of the main outcomes of the first national conference of the Employment and Education of Teaching Assistants was the establishment of a clearinghouse related to information on the education of GTAs. This National Clearinghouse was eventually established through the ERIC collection. The Second National Conference was held three years later in 1989 and like its predecessor provided valuable information for developing training programs for GTAs (Wright, 1989). Since the conference in 1989, a conference on the training and employment of teaching assistants has been held every two years (1991, 1993, and 1995) clearly marking the importance of GTAs to the process of undergraduate education.

A second indicator of increased attention to GTAs has been the recent publications devoted to GTA issues. Two issues of New Directions for Teaching and Learning (nos. 22 and 39) focused completely on GTAs. The first issue published in 1985 entitled "Strengthening the Teaching Assistant Faculty" included chapters on topics such as "The Teaching Assistant's Point of View", "Programs for TAs in the Context of Campus Policies and Priorities", and "Improving the Working Relationship Between Professor and TA" (Andrews,

1985). The second issue published in 1989 entitled "Teaching Assistant Training in the 1990's" included chapters on topics such as "The Challenge of TA Training in the 90's", "Socialization of Teaching Assistants", and "TA Supervision" (Nyquist, Abbott, and Wulff, 1989). In addition to these two publications, Nyquist, Abbott, Wulff, and Sprague edited a book of selected readings on GTAs entitled Preparing the Professoriate of Tomorrow to Teach: Selected Readings in TA Training (1991). This book includes 56 chapters on topics such as GTA Supervision, GTA Training, Resources, and International Teaching Assistants (ITAs). In addition to these three sources, a new journal began publication in 1994 called the Journal of Graduate Teaching Assistant Development. This journal is a quarterly publication devoted to empirical and theoretical papers on GTA development. Even though numerous program descriptions for training GTAs and teaching handbooks have been published in journals and by individual universities for many years, the emergence of these four publications signify the place of importance and attention that GTAs are receiving.

A third indicator involves recent events surrounding GTAs and their importance to the mission of undergraduate education. Labor unions are joining forces with GTAs and bargaining for increased pay and benefits. In January of 1996, 200 GTAs at Yale University withheld grades from the university in the humanities and social sciences in an effort to bargain for increased pay and benefits. Yale University responded with an ultimatum to submit the grades or loose teaching assignments. The strike ended with 137 GTAs being arrested

because their protest blocked an intersection ("Winter of Pickets", 1996). The Yale incident represents the growing issue of labor unions in higher education. Currently only a few GTA labor unions exist, originating from efforts in the 1970s. However, "labor officials say the recent recognition of a union at the University of Kansas and campaigns under way in California and Illinois are signs of a new trend" ("Teaching Assistants' Organizing Grows: TAs Cite Increased Teaching Load", 1996, p. C5). Other recent events include the interest in preparing GTAs to fulfill their future roles as professors. The Chronicle of Higher Education ("Learning to Teach", 1996) detailed recent efforts involving the creation of mentor programs, research projects, and seminars to train GTAs to teach and fulfill other roles not related to research such as designing a course. Such programs and seminars are becoming more popular and are in place at several major institutions (e.g., University of Arizona, Duke University, and The University of Tennessee).

In summary, GTAs have been a part of higher education since the mid 1800's when financial stipends were offered to attract students to graduate study. These funds could not cover the cost of living at the time and graduate students began taking on jobs such as teaching to generate extra income. The GTA system didn't flourish until after World War II, when veterans on the GI Bill flooded colleges and universities across America. There weren't enough instructors to meet the demand and graduate students were recruited to teach the increasing number of undergraduates. Other factors including increased

federal spending on education and the departure of many faculty members to private industry created more employment opportunities for graduate students. As the GTA system has flourished, several questions have been raised about the training of college professors and the effectiveness of graduate students as teachers. In response, numerous program descriptions on training GTAs to teach followed by studies evaluating their effectiveness appeared in the literature during the late 1960s through 1980s. The attention given to GTA issues has steadily increased during the last decade as evidenced by the organization of major conferences on the employment and training of GTAs, the rise in major publications devoted to GTA concerns, and the political and scholarly developments surrounding GTAs such as labor unions and the implementation of comprehensive programs devoted to the development of GTAs as teachers.

GTA Socialization

In the past several years, the research on GTA socialization has become a focused line of research dealing specifically with GTAs and their eventual development into members of the professoriate. However, the literature on GTA socialization literature emerged from an earlier line of studies examining the development of a "professional self-concept" using a variety of professional students such as physicians (Huntington, 1957), lawyers (Lortie, 1959), musicians (Kadushin, 1969), and graduate students in general (Hall, 1968; Rosen and Bates, 1967; Weiss, 1981).

The research on "professional self-concept" examined the factors that contribute to the development of a professional identity. Huntington (1957), in a study of professional self-concept of medical students, reported that increased self-concept was a function of the student's perceived success in handling patient problems and being near the end of training, which was most likely the point where they were working with real patients. Hall (1968) studied the impact of passing qualifying exams on the professional self-concept of MIT students. Hall found that students passing the qualifying exams "see themselves as being more like professors than they did before, and the reason is that they perceive themselves, not the professor, in a different way" (p. 457). The students reported an increase in intellectual and personal strength. Kadushin (1969) in a study of music students found that students with a higher professional self-concept expect to earn more money, are more committed to a career in music, were in school longer, had more professional performances, and tended to place higher in competitions. Weiss (1981) studied professional role commitment among graduate students. In an attempt to identify factors leading to professional role commitment, Weiss found that frequent and informal meetings with the faculty strongly bolster one's commitment to the profession over student ability, time in program, interaction with and prestige of the institution.

In summary, several factors contribute to the development of a professional self-concept. One common factor is the opportunity for role-enactment such as working with patients for physicians and performing

professionally in competitions and concerts for musicians. In Lortie's 1959 article on the process of laymen becoming lawyers, he notes "It appears very much as if laymen become lawmen only partially in law school and that the important transformations take place in the hurly-burly of work after graduation" (p. 367). Doing the job that will eventually be a full-time concern seems to play a major role in the development of professional self-concept (Kadushin, 1969). A second factor in the development of a professional self-concept involves the completion of certain program requirements such as comprehensive exams. According to Hall (1968), such accomplishments change how an individual perceives themselves more than their perceptions of others. A third factor affecting professional self-concept is the nature of the relationships between a student and his/her professors. Frequent and informal contact promotes identity development.

One of the earliest studies on the socialization of GTAs was by Pavalko and Holley (1974). Their study was the first to investigate the process of socialization within the disciplines of the academic profession. Pavalko and Holley were interested in how autonomy and previous experience impacted the professional self-concept of GTAs. The variable "autonomy" was divided into seven measures. Pavalko and Holley found that only three of the measures (selection of course content, selection and construction of tests and evaluation techniques, and control of grade assignment) were significantly related to self-concept. Of the three, having control of assigning grades was the most strongly

related to professional self-concept. In addition to autonomy and previous experience, role enactment (are job duties routine vs. complex?), exposure to graduate school, success as a teaching assistant, and career expectations were also measured to see how they related to professional self-concept. Pavalko and Holley found that "the complexity of work performed is directly related to the strength of professional self-concept and the more the work is perceived to be like that of the faculty, the more professional is the self-concept" (p. 467). Also, perceived success and amount of time teaching are both positively related to professional self-concept while previous experience (holding a teaching position at any level prior to the GTA position) had a weak, but positive association with self-concept. In concluding their study, Pavalko and Holley made several suggestions regarding the development of professional self-concept among GTAs: 1) Faculty need to be more aware of the socialization process of GTAs; 2) GTAs need a system of progressive responsibility and autonomy in their role as teacher; 3) Don't grant autonomy too early or assign tasks beneath the student; both may inhibit the development of a professional self-concept.

Although the distinction between "professional self-concept" and "socialization" is not clear in Pavalko and Holley, it seems that the development of a professional self-concept is the result of the process of socialization. The operationalizing of these two terms needs to be clarified in future research.

Staton and Darling (1989) use the definition of socialization from an earlier study on the socialization of student physicians: "The process by which people

selectively acquire the values and attitudes, the interests, skills, and knowledge-in short, the culture-current in the groups of which they are, or seek to become, a member" (Merton, Reader, & Kendall, 1957, p. 287). Even though this definition originally applied to studies on the socialization of student physicians, the definition proves to be useful for conceptualizing GTA development and remains useful in the current literature. Applied to GTAs, socialization is the process by which new GTAs learn to perform the roles of both a student and a teacher within a specific department. It requires learning the values and expectations of a department and how one's behavior is interpreted by others. Furthermore, it involves the acquisition of knowledge and skill in a particular field or discipline. In essence, "The experience of being a TA becomes the means of socialization to the professoriate" (Staton & Darling, 1989, p. 16).

Subsequent research has built on the professional self-concept literature by asking new questions about the process of socialization such as: What socialization activities are most helpful? What messages are communicated to GTAs about their new roles? How do GTAs go about gathering information about their position? What are the development stages of the socialization process? Myers (1994a) asked GTAs to rate the availability and helpfulness of different socialization activities. He found that in terms of availability, interactions with other GTAs, other new GTAs, and the department secretary were the most available, while campus-wide training programs, department orientation sessions, and trips with others in the department were rated as the least

available. In terms of helpfulness, interactions with other GTAs and the department secretary were rated as the most helpful, while campus-wide training programs, department orientation sessions, and trips with others in the department were rated as the least helpful.

The findings from Myers' (1994b) study that GTAs find other GTAs the most available and helpful sources of socialization coincide with results from other studies. Researchers have found that GTAs prefer to talk to each other about their assistantship experiences rather than other people in the department when finding out information concerning their teaching assistantship duties (Darling & Staton, 1989; Duba-Biedermann, 1994). GTAs prefer an informal setting to acquire information as opposed to an orientation session or formal departmental meeting (Darling, 1987). Furthermore, the information that GTAs most often seek is usually about their assistantship duties and obligations (Williams & Roach, 1992).

Other studies such as Darling and Staton (1989) have focused on the types of messages that GTAs receive about their role and the information-seeking strategies that GTAs employ to handle conflicting messages. Darling and Staton observed a five-day training seminar and interviewed three GTAs to discover the messages that were being communicated to new GTAs by their department and by more experienced GTAs. Two main messages were communicated to the new GTAs: 1) GTAs were on a journey on which they moved from being a consumer to a creator of knowledge and 2) GTAs should

use their own status as students to help the undergraduates they are teaching. In addition to messages, the emergence of themes and metaphors were studied and "the unifying theme that emerged from this analysis is one of service: GTAs provide services for undergraduates" (p. 227). From the interview session, the main finding was that GTAs were primarily concerned with "serving undergraduates and developing positive relationships with the faculty" (p. 233).

Although most of the research on GTA socialization has focused on the means by which socialization occurs for GTAs, a few studies have been devoted to developing a model to describe the stages of GTA socialization. This research follows the assumption that GTAs advance through different phases on their way toward becoming a full-fledged member of the professoriate. Borrowing from the organizational literature on socialization, Myers (1994a, 1995) applied the stages of socialization most generally agreed upon by organizational researchers to the context of GTAs and the professoriate. Myers identified the stages of GTA socialization as the anticipatory stage, the assimilation stage, and the exit stage. The anticipatory stage happens before the GTA teaches his/her first class. This stage involves the expectations a GTA has for his/her career and the preparation that a GTA undergoes before entering the work force. Myers (1994a) identified three components of this stage: vocational choice, organizational choice, and preservice training. In the assimilation stage, a GTA experiences a process of being integrated into the academic culture of his/her discipline. The GTA comes face-to-face with the

culture of the academic organization that involves the values, beliefs, attitudes, and expected behaviors that come with being a member of that organization. The assimilation stage has two sub-stages: the encounter stage and the metamorphosis stage. In the encounter stage, a GTA comes to grips with the behaviors and attitudes of his/her department. Norms of the department are continually impressed upon the new GTAs. The metamorphosis stage is crucial to socialization because here the GTA adopts the attitudes and behaviors acceptable to the academic organization for becoming a member (Myers, 1995). The final stage is the exit stage when the GTA leaves the organization for one reason or another.

To date, research has only been done on the anticipatory stage and the assimilation stage of GTA socialization. In addition, the studies have both been of an exploratory nature. Beginning with the anticipatory stage, Myers (1994a) constructed a series of questions that would explore the components of vocational choice, organizational choice, and preservice training. Seven open-ended questions were constructed and sent out in survey form to 236 GTAs. Each question asked GTAs to identify factors related to the different choices they had made regarding vocation, the organization (university), as well as reactions to training. One example of a question for vocational choice is "What factors influenced your decision to enter the field of your chosen profession?" When asked about career plans, Myers found that over 50% of GTAs in his study planned on becoming a professor in higher education. Interest and enjoyment in

the subject matter were the two highest factors influencing the chosen field of study. Needing an advanced degree for a job was the overwhelming reason for attending graduate school. In terms of factors influencing the decision to attend the university where enrolled, GTAs identified quality of program, location, and the offer of an assistantship as the most important. Most GTAs performed individual research about graduate programs or followed the recommendations of professors when inquiring about the university. In addition, professors were identified as the people that most likely influenced the choice to attend a particular university. The last question focused on the orientation program and its effect on their fears or concerns. Sixty percent of the participants reported the program reduced their fears about teaching. Myers' study was designed to explore the factors present in the anticipatory stage of socialization. Only the top factors for each of the seven questions are listed here. Other factors were identified and can be found in Myers (1994a).

The only other study done on the stages of GTA socialization was also by Myers (1995) on the second stage, assimilation. Myers proposed there are four components of the assimilation stage: supportive communication relationships, information-seeking practices, teacher communication concern, and additional socialization tactics of the institution. Myers' study examined the relationships between these four components and found there were significant correlations between these variables in the experience of GTAs in the assimilation stage. More specifically, supportive communication relationships correlated with

information-seeking practices, teacher communication concern, and organizational socialization tactics. Information-seeking practices correlated with teacher communication concern and organizational socialization tactics. Myers summarized these results by suggesting, "that communication is a central component of GTA socialization" (Myers, 1995, p. 8).

Although only a few research studies have been done on GTA socialization, three points begin to emerge in the findings of these studies. First, relationships are a key element in the socialization process of adapting to a new role and becoming part of the educational institution. Both professors and other GTAs play a part in this process with each being valued for different reasons. Relationships with professors contribute to a stronger sense of professional identity and self-concept. Professors are also considered the most influential people affecting a student's choice of a graduate program. Furthermore, one of the main concerns of GTAs is developing positive faculty relationships, which they prefer to do in more informal settings. GTAs on the other hand are valued for the information and support they offer. GTAs rated their interactions with other GTAs and the department secretary as the most available and helpful activities. Relationships and interactions with undergraduates also stand out for GTAs, but the meaning and significance of these relationships is not clear.

A second major point regarding the GTA socialization process involves the need for information. GTAs make significant efforts to obtain information about: their role as both a teacher and a student, their department policies and

procedures, the expectations of the department, how to handle problems with students and professors, and the resources available to them. GTAs use a variety of strategies to obtain different types of information and often have difficulty interpreting conflicting messages (Darling & Staton, 1989). It is evident that the need for information is a major concern for new GTAs and information is primarily gained through relationships. Although it would seem other avenues of obtaining information are available (such as a departmental handbook or other university guideline for faculty conduct), GTAs overwhelmingly choose to obtain information from peers first and then faculty and staff (e.g., department secretary) second. It may be that discrepancies exist between the messages contained in written information and those received through communication with others, and GTAs are looking for confirmation (Darling & Staton, 1989). Also, information is not only sought by GTAs but also conveyed to GTAs through formats such as department orientation sessions. The main messages communicated to GTAs are they are becoming creators of knowledge and they provide a service to undergraduates.

The third main point is that GTA socialization can be viewed as a developmental process broken down into three stages; anticipatory, assimilation, and exit. Only the anticipatory and assimilation stages have been studied. The anticipatory stage occurs before the first class is taught. This stage includes expectations and preparation for the new teaching role. Over 50% of GTAs planned to become professors and they selected their chosen field based on

interest and enjoyment of the subject matter. The assimilation stage is the second stage and it involves the integration of the GTA into the culture of the academic organization. The GTA is faced with values, beliefs, and attitudes of the academic organization and becomes a member of the organization by accepting these cultural characteristics as his/her own. The acquisition of information is the main component of this stage. The final stage is the exit stage and occurs when the GTA leaves the academic organization. No studies have been done on this stage.

GTA Experiences of Teaching

There have been two qualitative studies directly investigating the GTA experience of teaching. Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) and Worthen (1992) investigated the experiences of GTAs using various qualitative methods to explore GTAs' experiences of being a GTA and teaching. The researchers sought to understand the experiences of GTAs from different perspectives. Boehrer and Sarkisian provided a description of how GTAs perceive their job, their relation to the institution, and the act of teaching. Worthen identified the needs of GTAs in the area of teaching for the purpose of training. Both studies identified several themes prevalent in the GTA experience.

Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) drew upon their personal experiences as teaching consultants with GTAs along with data from three interviews they conducted with GTAs from different institutions and described the experience of

being a GTA from the GTA's point of view. They categorized their information into three broad areas: the GTA's view of their job, the GTA's interaction with the institution, and the GTA's experience of teaching. Several key issues emerged within these categories: adequacy of knowledge, adequacy of teaching skills, exercise of authority, responsibility for the learning of others, stress of critical self-evaluation, isolation, and developing their own teaching voice (Boehrer & Sarkisian, 1985).

The first area examined in the study was how GTAs view their job and what meaning does the experience have for them. According to Boehrer and Sarkisian, teaching challenges a GTA's sense of adequacy. Many times GTAs enter their first semester questioning if they know enough to teach. Teaching was experienced as something that goes to the limits of their knowledge and often beyond, putting them in a situation where they are teaching about a subject unfamiliar to them. GTAs often expressed discouragement and doubt about their perceived inability to teach. According to Boehrer and Sarkisian, they inferred this lack of ability from poor student attendance and their own tendency to be overly self-critical of their performance. For many GTAs, the teaching experience often served as a turning point in their career choice. Some GTAs decided not to pursue a career as a professor because of their experiences as a GTA. Others decided to enter the professoriate full-time after graduation because of a positive experience as a teacher (Boehrer & Sarkisian, 1985).

Experiences of GTAs interacting with the institution provided a second focus of this study. GTAs reported a lack of information about their duties and responsibilities as an instructor. They also reported a lack of guidance and support from faculty and supervisors. GTAs are told not to let teaching interfere with their studies or research. These institutional messages and lack of guidance, support, and information about their teaching duties convey to GTAs that teaching is not important, which GTAs often experience as very discouraging.

Authority was another significant theme in the GTA experience. GTAs struggled with how to appropriately handle authority that is given to them via their position as teachers. GTAs were most aware of this issue when grading. GTAs were often unsure of their authority and the ambiguity of grading exacerbated the struggle they have dealing with their newfound authority.

Boehrer and Sarkisian also interviewed GTAs specifically about their experiences of teaching and identified five major themes from the experience of teaching: assumed competence, knowing and telling, teaching role, responsibility for student learning, and the individual's own voice. GTAs perceived that entrance into a program equates with competence to teach. However, as Boehrer and Sarkisian note, "Possibly the most immediate threat to self-esteem comes from the discrepancy between this assumption that one knows how to teach and the discovery that one does not" (p. 15). Secondly, also evident in the GTAs' experience of teaching was an assumption that teaching is related to

telling. GTAs often associated telling someone what they know about a subject with teaching. This caused GTAs to fear that students will expect them to know all the answers when they don't. The teaching role was a third major theme in the experience of teaching. This role often conflicted with the role of student and required a different type of performance. Being a student requires the display of learning and being a teacher requires the facilitation of learning. Fourthly, GTAs felt pressure and responsibility that their students learn the material. This sense of responsibility often led to a pervasive sense of anxiety for GTAs. A final theme from the GTA interviews was the process of developing their own voice as teachers. They progressed from imitating their own professors to finding their own personal style and autonomy in their teaching. Relaxation and spontaneity often followed as a result (Boehrer & Sarkisian, 1985).

Worthen (1992) identified the needs of GTAs to inform future GTA training efforts. Seven master's level GTAs from a speech communication department participated in the study. All but one had no previous teaching experience. One student had secondary education teaching experience. GTAs were interviewed on their experience of teaching. GTAs also kept a teaching log and participated in a focus group discussion on their experience. Worthen identified six major themes of the GTA experience: 1) Need Teacher Preparation 2) Frustrating Experience 3) Beneficial and Rewarding 4) Role Conflict 5) Cares about Students and 6) Miscellaneous. Worthen listed the number of theme statements from the interviews, logs, and group discussion for each category. For example,

the theme "Cares about Students" registered zero theme statements from the interview about teaching experience, 15 statements from the teaching log, and 11 statements from the group discussion. A large variation existed in the number of theme statements depending on the information gathering method.

After identifying the main themes, Worthen extrapolated needs of GTAs inherent in each of the categories. For example, for the theme "Frustrating Experience", a set of needs are listed for GTAs such as the need for direction and support from a graduate coordinator and the need for information about duties and responsibilities. Each major theme was accompanied by a list of needs GTAs have within that specific area.

Worthen defined the experience of GTAs as predominantly one of frustration stemming from a lack of information and preparation, as well as the lack of support, guidance, and feedback from supervisors and the perceived inability to motivate students. GTAs often feel unprepared for the task of teaching. Furthermore, the experience of being both a teacher and a student emerged as a source of frustration because GTAs believed their students don't give them the credibility they do professors. Establishing credibility was a major concern, and GTAs often resorted to discipline and authority as a means to establish credibility. Being both student and teacher also produced role conflicts because each role has a set of demands and expectations often leaving GTAs torn between the two roles. When short on time, the graduate degree became a priority over the classroom, and GTAs often worried that undergraduates suffer

as a result. A number of GTA statements were expressions of concerns for students. They wanted to help their students, be available, and see them perform successfully on exams. Student success also contributed to the rewards and benefits to GTAs. The interaction with students and the personal growth experienced by GTAs, were identified as rewarding and beneficial. GTAs also mentioned that teaching was rewarding from a financial standpoint.

In summary, there have been only two qualitative studies that have directly considered the teaching experience of GTAs. Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) studied three broad areas of the GTA experience: the view of the job, the interaction with the institution, and the experience of teaching. Seven key issues emerged across these three areas: adequacy of knowledge, adequacy of teaching skills, exercise of authority, responsibility for the learning of others, stress of critical self-evaluation, isolation, and developing their own teaching voice. Five of the seven issues emerged as related themes in the experience of teaching: assumed competence, knowing and telling, teaching role, responsibility for student learning, and the individual's own voice. Worthen (1992) identified six themes on the experience of teaching based on data from interviews, teaching logs, and group discussions: need teacher preparation, frustrating experience, beneficial and rewarding, role conflict, cares about students, and miscellaneous.

Although the intent and design of both studies differed, both identify common themes related to the experience of GTAs: adequacy of knowledge and

teaching skill, authority, and student/teacher role conflict. First, each identified a set of issues related to a sense of adequacy. Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) reported that GTAs perceived in themselves a lack of knowledge and lack of teaching skills. Likewise, Worthen (1992) identified in his study the need that GTAs had for preparation which involved subject knowledge and teaching skill. Authority is a second major theme common to both studies. The subjects in the Boehrer and Sarkisian study reported uncertainty about handling their authority as teachers and the GTAs in Worthen's study reported using authority as a primary means of establishing credibility in the classroom. The difference may be a function of teaching experience. The GTAs in the former study were more experienced than the first semester GTAs in Worthen's study. Thirdly, both studies highlighted the experience of conflict GTAs experience by being both student and teacher. Both studies reported a lack of information and guidance concerning the teaching role. Furthermore, GTAs reported a struggle in their commitment to each role with the role of student often prevailing and the role of teacher suffering as a result. GTAs received messages from the institution that their research and graduate program come first over teaching responsibilities. GTAs seem to be consistently aware of the teacher/student conflict and were often uncertain about how to resolve adequately the incompatibilities that the dual roles produce. Most often, GTAs deferred to the student role and fulfilled these duties first.

GTA Attitudes and Expectations for Teaching

While studies such as Worthen (1992) and Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) have investigated the experience of teaching, other researchers have been interested in the attitudes and expectations that GTAs have about different aspects of teaching. These studies have examined issues such as gender, age, and teaching experience and how each relates to a GTA's attitude toward teaching. Other studies have examined issues such as beliefs about the first day of class, the socialization of undergraduate teaching norms, and factors that influence attitudes about teaching as a career.

McDowell (1993) investigated GTAs' perceptions of different aspects of teaching and different styles of teaching. Aspects of teaching were investigated by using a survey that measured GTA attitudes on seven factors related to teaching. The seven factors were defined as teacher as obligation, teacher as buddy, teacher as personality, teacher as follower, teacher as facilitator, teacher as lecturer, and teacher as omniscient. Likewise, styles of teaching were also measured using a survey. Styles of teaching can be understood as communication styles. Eleven subconstructs were developed from the survey to explore GTA attitudes toward different teacher communication styles: impression leaving, contentious, open, dramatic, dominant, precise, relaxed, friendly, attentive, animated, and communicator image. McDowell surveyed 120 GTAs and looked for significant differences in terms of gender, age, and years of

teaching experience. Age groups were divided into three categories (21-25, 26-35, & 35+). Years of teaching experience also had three groups (1-2, 3-5, & 5+).

McDowell found that GTAs rated teacher as lecturer, teacher as personality, and teacher as follower higher than other variables. Teacher as omniscient and teacher as obligation were rated the lowest. Overall, 70% of GTAs believe that students learn best by the lecture method over any other method. In addition, 50% of the GTAs believed that relationships with the students and the teacher's personality were important aspects of teaching. Also, 40% of GTAs rated their personal graduate work as their primary responsibility over teaching. When rating style variables, GTAs rated friendly, communicator image, impression leaving, attentive, and animated the most positive with contentious, dominant, and open being the lowest. Interestingly, 50% of GTAs did not rate themselves positively on the dramatic, open, and relaxed style variables.

Significant gender differences were found on both, attitudes towards aspects of teaching and style variables. Males rated teacher as lecturer significantly higher than females. On the other hand, females rated teacher as buddy and teacher as obligation higher than males. In terms of style variables, males rated dominant and precise higher while females rated open, friendly, and attentive the highest. According to McDowell, males used the lecture method along with more dominant and precise approaches to teaching more often in

their classrooms while females had a stronger commitment to teaching and preferred a friendlier, open, and more informal atmosphere.

Significant differences were also found for both years of experience and age. In reference to experience, GTAs with 3-5 years of experience emphasized personal relationships with their students as very important to their teaching. This group also viewed training as beneficial and important to their experience. The 5+ group was different from the others in that it preferred a more dramatic, dominant, and precise style of teaching than other groups The novice group, 1-2 years of experience, produced several interesting results. This group was the most likely of any group to admit they were wrong in a class. Also, this group experienced teaching as less enjoyable than the other two groups and did not feel that training was valuable. Furthermore, the 1-2 group relied on the lecture method, was less confident of their ability, was less dominant, dramatic, and precise, and wanted the courses to be standardized more so than the other groups.

Age differences were also found and are similar to findings based on years of teaching experience. Younger teachers, ages 21-25, were similar to the teachers with 1-2 years of teaching experience. They experienced teaching as less enjoyable, preferred the lecture method, had less confidence, and were less dominant, precise, and dramatic. In addition, the younger teachers perceived themselves as followers and were not as concerned about leaving an impression or presenting themselves as a communicator.

While McDowell (1993) focused on the attitudes of GTAs toward teaching in a broad perspective, Hayward (1993) investigated the beliefs that GTAs had for the first day of class and their strategies for implementing those beliefs in the classroom. Hayward interviewed 12 GTAs prior to their first day of class. Of the 12 GTAs interviewed, five had previous teaching experience and seven were teaching for the first time. Each GTA was asked a series of four questions: What are the most important beliefs you want students to leave with concerning your course? What do you do on the first day of class to contribute directly to these beliefs? What are the most important beliefs you want students to leave with concerning you, as an instructor? What do you do on the first day of class to contribute directly to these beliefs?

Concerning the first research question and student beliefs about the course, most GTAs were concerned that students believed the class would be a challenge. They were also concerned that students would expect the class to be fun, useful, and an opportunity to learn something and increase their knowledge base. The second research question asked how GTAs would contribute to these beliefs on the first day. Eleven different categories of responses were produced from the interviews. The highest response category was for the GTA to explain in a straightforward fashion what the policies, objectives, assignments, and expectations were for the class. The third research question asked what beliefs GTAs wanted students to have about them as instructors. Seven categories of responses were produced with most GTAs wanting students to believe they

would be fair, helpful, and had high expectations of student performance. When asked how GTAs would contribute to these beliefs, GTAs reported 13 categories of responses with most saying they would rely on nonverbal cues, straightforward explanation of policies and expectations, and telling students they were approachable.

Similar to Hayward's (1993) study on GTAs' beliefs about the first day of class, Braxton, Lambert, and Clark (1995) were interested in the socialization of college teaching norms in new GTAs prior to their first day teaching. Braxton, Bayer, and Finkelstein (1992) delineated a set of undergraduate college teaching norms. Four norms were identified that define appropriate and inappropriate teaching role behavior for college faculty; interpersonal disregard, particularistic grading, moral turpitude, and inadequate planning.

Braxton et al. (1995) were interested if GTAs endorsed these four norms prior to teaching and if not where did they differ from faculty, which have been shown to endorse these norms (Braxton, Bayer, & Finkelstein, 1992). They compared responses between 250 GTAs and those of 122 full-time faculty members while controlling for academic discipline. They found that on average both entering GTAs and full-time faculty endorsed the set of four norms. Not all new GTAs endorsed all four norms consistently, but the graduate school socialization process seems to promote the adoption of these values over time. Braxton et al. (1995) suggested that anticipatory socialization was largely responsible for the endorsement of the four norms. Possibly, new graduate

students were simply reflecting the norms of society at large, or they have observed these norms in action as undergraduates in their teachers, or they have witnessed violations of these norms and the consequences thereby resulting in endorsement (Braxton et al., 1995).

Bomotti (1994) studied GTA attitudes toward college teaching as a career choice. The purpose of the study was to examine the factors that influence a GTA's decision to continue or discontinue college teaching after graduation and determine which ones had the greatest impact on career choice. After reviewing the literature on GTAs, Bomotti developed a list of seven factors relevant to the GTA experience: 1) teaching assistant training 2) teaching assistant supervision 3) teaching assistant's academic department 4) teaching assistant as teacher 5) teaching assistant relations with peers 6) teaching assistant relations with students and 7) pragmatic constraints such as finances, discrimination, and the job market. Each of the seven factors was studied to see which ones had the most influence on choosing college teaching as a career choice after graduation.

Eighty-six GTAs were sampled and 73% indicated plans to teach in college after graduation. For GTAs that planned to continue college teaching after graduation, having good supervision was identified as the strongest influence on that decision. According to Bomotti (1994), GTAs describe good supervisors as, "respected scholars and good role models who place a strong value on quality teaching and concern for students" (p. 382). Good supervisors were further described as providing constructive and supportive feedback. They

also discussed issues related to teaching with GTAs such as teaching techniques and questions related to course content. Other factors such as the ability to teach well and have good relationships with students were positively related to choosing college teaching as a career, but did not influence the decision as much as having good supervision. Also, GTAs choosing college teaching as a career were older, enrolled in a Ph.D. program, had previous teaching experience in high school, and had taken education courses.

GTAs that selected college teaching as a career choice also identified several negative factors of their experience as teachers. Many GTAs questioned the value that teaching had in their departments and were discouraged by the lack of support. Other factors having a negative impact on their experience were limited financial support, low status, and excessive workloads. Although these negative factors tainted their teaching experience, their influence was not enough to alter career choices.

Of all the GTAs surveyed, 27% indicated choosing not to continue college teaching after graduation. This group of GTAs can further be divided into those who did not enjoy teaching and planned to enter other careers and those who did enjoy college teaching, but still chose other careers. For those who did not enjoy college teaching, they identified primarily with the research aspects of their job more than their teaching responsibilities. In addition, this group reported feeling uncomfortable in the classroom and lacked confidence in their teaching abilities. Discomfort and a lack of confidence in ability were strong factors, but

the identification with research was the most influential factor in not choosing to continue teaching after graduation. For the second group (10%) that enjoyed college teaching but elected other careers after graduation, they cited better jobs outside of academia as the main reason for not choosing college teaching as a career. In addition, this group also reported having less than satisfactory supervision and typically did not develop strong relationships with their supervisors.

In summary, the research on GTA attitudes and expectations for teaching suggest a number of ideas. First, GTAs come to the job of teaching with certain expectations already established. They adhere to norms strongly endorsed by experienced faculty and have expectations for the beliefs that students will have about the course and instructor after the first day of class. Secondly, relationships with students and faculty significantly impact GTA attitudes and expectations for teaching. Good relations with students and supervisors positively correlate with GTAs choosing a career in teaching. GTAs also identify positive student relations as an important aspect of their teaching. Bomotti (1994) noted that it seems difficult for GTAs to separated their academic experiences from their social experiences. "Social aspects of the graduate student experience appear to be subsumed by the academic - they became part of the academic process instead of something completely different as might be true on the undergraduate level" (Bomotti, 1994, p. 386). Thirdly, GTA attitudes

and expectations for teaching are different depending on the gender, experience level, and age of the GTA.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Data Collection

The data collection and data analysis which were carried out from an phenomenological perspective are described in the following chapter. The section on data collection addresses the methods for participant criteria, participant selection, the interview process, and the protection of participants. The section on data analysis addresses the methods employed for analyzing the data such as the use of the bracketing interview and research groups as aids in the interpretation of the data. Finally, the last section covers the steps in data analysis: obtaining a sense of the whole, identifying significant statements, formulating meaning units, clustering themes, and developing a structural description and confirming the findings.

Participant Criteria

According to Polkinghorne (1989), participants are selected to be interviewed according to two criteria. First, because they have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. Second, because they have the ability to provide "full and sensitive descriptions of the experience" (p. 47). Participants for this study were graduate teaching assistants recruited from various academic departments in a large southeastern university. The main requirements for participation were that the GTA had primary responsibility for the teaching in the class and had at least two semesters of teaching experience as a GTA. As a

result, the descriptions obtained were of experiences of teaching beyond the first teaching experiences. Six caucasian male and six caucasian female GTAs, representing a variety of teaching situations familiar to the GTA role (lecture, lab, and discussion) and ranging in age from 23 to 35 participated in the study. Participants represented a variety of academic departments including: Anthropology, Biology (2), Chemistry (2), Child and Family Studies, Communications, Geography, Marketing and Consumer Behavior, Physics, Sociology, and Sport & Physical Activity. Participants ranged in teaching experience from three to nine semesters. Furthermore, three GTAs with 1-2 years of teaching experience, four GTAs with 2-3 years of teaching experience, and five GTAs with 3 or more years of teaching experience participated in the study. A year of teaching experience was defined as two semesters. GTAs with varied backgrounds in terms of years of experience, teaching assignment, and academic department were interviewed in an effort to provide a full and rich description of the experience of teaching (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Participant Selection

A letter inviting participation in the study (Appendix A) was sent to 300 GTAs in a large southeastern university. Names and addresses were obtained through the university's payroll department. Fifty letters were sent at a time until a sufficient number of interviews were completed wherein themes from the interviews began to be repeated and new themes ceased to emerge. A total of fifteen GTAs responded to the letter and met the criteria for participation for a response rate of 5%. The first twelve respondents were interviewed and

provided the interview data presented in this study. Participation was on a volunteer basis only with no form of incentive offered.

The Interview Process

After potential participants contacted the researcher by e-mail or by phone, a private meeting was arranged at the potential participant's convenience. During this meeting, the researcher informed each participant of the confidential nature of the taping and had participants sign an informed consent form (Appendix B) that further described the study, delineated their rights as research participants, and asked for permission to audio-tape the interview. The basic format of the interview process was reviewed as well as the selection criteria for participating in the study. The participants were then given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and their rights as participants. All questions were then answered. All participants met the selection criteria and elected to participate in the study and complete an interview at that time.

Each GTA then participated in an unstructured question-and-answer interview with the researcher. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes in length. The interviews were audio-taped for the purpose of transcribing the interviews. Only the researcher had access to the audio-tapes. Each participant was asked to describe their experience of teaching as a GTA. At the beginning of each interview the participant was asked to respond to the statement, "Tell me about your experience of teaching as a graduate teaching assistant." Participants were free to talk about topics of their choosing. The researcher participated in the interview by asking follow-up questions for clarification or

further exploration of topics introduced by the participants. No leading questions were asked about topics that had not been introduced by the participants. The interview ended when the participants said they were finished describing their experience of teaching (see Appendix C for sample interview).

Protection of Participants

Several steps were taken to protect the confidentiality of participants. First, permission to tape and informed consent forms were signed by all participants. Second, the names of participants were not used on any of the audio-tapes or transcripts. A coding system was used to coordinate audio-tapes with transcripts. Only the researcher had access to the coding system. On the printed transcripts, the letters "R" and "P" were used to designate the researcher and the participant. All identifying information such as names and geographic locations were omitted from the transcripts and any portion of the transcripts printed in this document. Third, research group members that participated in the group analysis were required to sign a confidentiality form (Appendix D).

Data Analysis

The Bracketing Interview

In phenomenological research, it is important for the researcher to be aware of any biases he might have about the topic under investigation. The bracketing interview alerts the researcher to any biases or personal views he has on the topic with the intent of limiting the effects of his views on the collection and analysis of the data (Hycner, 1985). It becomes important for the researcher to

be aware of personal biases and preconceived notions on the experience of teaching for GTAs in order to avoid "leading" the interview or imposing his personal experience onto that of the participants. Therefore, before any participants were interviewed, the researcher participated in a bracketing interview. The researcher was interviewed by a colleague on his experience of teaching and his experience working with GTAs as a teaching consultant. The interview was transcribed and presented to a research group.

Analysis of the bracketing interview revealed four main themes. The first theme emphasized preparation which was described as a constant and time consuming effort to stay one step ahead. Being prepared was also described as a way of coping with feelings of anxiety by providing a sense that I could teach the information. The second theme was a concern about being knowledgeable of the subject matter. Credibility was believed to come with a thorough knowledge of the subject matter. A perceived lack of credibility was experienced when I didn't know enough information to answer questions. The third theme was that teaching is a responsibility which included the need to present information in a way that helped people to understand some topic. This information also had the perceived potential of influencing people's lives which heightened the sense of responsibility that came with teaching. The fourth theme was an emphasis on negative experiences with GTAs who did not seem to care about teaching. The bracketing interview included my experience as a teaching consultant for GTAs. Although the vast majority of my experiences have been positive and with GTAs who were concerned about being good teachers, the

experiences of working with GTAs who were uninterested and did not seem to care about teaching stood out for me in the bracketing interview. Information from the analysis of the bracketing interview was used throughout the research process to prevent my personal biases from leading the interviews and influencing the analysis of the data.

Research Groups

An additional effort to limit researcher bias included analyzing the data in a research group. Research groups have been recommended as a way of facilitating the bracketing process. Research groups limit not only researcher bias but also limit any bias or assumption that may be held by another group member (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio, 1989). Research groups serve other valuable functions such as providing a larger perspective on pattern recognition, assisting with a large volume of data, and serving as a protection against the monotony that may come with phenomenological research (Thompson, et al., 1989).

All of the transcripts were analyzed by the researcher. Major portions of five transcripts were analyzed with the help of a research group composed of students who are interested in and experienced with the phenomenological method. The research group was led by the researcher's major professor. The remaining portions of the first five transcripts and all of the final seven transcripts were analyzed with the researcher's major professor. All twelve transcripts were read and analyzed with the assistance of at least one other person experienced in the phenomenological method.

Thematization

After each interview was completed and audio-taped, it was then transcribed to produce a written text of the interview. The researcher transcribed all interviews. Each transcript was then analyzed in a thorough and systematic process using a phenomenological method. The purpose of the thematization process is to identify common themes among the interviews. Themes are identified as elements of the experience that are essential to the basic structure of the experience. These themes, and their relationship to one another, are then presented to describe the phenomenon under investigation. Various phenomenological methods have been used to analyze interview data. The steps included in this study have been adapted from the data analysis methods originally described in Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1985), and Hycner (1985). The following adaptation of their methods have been used in other phenomenological research projects such as Bradley (1993) and Stuhl (1995). The phenomenological method used in the present study includes five steps: obtaining a sense of the whole, identifying significant statements, formulating meaning units, clustering themes, and developing a structural description and confirming the findings. Each step is further described in the remainder of this chapter.

Obtaining a Sense of the Whole

At the beginning of the thematization process, each transcript was read thoroughly and completely by the researcher (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1985). The

researcher conducted and transcribed all twelve interviews. After each interview had been transcribed into a text format, it was read through in its entirety. The purpose of this stage is for the researcher to become familiar with the overall context of the data and develop a sense or feel for the entire interview. Having a sense of the context provides the ground from which later themes may emerge.

Identifying Significant Statements

After transcribing the interview and reading it thoroughly, each transcript was read through again. Typically, each transcript is read out loud, one page at a time. At the end of each page, research group members identified significant phrases and sentences that describe the experience of teaching (Colaizzi, 1978). The group then discussed the meaning of each statement. As each statement was identified, an initial attempt was made to interpret the central meaning of the statement. Identified statements were consistently checked against the context of the transcript from which they emerged. This was done to ensure that the statement was never separated from the meaning of the original context. Members served to help interpretations remain true to the text and to guard against biases that influence the analysis. After each significant phrase and sentence was identified and thoroughly discussed, the next page of the transcript was read and discussed in the same manner. This process was repeated until the entire transcript was finished. The researcher read through the entire transcript again after significant statements had been identified and their meaning discussed.

Formulating Meaning Units

After significant statements were identified and an initial attempt was made to interpret their central meaning, each statement was then extracted to a separate list. A list of significant statements was created for each transcript and coded by line number in order to refer to the original context when necessary. This list was then analyzed in order to develop meaning units. The purpose of this step is to move beyond the content and capture the essence of what the participant is trying to say about his or her experience of teaching (Hycner, 1985). As stated by Colaizzi (1978), the meanings developed by the research "should never sever all connection with the original protocols" (p. 59). One method of maintaining this connection was to identify a word or phrase from the original protocol that captured the essence of the experience of teaching and include that word or phrase in the meaning unit (Stuhl, 1995). A list of meaning units was then created for each individual transcript.

Clustering Themes

Once a list of meaning units was developed for each individual transcript, the researcher reviewed the units from all the transcripts and grouped them into themes that described a specific aspect of the experience of teaching (Colaizzi, 1978). Some themes were subsumed within a larger theme and became a sub-theme. The themes and related sub-themes were then used to describe the overall experience of teaching. Each theme and related sub-theme was checked

against the original transcript and extracted significant statements to verify their connection to the participant's experience of teaching.

Developing a Structural Description and Confirming the Findings

In the final stage of the data analysis, the researcher developed a general description of the thematic structure of the experience of teaching. The themes and sub-themes as well as their relationship to each other are described in the thematic structure (Giorgi, 1985). The general description of the thematic structure of the experience of teaching was then sent to all the participants (Appendix E) to see how it compared to their experience (Colaizzi, 1978). Participants were asked to provide feedback on the results and indicate if the thematic structure agreed with their experience. Participants were encouraged to note discrepancies between their experience and the results provided to them. Participants were mailed two copies of the results, one to keep and one to return with their comments. Participants were also given the option to provide feedback over the phone or by e-mail.

Feedback was obtained from nine of the twelve participants. All nine participants providing feedback returned the second copy of the results with their comments. In addition, six of the nine participants returning feedback were contacted by phone to clarify comments they made about the results or to follow-up on the status of their feedback. All nine participants that provided feedback on the results confirmed that the thematic structure of the experience of teaching accurately described their experience. One female GTA reportedly felt a sense

of validation after reading that other GTAs have similar experiences to her own. Three participants did not provide feedback on the results of the study. Phone calls were made to these three participants, but efforts to contact them were unsuccessful.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide a description of the experience of teaching for graduate teaching assistants. Twelve GTAs were interviewed and asked to describe their experiences of teaching. Transcripts were developed from the interviews and then analyzed using a phenomenological method.

In this chapter, the results of the study are presented. This chapter begins with a description of several non-thematic aspects that reflect the way in which the GTAs talked about their experiences of teaching. These non-thematic aspects are intended to provide a sense of what the interviews were like. This section is followed by a brief description of the overall experience of teaching. Each theme and sub-theme is presented followed by illustrative quotes from the transcripts. This chapter closes with a description of the overall thematic structure obtained from the phenomenological analysis of the interview data. Throughout the paper, quotes from the interviews will be used to illustrate themes and sub-themes. The quotes are single-spaced and left-indented in the text. Possible identifiers have been removed to protect the confidentiality of participants. Otherwise the quotes will be presented verbatim from the transcripts. It is worth noting that the transcripts were typed exactly as the participants spoke. Obviously, some excerpts from the transcripts will not conform to proper grammar rules.

Spaces between individual quotes indicate that a different individual is being cited. If some part of the quotation was deemed irrelevant to the overall meaning of the quote, it was removed by the researcher. This is indicated in the quotation with three ellipses. If the omitted section came after the end of a complete sentence, it is indicated by three ellipses enclosed in brackets: [...].

Non-Thematic Aspects of the Interviews

The purpose of this section is to describe the way in which the twelve GTAs in this study talked about their experiences of teaching. This section provides a "sense" or "feel" for what the interviews were like. The intent is to give "life" to the interviews and to the participants. As GTAs described the experience of teaching, their presentations were found to have some common features that characterized the twelve interviews. These features contributed to the tone of the interviews and provided some sense of how the GTAs talked about their experiences. These non-thematic aspects are different from the main themes. The main themes are essential to the experience of teaching because if one of them were removed the experience of teaching would not be what it is; it would be fundamentally changed. These non-thematic aspects do not describe the thematic structure of the experience of teaching; they describe the manner of expressing the experience and the tone of the experiences.

GTAs' descriptions of teaching often included personal statements about their stance toward teaching as something they liked and wanted to pursue professionally or as something they did not like and had decided not to do after

graduating. Ten out of twelve participants included a statement reflecting their personal feelings toward teaching as something they enjoyed or not. Of the ten that included such a statement, eight expressed that teaching was something they enjoyed and would continue doing professionally. Here are some examples of these statements:

> So I love doing lab. [...] I really take it seriously, this teaching thing because I enjoy teaching. [...] I enjoy teaching very much.
>
> I guess the first thing that comes to mind is I was delighted when you asked me because I love to teach. I love it. And I think I'm pretty good at it. I've gotten some very positive feedback. I mean I think I definitely have room for improvement, but I really like it a lot more than I thought I would and I appreciate having the opportunity to work with students at this level. I think it's incredibly valuable. And I think I'd like to do it in the future. I wasn't sure that I'd like to pursue it thinking that professionally I'd like to secure a position so I could do my own research and if that's a university position it is, but I think I would really like that. So I feel really lucky that I get to teach and I enjoy it a great deal.
>
> I've found that teaching is something definitely I want to do. I mean it is very rewarding. [...] Oh I love it. Like I said, it's not a job, it's fun. It's what I do. I get so much out of it. How could I not be a teacher now. That's what I want to know. Maybe I should get the Ph.D. now.
>
> We have some dynamite researchers, and teaching, especially this undergraduate introductory level teaching is, I think, not a real high priority for most of the faculty. Which is a shame because that is not what I want in my career.
>
> We have very few opportunities beyond teaching in our department. So I think that is what bothered me is people seeing it as something they just have to go through. I mean for me, maybe I'm an anomaly in the department, but I often look forward to going in and teaching.

Two of the ten GTAs expressing personal sentiments about teaching indicated less enthusiasm for teaching and a preference for research. One GTA in Chemistry expressed his preference in the following way:

> Right, I wouldn't want to do it, I mean when people ask me, well after you get your Ph.D. are you going to stay in academia or do you want to go out in industry? And for me I definitely don't want to teach. I like the research a lot better. I'm a lab rat. I mean I'm down in a hole somewhere and that's fine. [...] I'd say the main cause or the main reason for not wanting to teach would probably be the fact that just seeing that the students don't want to learn just for the sake of learning and I guess that's alright for some people, depends on your point of view. I mean I went through school, the classes that I took I took because I was interested in the material and I wanted to learn the material and it just so happens that I ended up with a degree in chemistry and I didn't really plan on it. I was just taking classes because they were interesting to me so I wanted to learn the material.

GTAs' descriptions of teaching often started at the beginning of their experience. Several interviews started with the first semester or first class as the starting point for the interview. Furthermore, many of the experiences described by GTAs occurred while teaching their first semester:

> Well, I guess we could begin at the beginning where I started teaching. Let's see that was about four years ago maybe, so I was about 21. I'd just finished my undergraduate degree and there were a lot of students in my class that were older than me.
>
> I remember exactly the first day, actually it was the first morning. My first teaching experience I had to have a discussion at 8 o'clock in the morning.
>
> At the beginning of the semester, I give my expectations for the semester, what they are supposed to be doing. In the first semester, I said this is the first semester, for most of you it's the first semester and I'm going to get you adjusted.
>
> When I first started out my first semester...My first semester here they had me and just because of so many graduate students coming in I only had to teach one section. [...] I went into that first semester saying you know, this is my first semester, I'm going to be hesitant on a lot of things. I may not know how to explain a lot of things, but just keep that in mind. Take it easy on me, bend, and have patience with me.

The interviews were further characterized by stories regarding an individual student in their class. A majority of the examples given by GTAs were

about their interactions with a single student. It was often one student they connected with or experienced as confrontational. Despite the presence of an entire class, GTAs often told their story around experiences with an individual student:

> And I got to this one student, can't remember her name no surprise, and she was a pretty good student I mean C+, B type of student...He was an older student in his 30s coming back and starting over again and very smart.
>
> ...one of them is from just a really poor area and she is a really good student, but her life experience is so different from virtually everyone in the class.
>
> I guess one of the ones that stands out is my first semester. When I was doing the discussion section I had a student from, I think he was from, it was an Hispanic country, it may have been Argentina.

In addition, many of the interviews were characterized by "negative" examples such as students being confrontational, not paying attention, and labs not going as planned. There were descriptions of "positive" experiences, but the "negative" far outweighed them:

> I can think of a time when maybe I lost their confidence and in that way lost their interest. I was working on a, trying to demonstrate price elasticity of demand from economics and I got confused on the board and so obviously if I didn't know, if I couldn't even explain what I was trying to do, then I felt like well at that point if they didn't know if I knew it or not so they didn't really challenge me on it, but some of them kind of laughed, but I could see that it was kind of above their heads and they got tuned out. And so and again I think that I didn't, I guess I didn't explain something correctly or got confused which didn't look real well either real good.
>
> But my first semester of teaching 101, like I said I found out about this about three weeks before school was supposed to start, two or three weeks before. Again, like with the lab it was sort of my first, it was a baptism by fire and my first time out was definitely the worst.

> One class it really came to a head...We had boiling ethanol on hot plates...They were throwing erasers around the room while I had this boiling ethanol on this bench. And I just, I threw them out of class cause they were a danger to people.

Teaching was often presented in contrast to research activities. In most cases the two competed for time and GTAs felt forced to choose one or the other. GTAs also received messages from faculty and the institution about teaching in contrast to what they heard about research related activities:

> Right, where I work we are also responsible for our own research. So basically, between teaching classes, you're doing research all the time. You're also taking classes yourself so things can get pretty busy, the day gets pretty full. So, by taking care of my own business, I'm also responsible to my advisor for doing research. [...] Right it is a balance between the teaching and your taking classes yourself and your also doing research for your advisor. It is kind of a juggling act and I know several of my colleagues that were over there morning till night so.

> ...when I'm doing my science I often don't come into contact with people. Although research is important, it can get you kind of down when you aren't seeing any people. So a lot of TAs don't want to teach because it slows down your research and that just means you're going to be in graduate school another year or two years or however long.

> Yeah, I've had some professors tell me this that our first goal is to get our doctorate and to get working on the dissertation and it's not to, and it sounds terrible, but it's not to the undergrad students and don't put so much into your teaching, you don't want to neglect your research and I think I have the tendency to do that, to spend too much time preparing for a class rather than just going in and winging it.

> One of the things I have the biggest problem with is sort of what I think of as an institutional devaluation of just the art of teaching, teaching undergrads. At least in my department and from others that I know people in it seems that the emphasis placed on teaching is not very high, it's not very strong. In fact a lot of my colleagues I think treat it as sort of a means to an end. It's, that's how they pay their bills is by getting an assistantship and it requires that you teach a class or assist the professor or something like that. I think that some of the faculty members might probably unwittingly reinforce some of those ideas that teaching is not as important. You really need to concentrate on doing papers for your classes, getting

> articles published, working on other projects and so teaching is something you almost have to do. It's a necessary evil to become well known, to finish your degree.

In summary, the participants presented their stories with a number of non-thematic aspects. These aspects colored the interviews and provided a "feel" for what the interviews were like. A majority of the interviews were given by participants who enjoy teaching and plan to continue teaching after completing their degrees. In addition the interviews were characterized by an emphasis on individual students and negative examples. Teaching was also described in contrast to research and for some participants there was a pressure to choose one or the other with the implied message from others, such as faculty, that they should choose research activities if a choice had to be made.

Phenomenological Analysis

Analysis revealed three interrelated themes: (1) Awareness of Self; (2) Awareness of Students; and (3) Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries. A brief description of the overall experience of teaching is introduced first. This overall picture presents the organization of the grounds, themes, and their interrelations to each other. Each theme and sub-theme will then be presented followed by illustrative excerpts from the transcripts. The section closes with a description of the overall thematic structure of the participants' experience of teaching.

Thematic Structure of the Experience of Teaching: Overview

Analysis revealed three themes as essential to the experience of teaching for GTAs. These three themes are Awareness of Self, Awareness of Students, and Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries. In the remaining sections of this chapter, these themes and their sub-themes are presented in detail with illustrative examples from the interviews. It should be noted that the ordering of the themes has no particular meaning. The themes occurred in no predictable order in the transcripts. Before presenting the themes in detail, a brief overview of the organization of the themes as they combine to form the basic structure of the experience of teaching is presented.

The thematic structure of the experience of teaching is presented in Figure 1. The figure consists of the three themes of the experience of teaching represented by the two overlapping circles and the oval area shared by the circles. One circle represents the theme Awareness of Self and the other circle represents the theme Awareness of Students. The oval area shared by the two circles represents the relationship between the Self (GTA) and the students described by the theme, Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries.

Awareness in the described experiences of teaching was constantly shifting. At one moment the GTA was aware of some aspect of him/herself. At another moment, awareness shifted to the students and they became figural in the experience of teaching. Still at another moment, awareness shifted to the nature of the relationship between teacher and student. The dashed lines

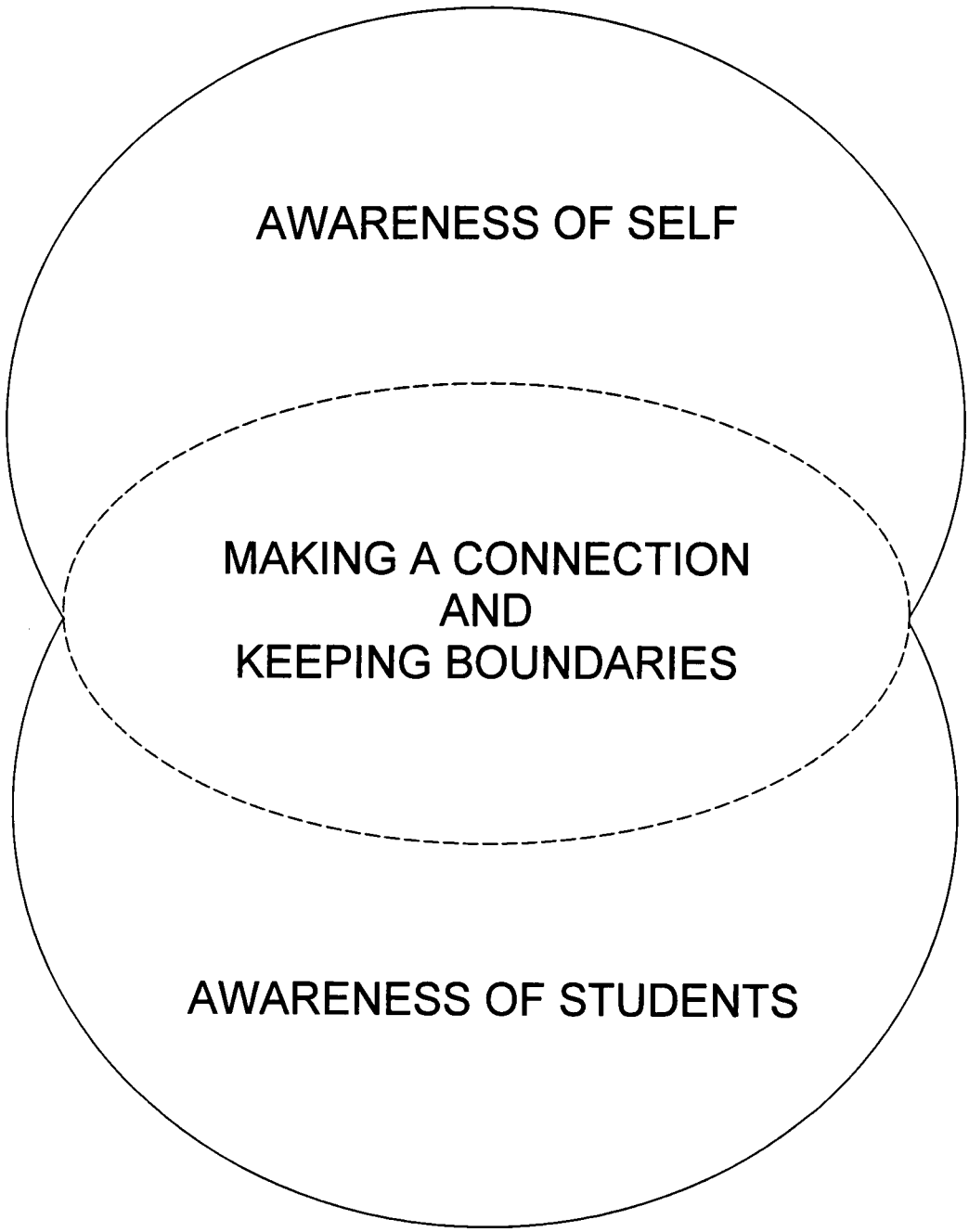

Figure 1. Thematic Structure of the Experience of Teaching

represent the ever shifting nature of awareness in the experience of teaching. As one theme became figural and focused upon, the others faded into the background. Yet they were not lost or severed from awareness. For example as the theme Awareness of Students became figural and GTAs focused on some behavior of their students, such as being confrontational, their awareness of themselves receded and became the context, or ground, from which they experienced their students. As the theme Awareness of Self emerged as figural and participants were aware of themselves in the experience of teaching, their awareness of their students receded and formed the context from which participants made meaning about who they were as teachers. The theme Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries was contextualized by the perceived roles that GTAs and students play which incorporates aspects of both Awareness of Self and Awareness of Students.

Although each theme has meaning on its own, it is the relationship of the themes to each other that forms the basic structure of the experience of teaching. Each theme is an essential aspect of the experience of teaching. Furthermore each theme was directly stated or implied in all of the interviews. In the final section of this chapter, a more detailed description of the thematic structure is provided with examples demonstrating the relationships between themes.

Themes

In the following section, each of the three main themes (Awareness of Self, Awareness of Students, and Making a Connection and Keeping

Boundaries) and related sub-themes are described. Descriptions of the themes include statements taken from the interviews to illustrate the nature of each theme. Although the themes and sub-themes are presented separately from each other, it is important to keep in mind that all of the themes are interrelated. Therefore, many illustrative statements may include more than one theme.

Theme I: Awareness of the Self

In the main theme Awareness of Self, participants described an awareness of themselves as teachers in the context of their students. Predominant in the participants' experience was a shifting awareness of personal attributes that the participants identified as meaningful for themselves. These personal attributes were descriptive of how they experienced themselves in the process of teaching. The theme Awareness of Self consists of the following sub-themes that represent the personal attributes that participants were aware of in their experience: Self as Confident, Self as Knowledgeable, Self as Prepared, Self as Authority, Self as Performer, Who I Am, and Self as Learner. Each sub-theme had meaning in a temporal context. Sub-themes--Self as Confident, Self as Knowledgeable, Self as Prepared, Self as Authority, Self as Performer, and Who I Am--had meaning in the present context of time. Self as Learner was grounded in the historical context and referred to a time preceding the participants' experience as a teacher typically when they were a learner in their undergraduate studies. Participants' awareness of themselves changes. Awareness shifts from moment to moment. One moment GTAs are aware of

themselves as being confident and then awareness may shift the next moment to themselves as being a performer. The participants reflected the ever shifting focus of awareness in the following sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1: Self as Confident

The sub-theme Self as Confident was figural for six participants. For them the experience of teaching included an awareness of themselves as growing in the dimension of confidence as the teacher. Confidence was described as an aspect of themselves that increased over time as one gained experience and knowledge and also learned to anticipate questions and reactions from the students:

> There is much more confidence on Thursday in that Thursday lab because now I know more or less what they are going to ask as opposed to you're teaching it and you know the material that's great because you have confidence in that, but then to know what they are going to ask gives you, brings you to another level of it. [...] I see it as two levels of confidence. There's a confidence that the first year graduate student has first semester teaching lab, they know it, they know how the experiment runs, but they don't know what questions the students are going to ask, but the second semester, the second time they teach in the fall, the fall labs, the second year, they seem to do a much better job because you anticipate many of the questions and you have better explanations for the questions that they do ask because you may have already gone through them once.

> Also, the subject matter was infants, toddlers, and preschoolers which happens to be my area of expertise and not only was I covering something that I really knew backwards and forwards and felt really confident in, had tons of examples for, uh just my general teaching improved and I was much more confident in myself.

For two participants, the awareness of themselves as gaining confidence related to their perception of the students as being responsive and talkative or believing what they say is true:

> You know sometimes how you get a really good class and sometimes you get real quiet, not very responsive class. Well this just happened to be a really good class, which was really fortunate for me because I was still a little bit nervous and was unsure of myself so they helped me a lot in gaining confidence.
>
> I think the first semester was kind of a shock that I had never done anything like that before. I guess what has surprised me is how, I think going into teaching I was real concerned about appearing that I didn't know what I was talking about or that I hadn't really experienced a lot of the things that I teach and that's probably still a concern, but what I have noticed is students to a degree believe everything you say good or bad and so I think it actually gave me a little confidence, more confidence that I really, even when I was talking to people older than me that I have more experience than I thought I had. So that has helped me in teaching kind of build some confidence because I think I didn't have a lot early on. [...]so when you get questions from the class and they're asking questions and so then you have to move off of your overhead and your prepared presentation and really talk about your experiences and what you think and I know that when I've talked about some international topics like why do companies want to invest overseas, things that weren't really covered in the book, then I had to kind of use my own experiences. And I think at that point with the students asking questions and there being a dialogue there, I feel more confident even if I didn't know all the answers. To me dialogue makes me feel more confident. It doesn't scare me because it makes me feel like I'm contributing and they're contributing and they learn something so.

For two participants, their sense of themselves as confident grew to a point where they experienced a change in how they related to their students and described themselves as taking charge and having ownership of the class, which was a positive experience for them:

> And then I skipped a semester and then I taught another evening school and I was less forthcoming with them about my experience and had a lot more confidence and it was really the first time I felt like I'd really just taken charge. [...] So, the tone of the class was different because I felt much more in charge. I felt like it was less of a growing experience for me and that I was more confident.
>
> And that's a confidence which I might not necessarily have which I'm gaining more of now than before, but I didn't necessarily have before

> becoming an instructor or a GTA or whatever. It's just that confidence in knowing that you have something that's your own and you can. It's that whole autonomy thing and that's ok that what's supposed to happen, that's what's supposed to take place. You are the boss in this situation and you have, the boss you know has confidence because they've made it to be the boss and know what it's like to be there, know what it's like to be here and have complete ownership of the situation.

Sub-theme 2: Self as Knowledgeable

The sub-theme Self as Knowledgeable, of the main theme Awareness of Self, was described by the participants as an awareness of themselves as knowing or not knowing the subject matter they are teaching. GTAs reported that students have questions and they are there to give the answers. In several descriptions, GTAs were aware of not knowing all the answers and not having a total understanding of the subject matter. Figural for five GTAs was the experience of having to say "I don't know" to questions asked by students and believing they should know the answers to the questions asked by their students. Here are a couple of examples:

> There is also the occasional, very daunting experience of having to say "I don't know"...it goes back to what I said earlier about gee it's all me, the students are looking at me, the answers have to come from me.

> I knew there were logistics majors in the class I remember that and when I got to talking about some different types of distribution, I knew they probably knew more than I did and that started feeling uncomfortable like I didn't, I couldn't go into a lot of detail. And a lot of times when that has happened, and I can't think of any specific instance, but a lot of times when I didn't know something I've always admitted that I don't and I'll try to find out the answer. And I don't like doing that, but I feel better about doing that than trying to cover it up and it seems like I've never really been questioned about that.

Some GTAs reported feeling uncomfortable and nervous making this statement because they felt it was their job to know the material and not knowing

meant they weren't doing what they were being paid for. Others nervously anticipated times in their classes when they would be asked questions to which they did not have the answers and felt enormous pressure to have the answers. One GTA in Anthropology expressed the following:

> And so that worry of not knowing enough and yet somebody's paying me to stand up in front of all these people. A hundred people can walk through and say of course you know more than they do so you're fine, but the pressure I felt to know everything before I stood up in front of the class was enormous.

For three GTAs the awareness of themselves as knowledgeable extended beyond how they understood themselves and included awareness of how they thought their students were perceiving them:

> ...so it was hard for me to seem competent that early on and so I think that was one of my greatest fears was appearing not to be competent, appearing not to understand the material...I've always been concerned about how I appear to others so I constantly use what (name of author) calls impression management, trying to create a favorable impression in the minds of others. So in the academic setting I would try to make others think that I was competent. Hopefully, I am, but at least I want to appear that way and could handle questions.
>
> I guess at first I was a little bit frightened that it would undermine their perception of my authority. I didn't want the students to think 'who is this geek? We're supposed to be learning from a teacher in this class and she doesn't even know what she's supposed to be teaching.'
>
> I guess that kind of goes back to personality trait, perfectionist. I like to know everything and if I don't, I don't want people to realize that I don't.

While most GTAs came to a point where they accepted that they didn't have all the answers and could tell their students "I don't know" and feel positive about it, one GTA reportedly made the decision in the very beginning that it was acceptable for her not to have all the answers and say "I don't know":

> I decided in that first week that it was ok for me to say "I don't know". It had never occurred to me to think maybe I wouldn't know the material just because I like the subject so much and that's why I decided to come to school is because I love the whole idea of journalism and communications. [...] this whole teaching thing is that I'm going to have to say 'I don't know, but I'll find out for you'. And that was probably the most valuable thing and that's the thing where I started feeling like I was going to get nervous. Well what if I don't know this and I think that's where maybe I even chose to be a little naïve about that too in saying that you know well I'm not going to get up there and postulate about what an answer is if I don't actually know what the answer is. So that's kind of the situation I was thinking of. It had never occurred to me that somebody might ask a question that I wouldn't know.

For three GTAs, their awareness of knowing or not knowing the material was figural in the beginning of their teaching experience including the time before they stepped into their first classroom and throughout their first semester:

> I think it's an incredible responsibility to teach a class of that size and I was nervous the first few times I lectured. And I don't mind speaking in front of people, but it's kind of, I think teaching a class is kind of the weight of the world or those students on your shoulders and I worry about, for a long time when I first started teaching, I'd worry that I didn't know enough they were going to ask me a question that I couldn't answer.

> I guess I was shocked at how uncomfortable I was at first in that first class and I think it was obvious. And I had made presentations to people before, but that was different. I don't know how it was different, but it was cause usually when I make presentations I've known everything I was talking about. I knew it well. So I guess those two things, you know here's all these people paying attention to me thinking I know all the answers and also realizing I didn't know all the answers.

> So, I guess as I started teaching that was one of my main goals. I already had that enjoyment of teaching, so that's the one thing that I wanted to make sure that I could achieve is that I knew the material.

Sub-theme 3: Self as Prepared

For seven GTAs, a sense of their own perceived readiness to teach their respective classes and to handle unexpected situations involving student

questions and behavior was represented in the sub-theme Self as Prepared. Being prepared was often a short-lived experience that required significant effort and time to stay ahead of the students. Being prepared includes knowing teaching techniques on communicating information and dealing with students, reading class texts and related articles, reviewing notes before class, doing course-related research, and creating a syllabus:

> So I'm having, I'm still having to keep, like I felt like I was maybe four or five steps ahead of them you know on the first class and it's come to three or four steps ahead of them now.
>
> So (name of other GTA) and I worked together a little bit at times and we sort of gathered syllabi together from every, we went around asking professors if they had old ones we could look at and got some ideas for what we would cover and then we had to go through and figure out ok what book, text book readings should we have them do and had to make out a schedule so that we could put together a syllabus, you know we'll be covering agriculture for five lectures, for two whatever. So we kind of got these outlines together and then boom! it was the day, here you go.
>
> I don't feel comfortable just going in somewhere and just winging it. I like to at least review my notes before making any type of presentation. So I think preparation for me is important. I can't ever see that at least not short term at least, going away, I think I'm always going to prepare, probably over prepare.

In the process of making sense of their own preparedness or readiness to teach, GTAs were often aware of three related issues: 1) A lack of training and experience in teaching; 2) Time; and 3) Unexpected or odd moments with students. Examples of each issue are presented in the following quotes. First, three GTAs described themselves as having very little if any training at all or experience on how to teach:

> I didn't know what I was doing. As far as techniques for teaching I had no preparation at all. I understand the lab material, but as far as communicating it to the students or controlling the class, I didn't know

> what I was doing. [...] Well it was basically, it was just like being taught how to swim by being thrown in the deep end. I had no, no one helping saying here are some things to think about when preparing your syllabus.
>
> Well the training is one thing. I never got more than like a day of how to teach. [...] they'd have like two seminars on how to teach and that was it. Then they just threw you in there. [...] Um, I guess I would have liked a little bit more training, but it's a kind of learn on the job.
>
> ...my department didn't do a whole lot as far as training or anything like that. [...] I hadn't really had any teaching experience before...but no real teaching experience.

Secondly, three GTAs were aware of time as it related to being prepared. GTAs were often surprised at how much time they invested in preparing to teach and sometimes saw it interfering with other duties and responsibilities:

> Now it was sort of like starting over again. I couldn't use my notes from the first couple of times I taught. So that Fall '96 man oh man I put time into that class. I was constantly reading articles and trying to stay on top of the latest stuff and everything and say well I really don't know enough about this so I need to research it.
>
> But the first semester I was staying up all night writing overheads and trying to prepare for class and everything. And I just used up all that time teaching and preparing. [...] And to balance my teaching, preparing for classes I think I took a lot more time than I needed my first semester and just familiarizing myself with what I needed to do. Also, you take up a lot more time preparing.

For one GTA, he was aware of time as it related to being prepared in the way he experienced a lack of time to prepare. He felt unprepared and was trying to catch up with the material and experienced a lack of time to be as prepared as he wanted:

> I guess one of the first things was that I didn't have time to prepare. I had to use the person's syllabus who had begun the course and follow that as closely as possible. I was reading, I think we were already in the third chapter of the text and so I was trying to catch up and learn that and in fact I think that the first day that I ever, it seems like I was given the

> position on a Tuesday and I had the discussion on a Monday so I didn't meet them for almost another week. And so at that time I think I was supposed to review them for the exam. And so I had just started reading the text, I had just started looking over the syllabus and learning about the material.

Thirdly, three GTAs were aware of themselves as being prepared or unprepared in the context of unexpected or "off the wall" situations. These unexpected situations usually consisted of students asking questions or making comments that the GTAs did not anticipate or they consisted of student behavior that was unexpected. Some GTAs described such situations and felt unprepared to respond to the students and were often taken aback by their students:

> So, occasionally that will happen where someone will make a comment or ask a question that I'm not prepared for and so sometimes it's difficult especially when it really is truly off the wall and I have to try and answer the question without belittling the student. [...] Someone will ask me a question that I've never considered or at least not had given much thought to.

> I get them to bring in their own experiences for class and she said in class a couple of weeks ago that her best friend in high school smoked marijuana with all three of her kids, with all three of her pregnancies and we had been talking about teratogens and how it is so bad on the fetus and all that stuff and for a second I just stood there and I didn't know how to react to it. [...] So it was just strange because all of the sudden I was in a situation that I was not prepared for and I had not even thought about because we had been talking about teratogens and cocaine and marijuana and radiation and all these things and I always had the sense that it was other, it was somebody else's problem and all the sudden that problem was in the class and I was just unprepared for it.

> You definitely need to be prepared and know your subject because your students will throw questions at you and you will be like why are they asking that. Or something that, how can you explain it to them on a level that they understand while relaying that you know this stuff in more detail and that you understand it completely. That's a challenge sometimes to bring it down to their level, but you have to.

Sub-theme 4: Self as Authority

For four of the GTAs, their experience of teaching included an awareness of themselves as an authority in their classrooms. GTAs described authority as something they set or established and then worked to maintain, sometimes this was done through their grading procedures:

> You don't have to call me Mr. (last name of GTA), you can call me (first name of GTA), but I am the teacher and yet I still worked on the personal level with the student, but I made sure to establish the authority. [...] You sort of set it a little bit harder at first and then lax because then you've set the fact that you are authoritative you are the boss, but you know I'm going to let you do this, I'm going to let you do that. You know that sort of a thing. [...] And by setting the tone with those things going "you will not cheat or there is a consequence. You are expected to do this, this, this, and this. The grades are going to work this way, this way, this way, this way, and there's this set formula at the end to calculate your grade". That to me worked to set the authority.

> I felt like my authority had been edging away at like each class and I didn't know how much of that was my part because they were all, four of them, four of the five were black students. And I kind of felt like more aware of myself in disciplining them than I would with a white student and that's probably racist on my part, but [...] I still wear my nose ring in class. I feel that's part of who I am and I'm not going to change that, but I try and carry myself with more authority so they can look past that. [...] Like I'd stand there with a piece of paper in front of me and I'd be shaking. I don't know how much authority that gave either. I don't know I think that's about it.

Most were acutely aware of authority when they perceived it had been lost due to their own unprofessional behavior or when a student challenged or confronted them, which they seemed to interpret as a loss of control of the classroom suggesting their authority had been lost or diminished. Challenges and confrontations typically came in the form of behaviors such as students talking, reading the paper in class, or arguing with the GTA about some class-related issue or over a grade they had received. GTAs experienced student

behavior in these circumstances as a perceived loss of control over the students which caused them to reflect on their own sense of being an authority:

> I think so. He kept saying the same thing over and over again and I thought 'I'm going to win, it's going to take me a minute', but I'm glad I composed myself. I really thought about what I was going to say and I said it because I felt like there was no way he could win because I felt pretty powerful at that point because I had already identified these two different components of this topic and he couldn't see that and that's how I knew I would win. And so I did. So silly. And that was alright, but I still feel like I need to reestablish my authority in the class.

One GTA in Geography experienced her own loss of control that she described as unprofessional and detracting from her sense of authority in the classroom:

> It was obvious that I was mad and chewing somebody out and I don't think that was a very professional thing to do. It certainly didn't get the results I wanted. It wasn't the best way to handle the situation and um I think that kind of detracted from my professionalism. And you know I think professionalism and authority are so closely interrelated.

Sub-theme 5: Self as Performer

Four GTAs' described their experience of teaching as performing or acting. For these GTAs, the experience of teaching was like being on a stage in front of the class. Some even compared it to acting in a play. Performing was described as the turning off of one personality that was present prior to teaching and turning on a different personality or persona as they started to teach. Some described the experience as stepping into and back out of the new persona. This new persona that was put on or created was more conducive to teaching and possessed characteristics that were perceived to be helpful to teaching such as being energetic and liking people. Performing also helped GTAs put behind them whatever distractions or difficulties they were experiencing at the time and

focus on teaching the class:

> It sort of reminded me of going on stage in a play in high school kind of feeling. There's the exhilaration of realizing that yeah I can answer those questions, yeah I do know my stuff. It's a great feeling. [...] But there's so much of this, it's so closely related to acting and putting on this persona. [...] One day I was furious because my car wasn't running well and the shop was giving me a hard time, but I had to go in and turn that personality off and turn on lecturing about whatever.
>
> I actually have a very hard time getting up in front of other people and talking believe it or not. Sometimes it helps to, I don't have as much a problem now as I did back then, but sometimes it helps to create sort of a different personality. So when you step into the classroom, you're that person and then you can step back out of that person when you want and be the expert when you're teaching. There are some days when I do not want to get up in front of the class. And you have to pull on this other personality you've created and do it. [...] And you realize I've got to go in and teach this class, but I can't go in like this and you just have to go and say I'm shutting that persona off for now and I'm getting this other one that is bouncy, full of energy, and likes people, and likes to work with them and she just kind of tends to stay there the rest of the day and get things done.
>
> I'm much more expressive in front of a classroom than I am personally on a one-on-one basis. I feel like I do use more big hand gestures or smile more or you know that what I normally do and that's what I mean by going in there and becoming this person on a performance. Because, maybe it's just more of me, it's me amplified, but it, I mean it's a difference between what I do if I were reacting one on one with an individual than when I'm standing in front of a classroom.

One GTA in Chemistry experienced being on stage and performing as an outlet for his personality that he didn't experience in other situations. Teaching became a way for him to express part of who he was and the positive reaction of the students served to reinforce and produce a stronger sense of himself as being a performer when he teaches:

> Previously when I would be there with discussion, I would kind of be, I'd be on stage basically. By nature I'm a ham. And to be, being in front of the classroom, somewhat in my territory where I know they're sitting in front ready with questions and most of them start kind of cloudy and unsure of

some things and I'm there to fix that. [...] I get more into whenever they, they catch on and then like 'ah cool' you know. It's more of like when you're fishing you get that bite you get real excited because you think you've caught the fish so you get all excited and you're trying to reel them in. So when I see that glint with a student, when I see that encouragement and everything is actually started to work then I think 'ah cool'. Now that just puts me on stage even more. [...] And I was on stage and I found an outlet...So when I came here and I started teaching and I started planning just like general chemistry the basic stuff, I looked out into the classroom and I see all these students quiet, listening to like on every last word, every last breath that I'm expelling and I loved it. So it's, there's a parallel between the two.

Sub-theme 6: Who I Am

A sense of personal identity for eight GTAs was reflected in the sub-theme Who I Am, of the main theme Awareness of Self. In this sub-theme GTAs described a core sense of who they were as people and not just as teachers in the classroom. When GTAs were describing Who I Am they often referred to how they were raised and the influence that family and society had on their identity. GTAs also referred to personal characteristics that were central to their identity and heavily influenced their approach to teaching. In the following excerpts, examples of both Who I Am in terms of family and social influences and personal characteristics are presented:

Family and Social Influences

One thing that I was constantly trying to keep in mind is that I'm not from the South, I don't share the same type of religious background that most of the students here do. I certainly do not share this conservative, Republican type leaning that you find in (name of state) so much and it's very very, you have to keep all these things in the back of your mind whenever you're talking, try not to offend anyone's religious, racial, political sensibilities, but at the same time don't back away from things.

Yeah, um, I guess growing up in the house that I did it was the traditional family, father went to work, mother stayed home raised all three kids, it

was just such a clean, healthy way to grow up. And when I think about this woman who is in my class who is 18 or 19, I don't think she has any kids of her own, but her life has just been so much different from mine and probably most of the other people in the class.

I guess for me personally it was probably the influence of my father. I've always felt like if you were getting paid to do something then you should do it to the best of your ability. Whether you are picking up garbage on the street or teaching. You are getting paid to do it. Yeah we may not be getting paid much as far as we're concerned, but you know we are getting an education out of it and we also get paid some, it may not be much, but I feel a little obligated if someone is paying me to do something I feel obligated to work to the best of my ability.

Yeah, I mean the town I was raised in was completely white in my class of maybe 500 students when I graduated maybe two of them were black. So I mean, you know I don't, I have a really good friend who is black. I try not to you know pre-judge people because of their race, but I feel like if I discipline them, the basketball students for example then they are going to say you're doing that because I'm black. You know and my mom is an elementary school teacher and she's run into that with some black students where like, you know if that was a white student I'd say get the hell out of my class, what the f--- are you doing, you know. I guess I just gave them more leeway because I was being afraid of being called a racist.

Personal Characteristics

That's the kind of person I am. I'm an experimentalist, I like to get down in the lab and monkey with stuff.

I'm a lab rat. I mean I'm down in a hole somewhere and that's fine.

I'm a ham and I love attention. [...] So if I'm going to teach then I want to accomplish something. I'm prideful about things. I want to look back and say I succeeded. I'm very competitive which pride goes along with competitiveness and I'm very much a ham.

I mean a lot of intro classes, superficial knowledge is enough, but she was just really struggling so in some ways I felt like it was my fault cause I mean as a sociologist I'm taught and it's just the way I think that I don't immediately look to some individual factor to understand her not doing well so I thought that there has to be some kind of situational factor.

> So I was used to just more of doing my job and being quiet and staying awake and suddenly here I was in front of a group of people and what I was saying mattered to them and whether it was right or wrong and that was just, that was different because I guess that I had always been more of the behind the scenes type of person and suddenly here I was in front of the room.
>
> I've been a news junkie since I was twelve.
>
> She kind of has this helpless feeling and that is just so much not me. I'm such a proactive person.

Over the course of time, one GTA in Communications reported a change in Who I Am. Her experience of teaching included what she called a "progression" in how she felt about herself and identified herself when telling other people who she was. She began to perceive herself differently as a teacher:

> I've enjoyed that progression and I feel more like an instructor now than a GTA. [...] When you are telling people what you do and you know that first semester you say 'well, I'm a GTA, I'm a graduate teaching associate'. You know I distinguish myself that way and it seems like now more and more I distinguish myself as an instructor or as a teacher rather than just referring to myself as you know as a GTA. [...] I've come more to the idea that an instructor better describes what I do than my first perception of what a GTA does.

Sub-theme 7: Self as Learner

The sub-theme Self as Learner has an historical context. The previous sub-themes have all been in the present context as the GTA is currently aware of him/herself as a teacher. In the sub-theme, Self as Learner, GTAs described their experience of remembering when they were learners in their undergraduate experience. This sub-theme captures a picture of how nine GTAs remembered themselves in the past as learners, which included an understanding of their

attitude toward learning and interest in the material. It also included a remembrance of their behavior in terms of what they did and would never have done in a classroom. GTAs reflected on helpful and unhelpful teachers and the way in which they learned the subject matter they are now teaching. GTAs' awareness of themselves as learners often occurred in contrast to what the GTAs experienced with their students. They typically reflected on their own experiences as learners when their students' attitudes and behavior were different from what they perceived their own to be as learners. It is as if GTAs tried to make sense out of negatively perceived students' attitudes and behaviors (e.g., lack of interest, grade-focused, being confrontational) by thinking back to their own experiences and remembering what they were like as learners.

> That's the kind of student that I've always been for most of my classes. I don't know if I've just been lucky or what, but it seems like I very seldom had a class that I didn't find interesting at some level.
>
> Like every student is going to be like I was as an undergraduate and I was really really into biology and really wanted to do well and not every student is like that and I learned that the first semester.
>
> And it's just been interesting to see how because as a student I was never concerned about grades. I didn't make great grades and I didn't make bad grades as an undergraduate. It never concerned me and I usually, well that's what I earned is usually what I felt like.
>
> ...this was the kind of student I was. I would have never challenged, I mean I might have asked questions or said something, but I never would have angrily confronted somebody so that hadn't occurred to me before.
>
> I'd say the main cause or the main reason for not wanting to teach would probably the fact that just seeing that the students don't want to learn just for the sake of learning and I guess that's alright for some people, depends on your point of view. I mean I went through school, the classes that I took I took because I was interested in the material and I wanted to learn the material and it just so happens that I ended up with a degree in

chemistry and I didn't really plan on it. I was just taking classes because they were interesting to me so I wanted to learn the material.

I guess I remember my experience as an undergraduate and when I learned that you need to go seek out your professors and they will be there for you always and I suppose I wanted them to learn from my mistakes, but poor class they have no idea I'm not just a teacher, I'm emotionally involved (laughs).

GTAs also reflected on their experiences as learners when deciding what they wanted to be like personally as a teacher or how they wanted to teach their own course. They reflected on themselves as learners with teachers they found both helpful and unhelpful.

I took a philosophy class as an undergraduate we were in a discussion section of 50. I never knew my TA. He never knew me, but another class I took we were in a discussion section of five, the person knew me, I knew the person because we got more involved in sometimes bringing our personal experiences into it. Whereas, so everyone got to talk more whereas instead you have a class of 50 where maybe you get to talk twice a semester.

And I guess as an undergraduate that was something I always looked for and was impressed by was people that seemed to have a good understanding of the topic and could answer questions and do something besides read their notes.

I guess a lot of it goes back to undergraduate experiences and I always, there were times when I had professors that I thought were not extremely competent and I had occasion and I guess I am knocking in some ways on myself, but I had a fair amount of graduate student instructors, some of them I don't think were really very competent and some of them probably were teaching the course for the first time or maybe teaching the course in an area other than the one they knew the most about. And so I guess that is something I've always found to be very important.

I know from my own experience of being a student if the teacher was more personable I learned a lot more and that's what I'm trying to carry on.

In summary, the theme Awareness of Self was described by the participants' as an awareness of themselves as teachers in the context of their

students. Predominant in the participants' experience was a shifting awareness of personal attributes that the participants identified as meaningful for themselves. The theme Awareness of Self has seven interrelated sub-themes: (1) Self as Confident; (2) Self as Knowledgeable; (3) Self as Prepared; (4) Self as Authority; (5) Self as Performer; (6) Who I am; and (7) Self as Learner.

Theme II: Awareness of Students

Students were an important part of the described experiences of teaching for GTAs. This main theme reflects the participants' awareness of their students and how they related to their experience of teaching. The GTAs in this study talked often and at length about their students. At times awareness focused more directly on students as other aspects of the experience of teaching, such as the GTAs' awareness of themselves, shifted into the background. Awareness may shift and different aspects of the experience of teaching may become figural as others fade into the background, but awareness of one aspect is never severed from the others. This situation is reflected in the GTAs' awareness of their students. GTAs became focused on their students and what became figural about their students often had meaning for how they experienced themselves and made sense of themselves as teachers. As awareness shifted to their students, participants were aware of their students in ways reflected in the following sub-themes: (1) Students as Interested/Not Interested; (2) Students as Confrontational; (3) Gender; and (4) Race. One way to think about the sub-themes is to organize the first two sub-themes, Students as Interested/Not

Interested and Students as Confrontational, as describing the behavior of the students. The last two sub-themes, Gender and Race, have to do with types of students experienced by the participants and describe the personal characteristics of their students. Although GTAs described other types or categories of students, such as pre-meds, majors, and non-majors, gender and race were the two most prominent categories used.

Sub-theme 1: Students as Interested/Not Interested

Figural for several GTAs in their experience of teaching was the awareness of their students as interested or not interested in the material. The latter group, not interested, was commonly described as the students who were just interested in getting a grade and having no interest in learning the material. GTAs perceived that a majority of their students were not interested in learning the material. These students often stood out in contrast to the GTAs' recollection of themselves when they were learners and very interested in the material.

A few GTAs described experiences with interested students, noticeably fewer than the number of non-interested descriptions. The interested students wanted to learn the material and seemed less preoccupied with their grade. They often asked questions and responded to the GTAs in class. When aware of the non-interested students, GTAs felt frustrated and questioned their ability. In contrast, GTAs experienced a sense of confidence in their teaching ability, felt they deserved to be teaching the class, and enjoyed the teaching process when aware of their student's being interested in the material. Below is how one GTA in Biology described his experience:

> And so they're students who have put in time and you can tell have actually thought about things and then there's other ones who just turn in things. You can tell they are just doing the assignment 'cause it's due at four o'clock today. But the ones who really care will come into your office hours and so you read the paper and say, 'wow, who was that?' and flip back and look at the name and the name J. or whoever will stick out in your brain. And they are the students that come into your office hours and ask questions and when I'm lecturing and when I ask a question they're the ones who raise their hand or shout out the answer. And so it's not that you really prefer them, but they are the ones who are noticeable who come to you to ask questions, who are looking at a dissection and say what's this and they're the ones who will challenge you as a TA and you're like hmmm I don't know, but whereas a lot of the other ones will just kind of sit there and casually observe and watch, these other people who are more into it do all the work and they're just kind of hanging on following person and that's fine too, but it's the ones who have an interest. And some of the ones who have an interest aren't the ones who are that interested in their grade. [...] Yeah, it's a little frustrating to me because they are not interested in learning.

A GTA in Physics described his experience of students being interested or not interested in the following way:

> The attitude of the student especially since some students aren't interested in it at all and never get into it, whereas other students occasionally have their interest peaked and other students are always interested because you can tell that they've built their own crystal radios before or they've had some experience where or they like to play around with their hands with things. [...] just to get to know the students though you can tell then when their interested and when their not. You can tell when their asking a question that if they give it just another minutes worth of thought they would know the answer too and were just not interested, too lazy you know, and just wanted to get the answer and get done with it. Whereas if they're interested they will spend a little more time monkeying with something or thinking about it and then get their answer.

Overall, nine out of twelve GTAs talked about their students as interested or not interested in learning the material. Those that were not interested were often

described as only in it for the grade and not caring about the material. Here are some other descriptions of students:

> She would just come to me and in that hour expect me to explain like an entire chapter, answer her questions and you know get her on that right track which is near impossible. [...] And it was very very disheartening and aggravating...She would come in and just sit there and not be interested in the information at all. [...] I guess I have to be here type of attitude instead of I want to be here I think I need to be here and she ended up failing the class I think.

> Yeah, I haven't gotten to the point yet where I can look at students who are reading the paper and not take it personally. Maybe one day I will get there, but I feel like if students are talking to each other, if they're looking out the window and maybe not one student, but several students or a good many students then I feel like I must not be doing something right and I must be boring and I don't want to be an entertainer because I know I'm not that personality.

> What gives me trouble are people that sit there like a lump on a log, they're not engaged, they don't make eye contact. And some of them can do very very well and get good grades, but they still aren't terribly engaging people. [...] I'll have two or three students, the same two or three students who can say something about it and the rest of them neither know nor care.

> One of the bad things that just came to my mind, one of the things that bothers me sometimes is you get some of those students you reach out to them, but there's I'd say a pretty sizable group of students that really just want to get a grade and leave and so you know if you say you can get a C if you never show up, they would never show up.

One GTA in Chemistry was so strongly impacted by his students lack of interest that it contributed significantly to his choice not to pursue teaching as a profession:

> I'd say most of the people that I run across, the students that I teach, they're in it for the grade. It's like what do I need to do to pass? What do I need to do to get a C? What do I need to do to get an A? And as far as really learning the material, I really haven't, I don't know if I've come across, well I'd say about .5% of the students I've taught really want to learn the material just for the sake of learning it. [...] and I remember a group of two or three of them were very concerned about just getting

through the class to get the grade to keep their scholarship and that was it. And the second semester it was a few pre-med students who they were going to be doctors some day, but they could care less about chemistry. All they want, you know, is their A. So that kind of turned me off definitely.

Although most descriptions were focused on those students not interested in learning the material, some GTAs reported experiences with students that were interested. These students were typically involved in class by asking questions, talking to the GTA after class, and generally just participating more in class. For the GTAs, such students provided a sense of excitement and satisfaction for their work:

> It's exciting kind of when you see more, you see that your students are getting interested. And when you see more than one student getting interested and when it's students more than the ones who always participating. [...] I guess I sense it with people who hang around afterwards and talk to you and ask you questions or who contribute a lot during class. Maybe and who knows I could be wrong they could like give me ones on evaluations and not be happy with the class, but they appear to be interested and more often than not they are the ones who have given me compliments or told me they enjoyed the class. The more vocal participants. [...] The only thing I might add is how rewarding it is when I see students really become interested in the topics.

> ...that's what makes those students who do care, not so much about their grade, but about learning and you know experiencing college for what it has to offer each course or what it has to offer, it makes those students really stick out in your mind.

> He was an older student in his 30s coming back and starting over again and very smart. He would sit in the front left of the discussion room and students would ask questions. I'd be nervous for one. I wasn't really sure of myself of how to give it back to them and when I would start to stutter I would kind of look down at (name of student) and he would know the answer just because he was well educated, and he was very smart and he knew it and he would kind of guide me along through it even though I knew it I just didn't know how to express it.

> ...not so much engaging, but people who are, who make eye contact... paying close attention, concentrating, who will ask questions, when I throw out a question to the class, who will respond. Those are the gems. The

people who will actually come to my office hours or who will come up to the desk after class and speak to me or come chat with me before class.

Sub-theme 2: Students as Confrontational

GTAs often described student behavior that was experienced as challenging or confrontational. Six GTAs described experiences in which they had conflict with their students. GTAs described instances where students argued and fought with them, used profanity toward them, behaved recklessly in class, and were generally disruptive of the class and their efforts to teach:

> Basketball, especially at that time, we had one guy on the team that went to the NBA and basketball was a big thing and therefore the basketball players pretty much ruled the campus and these guys were basketball, had five starters in the same class and they were just out of control. They would you know back talk me all the time. [...] one class it really came to a head...we had boiling ethanol on hot plates...they were throwing erasers around the room while I had this boiling ethanol on this bench. And I just, I threw them out of class cause they were a danger to people.

> I thought the comment was made not only out of ignorance, but a little bit of malice. And I sensed that the student was maybe trying to cause trouble in some way.

> There were these two guys, sat in the back, right in my line of sight, I think that was the big problem, was they were straight in my line of sight. And I finally I mean I pulled them aside two or three times and tried that, guys please don't say anything. So I would look up and I would see these guys talking and sometimes I would hear them and it just made me madder and madder. [...] one of these two guys was in there and he was reading the name of student newspaper and he also fell asleep an awful lot in class and I said to him, 'you know, end of the semester I've got all these concerns, you know of my classes of my projects I'm late on,' my plans all that stuff. I was on the edge and I said, 'do you think you could manage to stay awake and not talk through the video?' [...] I've had three newspaper fights. [...] What bothers me is when they get blatant and hold it up in front of their face and that's just a little more that I can handle cause I know that as I stand up there and lecture, I look out, I see these people, it's gonna make me mad. It's gonna make me lose my train of thought, gonna make me lose my place in my notes and I won't be lecturing well.

> I began to speak to the entire class and there were two students, they were men, talking. And I let it go for a long time because I was concentrating on something else and it never occurred to me that they wouldn't stop talking. And I'm the first person to say 'shutup', you know I'm ready to go, what are you rude. I'm absolutely the first person, but I let it go and I let it go and they were louder and louder. [...] And I made a few jokes and things and with one of those students, he tried to have a fight with me in class, he tried to argue a point. [...] I don't feel like I had the upper hand, but he I think with someone else would have presented it differently or backed down from the confrontation and he didn't.

Sub-theme 3: Gender

An awareness of their students' gender was described by five GTAs as important to their experience of teaching. Although all transcripts included references to male or female students, four female GTAs and one male GTA were specifically aware of gender in their experience of teaching and the dynamic it created between teacher and student. The female GTAs were commonly aware of gender when being confronted or challenged by male students. In addition to the examples provided in the previous sub-theme of Students as Confrontational, here is another example by a female GTA in Communications:

> I had a student that tried to negotiate...my bad example is the whole negotiating thing that students do that I used to feel like I had an obligation to do this whole negotiation thing. And I think that's especially true when you have male students if I don't have a commanding presence as a female instructor. That I find the male students are the ones that really like to negotiate.

One male GTA in Sociology was aware of gender and potential problems that could possibly result from relations with his female students:

> If it's the two people are of opposite sex it might be an ethical guideline there. It's generally not a good idea to do that with a female student given some of the possibilities there. And so I think he saw that I was willing to

be connected. I was willing to help him outside of the class. [...] So I always try to keep that, especially more so with females I guess with some of the potential difficulties there I mean I don't want to even give a, have the possibility arise of some impropriety there...And it seems like there was one time that she came to one of the showings of the films and something like she parked really far away from the library like down at the stadium or something and asked if I could walk to her car with her cause she didn't know anybody in the class and she was afraid. She was kind of tiny, and I guess she was afraid of possible assault and walking at night, stuff like that. Asked me if I could walk her to her car or if I was parked nearby if I could give her a ride. And so in some ways I guess I felt a little uncomfortable about that because that was probably going a little beyond the typical, I mean that's not typically one of the duties of the instructor to walk students to their cars, things like that. So that was a time where I kind of thought 'if I do, that is that sort of crossing the line.' I mean because we would be alone, walking together, in the dark, in a garage. And I'm not sure that's something I should do so I was concerned about that.

Sub-theme 4: Race

In addition to gender, GTAs were aware of race and the impact it had on how they responded to students of a different race from their own. Two caucasian GTAs were specifically aware of their student's race during instances of potential confrontation. Both GTAs described themselves as being aware of how they react to students of a different race and showing precaution not shown with students of a similar race:

> You know I'm still trying to work through my feelings about that and how it's not, my feelings are kind of worked through it's how I individually deal with my students, my black students or white students or whatever. The differences between them. How I immediately react. I guess it kind of bothers me that I feel about students differently based on race.

> Yeah, Yeah. And I don't want the rest of the class, I don't know, the whole thing with her being black. It makes me even more aware of how I treat her because she is very vocal in class and it makes me just really aware of how I treat her versus everybody else. Just because she is so different from everybody else in the class, but I have to stay really aware of it so I

don't spend 10 minutes talking to her before class starts and ignore everybody else who is waiting in line to talk to me or wants to talk to me.

In summary, the students played an integral part in the experience of teaching for GTAs, which was reflected in the second main theme, Awareness of Students. All participants talked about their students and focused on specific behaviors and characteristics about their students. GTAs were aware of students being either interested or not interested in the subject matter. Most GTAs described experiences with students that were not interested in learning the material and only concerned about receiving a grade. This often left the GTA feeling frustrated and disheartened by their students' lack of interest. Also figural, in their awareness of students, was when students confronted them by arguing in class or behaving disruptively. In addition to these behaviors, GTAs were aware of personal characteristics that influenced the teaching experience. These personal characteristics were the gender and race of students.

Theme III: Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries

GTAs described the experience of the relationship between them and their students as a balance between making a connection with their students, yet at the same time, maintaining boundaries. It is important to keep in mind that both the experience of making a connection and keeping boundaries were from the perspective of the GTAs and not their students. Both of these experiences happened with a small number of students. In most descriptions, it was only one student that the GTA made a connection with and only one student that the GTA

experienced as crossing the boundary. The process of making a connection included getting to know the students on a more personal level and developing a professional relationship that went beyond the course:

> I like to be accessible ... and I really like close interactions with students.
>
> I love, the thing that I enjoy the most, the person doesn't have to get a good grade for me to feel like I've made a connection with them.
>
> ...and I think the connection was that he saw that I was willing to be connected if that makes sense. I think a lot of students are more than willing to connect with faculty and to form some kind of professional relationship there and to be able to talk even on a personal level beyond the course. [...] And so I guess that's where the connection was that I was interested enough in him as a student to try to help him. [...] I think they sense at some level I care about them, the students, that I'm interested in making some connection.
>
> I've probably had more from that class keep in contact with me than other class. You know come by and see me and keep in touch. So that makes me feel like I clicked with some of them. Whereas in a larger class, you know I might pass them on the campus and not even remember they were in my class and I hate that, I mean I hate knowing that I'm not remembering them all.

The main theme Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries has four interrelated sub-themes that are specific to the Making a Connection aspect of the relationship. GTAs further described their experience of making a connection as: (1) Getting Through; (2) Going Beyond; (3) Seeing it in the Eyes; and (4) Use of First Names.

Sub-Theme 1 of Making a Connection: Getting Through

For five GTAs, Making a Connection included a sense of getting through to the students. When GTAs made a connection they felt like their students were understanding them, grasping what they were trying to communicate at a

deeper level, a level beyond simply listening to the GTA dispense information:

> Yes, that's what I would consider more of a connection with the student because they're going to, they're going to realize that OK maybe there is something to what he's saying, maybe there's, maybe I need to pay attention, maybe listen a little more listen a little closer to what he's trying to say so there, it's more or less, instead of like slouched (slides down in chair) they kind of scoot up to the front of their seat.
>
> I guess one of the things I like about teaching is that ability to make a connection, to see someone actually learn. I find that very rewarding. I know that probably in a class of 50 that I normally have, I mean I may really only connect with four or five per semester.
>
> It's almost like making a connection. I think. She, I felt like because of the question she asked I was probably presenting it well. I was probably pretty clear. It's like a small victory I guess in that respect. So it's like for a minute we kind of had a connection. And in fact I felt like we lost the room. It was just the two of us talking because no one, I was very surprised, I was a bit surprised by her question and delighted and I thought probably many of the students were you know reading their paper at that point or taking a nap because it was over their heads. And some of them I hope were listening and some around her I knew were listening. But for a while it was just the two of us. And it would have been nice to go on for minutes and minutes with her question, but I looked around the room and there were 250 people you know that were waiting with their pens so we had to stop.
>
> And I guess to me that's getting through to students is when they can understand and put together something bigger or when they are willing to put in the effort themselves to find out what they believe or what they think is the truth.
>
> And one of the students...That means he's doing something right and he's feeling good about himself so I'm getting through to him and he's learning what I've taught by the sign of a good workout.

Sub-theme 2 of Making a Connection: Going Beyond

Five participants desired that what they did as teachers would have an impact on their students' lives beyond the classroom. GTAs hoped their students took the information and experiences they were exposed to in class and carried

them throughout the rest of their lives. Going Beyond meant that the GTA had made a contribution to the lives of their students in such a way that the students would apply their knowledge outside of the classroom, be able to form their own opinions and explain them, and in some way have a better quality of life:

> I enjoy making them go out and do observations and say, 'hey this theory really is relevant to this child's life, it does help explain behavior,'...And that is what I want, I don't want them to leave with just all these theories, I want them to think well I believe this because x, y, z and I will act differently with children because of this so I want them to leave with opinions about raising children and child development. [...] I just feel interested in the material that I'm teaching and I'm still interested in figuring out the best way to get them to learn it and get them to remember it. Um not just for the class, but hopefully for the rest of their lives and try to make it relevant for them. [...] And really teaching them. I am interested in teaching them something, having them leave with more knowledge than they had when they came. And clearer knowledge, not just more, but more opinions so that they could really go out and argue with someone and say no I don't think you should spank because x, y, z. Or Piaget said x, y, z. I would love that if one of my students did that. [...] And so I want them to be really firm in what they believe because it could end up impacting hundreds of children eventually. So I see it as a really important role for me to try to get them to really think about things because it has the potential of impacting so many other things.
>
> I really think that I try to see it as preparing them to go on...And I'm trying to prepare them right now with a little four page report...there is one window in the lab where I teach and I try to have the students go beyond the actual classroom look out that window, not literally figuratively of course, look out that window and look around and see the physics.
>
> They are learning something. They are applying it to their life and that's what I enjoy, make them realize something, make them learn. [...] I think we're all teachers and we're all learners and just to be able to influence someone into what their future activities might be, hopefully for the better. And the fact that maybe they are going to stick with this the rest of their life and that's that goes beyond anything. Hey I've influenced this person for the rest of their life, what can be more rewarding. [...] Make them aware that the details are essential. That there are things you need to be concerned with now that will affect you in the future. So if you are doing a deadlift wrong or you are doing this workout that is not muscle balanced it could lead to injury later, you could pull your back out later. Things like

that, you need to pay attention to detail now so you don't have something down the line that keeps you from living a full life. [...] Partly on my test, I don't give multiple choice tests. So you can spit back the answer, but can you apply it. Cause I would much rather have them apply what I am trying to teach them than just spit it right back at me. [...] I want you to be able to use this stuff and apply it outside.

And I think, I don't know if anyone else shares my view, but I think there is more to my job, I have more responsibility than just teaching world regional geography. I think that teaching an introductory level course, it is also my responsibility to work on building critical thinking skills and to help them build those skills that they are going to need in their college career and certainly writing is something everyone needs. One of these days most of them will get out of here with a piece of paper saying they are educated and they darn well better know how to write. Or else that degree doesn't mean anything.

So it's unrealistic I think to expect them to love it like I do and some of them do though which is incredibly rewarding when someone comes up to me and says they picked up an article they wouldn't have picked up or better yet they were reading an article and they understood it because they took this class.

I think the things that I enjoy about being a TA the most are when you can reach out to a student or to a group of students in a lab or in a discussion and explain something to them in a way that it they understand and when you do that you not only educate them, but you also give them the tools to use that information, but also the confidence and self-esteem to go out and search for more knowledge and more information. [...] What's important is if five years down the road when they read something in the newspaper or go to vote on some issue or elect a representative for state congress they will be able to take these things they've learned, the concepts they learned five years ago back in college, and say I remember we learned this is a problem and they can apply that. [...] I try to cover conceptual things and more thought provoking things that will hopefully peak their interest a little more and not so much peaking their interest, it's what I think is important for them to know as a person living in today's world...I try to make something that will help them as people.

Sub-theme 3 of Making a Connection: Seeing it in the Eyes

When GTAs experienced a connection with their students, they often recognized it through the facial reactions of their students. For three GTAs their

experience of making a connection included an awareness of their students' eyes as a signal that a connection had been made:

> ...to see that glint in the, like the corner of their eye when you can tell that it clicked they finally, they caught on. [...] you see the glint in the corner of their eye where everything kind of falls into place and it makes the hour, it makes the time worth something.
>
> I remember seeing a student. I don't know how to explain it. I said something or we talked about something that you could just see it on their face, kind of a spark or something, they looked deep in thought and they were really thinking about that, were interested in it. And if I remember she didn't even ask any questions in class, but it just seemed in looking at her reactions that something had hit her that she was really interested in. [...] It was just kind of a, her eyes kind of aware, just opened up a little bit wider or something and I think I remember she started taking some notes.
>
> But sometimes that's when their eyes light up when I get off track or I'm subtly still on track.

Sub-theme 4 of Making a Connection: Use of First Names

In addition to Seeing it in the Eyes as a signal of connection, three GTAs experienced the making of a connection when their students called them by their first names. The use of the GTA's first name by their students indicated to some GTAs that the boundary between them and their students was being diminished:

> Um, you need to let them know that even though I am the one teaching the class and I suppose I have all this great knowledge I have been where you are at some point in my life. I was an undergrad for ten years and I like the fact that around here they can call you by your first name. Back in my undergrad we had to call all our teachers Dr. whatever and when I was teaching there it was ok to call me (first name of participant) since they already know you as that. If they hadn't known me as that it would have been Ms. (last name of participant) which that sets a distance right there, there is that level of respect in there as well, but they can still identify you by your, identify with you more easily by your first name. And again it brings you down to their level where I can step back into the front line or bring them up toward me. So that she's more of a facilitator than a teacher.

> Well, in my lab I try to get to know the students better. It's done on a first name basis. Every now and then some people will still call me Mr. (last name of participant) which is a little weird for me.
>
> I don't think I can pinpoint any certain time, but there was a point where that boundary or that dividing line between student and instructor was starting to go away, becoming diminished. And I guess I knew there was a connection at the point when, I think he eventually started referring to me by my first name.

Two GTAs described the importance of knowing their students' names to making a connection with them. Knowing the students' names was a way of communicating to the students that they were important to the GTA:

> So if I can call them by their first name they are going to feel like they are someone and they can come up and talk to me. They are going to feel more comfortable. It's amazing how many people do not know my name in a class of 35. [...] hey, 'She knows my name. I must be important in this class.'
>
> And again, partly maybe it makes me think I'm doing a good job, but I do like interacting with them. I don't like looking out there and not knowing everybody I'm talking to and that's important I think. I mean, I'm still terrible with names and I guess that's another thing that bothers me. I can't even, even in a class of 40, I can't I have trouble with names and I feel guilty for not knowing people's names especially in a small class after a while and I work on it, but I have a real hard time with that.

Making a connection with students was often balanced in the relationship between GTAs and their students by keeping boundaries. Boundaries delineate the distinction between "I the teacher" and "you the student". Keeping boundaries was about maintaining a wall, a boundary line, a sense of distance or separateness from your students. Whereas making a connection was about breaking through the wall and decreasing the sense of distance and separateness from the students, keeping boundaries was described as the experience of developing, maintaining, and reestablishing, if necessary, the

boundaries that separate "I the teacher" and "you the student". Some GTAs described boundaries, such as a glass wall or sense of distance, between them and their students as something to be overcome in order to reach their students. On the other hand, some GTAs described boundaries, such as a glass wall or sense of distance, as something to be maintained. Just as GTAs were aware of making a connection and getting through to someone, they were equally aware of boundaries they wanted maintained and of times when those boundaries were crossed by them or their students. GTAs used a variety of words to describe the experience of Keeping Boundaries. It was described as a glass wall, a boundary, a dividing line, a thin line, distance, and being separate.

The interesting thing to note about a glass wall, boundary, or line, is that the GTA can still see their students and their students can see them. Keeping Boundaries was not about being cut off from students as might be the case if GTAs described a brick wall between them and their students. Keeping Boundaries was about an awareness that the teacher and the student are not the same. They are different and each has a different role to play. And it was when the teacher or student did not play their role that the boundary was experienced as being crossed and subsequently it had to be reestablished.

When boundaries were crossed, GTAs described it as a loss of respect, an uncomfortable feeling that the students had become too familiar with them. GTAs often felt compelled to reestablish the boundary and create some distance between themselves and their students. This distance served to reestablish the roles of "I the teacher" and "you the student" and create a sense of respect that

enabled the GTA to teach the class and more specifically to evaluate the students and give grades. One GTA in Sociology described it in the following way:

> One thing I always try to do is I always try to keep sort of a dividing line between instructor and student. I can't really operationalize it, but I mean there is sort of a point of going too far as far as I'm concerned in terms of the relationship between a student and an instructor. I'm fine with that boundary being diminished like I said, but there is a point which I would draw the line. [...] So I try to keep that boundary there. I honestly like to know my students maybe beyond the teacher student relationship, to know a little bit about them, their background. I have them fill out a little information sheet at the beginning of every class just to get an idea of where they are coming from, interests, hobbies, stuff like that. But at the same time I want to keep it semi-professional. So that's tough to find that median between just total instructor student, no interaction beyond what's related to the class, and then become close friends. I've known people that have really become close with students even during the semester and that can be tough. [...] So that developed over the semester and I can remember a couple of times where I had to just almost in talking before or after class or by e-mail I found myself having to change the topic because we ended up talking about personal matters. And so I felt kind of strange doing that cause I hate to cut someone off, someone that is willing to share. I hate to do that. But at the same time I felt like I was losing that element of power, that distance that every instructor should have from the student and so.

One GTA in Anthropology experienced the boundary as a wall and was aware that the boundary was being crossed when students began using her first name. She described the boundary in the following way:

> I'm teaching a course for the first time and I think it goes fairly well, but there are a few students in it who I think see me a bit too much as their buddy. So, and that I find disturbing. They call me by my first name which under normal circumstances wouldn't bother me, but students have always called me by Ms. and very rarely do they use my first name. And I wouldn't, I wouldn't use someone's first name. So I can get over that. I feel as if I need to put up a bit more of a wall to remind them that I'm not their buddy...mentally I need to be standing a bit above them. I need to be the instructor. [...] but I suppose I want to step up on a platform and remind them who's in charge.

This same GTA also talked about clothing as a way to establish the boundary and gain some distance from her students:

> ...but last night I wore the power duds with the shoes, the pants, and the big belt. Anyway, I look I do during the normal academic year and I found that the few times I tried to dress down during the normal semester I gave some of the worst lectures ever. And I don't think all of it has to do with me wearing jeans, but I think that's part of it. I've learned you carry yourself differently when dress, I guess another way to separate yourself from your students and also makes you stand up a little bit straighter, gives you a little more authority so I put on the old power clothes last night and that did some of it, that was good.

Another GTA in Sport and Physical Activity experienced the boundary in terms of distance. At times, she did not like being distant or separate from her students and would work to decrease the distance, which she often experienced as a physical distance, between her and her students. Yet at other times she was aware of wanting to maintain a certain distance that she felt like she needed in order to maintain their respect:

> A lot of instructors when they teach will be separated from the class. I prefer to be back on the front row with everybody. And I hate it when I'm separated because I feel like I'm not a part of them and they can identify with you on a certain level I think, on a different level aside from the teacher student. I think they get more out of it cause I always pull them up to me or pull myself back to them when I'm teaching the exercise to music classes. [...] I will actually hop in and play with them. [...] So we all have a good ole time and we have a blast. It's just fun and I'm a part of the group at that point. They still respect me as the teacher, as the person in charge of the class, but they also say, 'hey she's fun.' But they will come up to me and make comments they may not make otherwise and say they are having fun, and just feel like they can approach me more.
>
> They are not paying attention to the safety, they are not listening to what I say and I have to step out and not be the teacher. On the other times, sometimes you become with your students and still remain the teacher and be their friend at the same time, there is a thin line at times. I try to keep my distance without being too distant. I don't think there has been a

point where I'm too much of their group and not enough of the teacher at least at this point in my career. I've still been able to maintain that distance that I need.

Four GTAs were aware of boundaries when giving grades to their students, especially poor grades. For many GTAs, giving a bad grade to a student was described as hard to do and in some cases GTAs felt bad or like they had failed when giving a bad grade. Grading produced a realization for these four GTAs that the personal relationship with their students had limits. These GTAs recognized that they would eventually have to give a grade to their students and possibly a poor grade. Having a boundary between them and their students gave them enough separation in the personal relationship to give a poor grade to a student if necessary.

So they were more willing to interact cause I like to be more personal, because I feel if it's more personal you get more out of the teaching relationship, but this is something that I learned, you don't want to, you need to avoid running the risk of them being too personal with you and not realizing that there is a purpose, eventually there will be a test or grade assigned. [...] yes, it's nice to know the students and personally interact with them, but they need to remember that there is some point where they are going to be tested and graded and that they have to know the material and not just be your friend.

And actually last night sort of a different incident, but more along the lines of this familiarity this being too familiar. [...] And a student walked up, an older student, and asked me if I would look at her exam and tell her which ones I got wrong. And I said 'sure, see me at the break and I'll do that'. I wasn't going to do it then. I wanted some distance from her. So she stayed in my face and handed it to me like I had nothing going and I was in the middle of doing something and she called me by my first name, which irked me a bit.

...started talking to me in a very informal manner and he started talking to me like he would talk to his friends, in fact I gave him a paper back one time and he said something like, 'this is B.S., I can't believe you gave me this grade,' this is bunch of stuff and using profanity and things like that.

> And I guess he somehow thought that things were that informal, that he could talk to me in that manner and then other times where he actually called me various names. I mean he used profanity. I don't want to repeat any of them. He would say, 'hey you are a (pauses)' like he might say to his friends. [...] Yeah, I mean I would feel like I didn't have that sort of respect. I think there has to be that dynamic where no matter how well you know each other that you have to keep in mind that one has the ultimate power to assign the grade to the other person, one can grade a person down not approve their work.
>
> So that automatically gets an F. And he said, 'you weren't' specific.' He tried to negotiate this with me...And I had to stop and say, 'no you have to step out of that' and say, 'no the facts are wrong you cannot win this point, you cannot win this argument this is how it's going to come down so sayeth the instructor,' so...

At times, GTAs were aware that they had crossed the boundary with their students. Two GTAs described instances when they had crossed a boundary with their students:

> And I got to this one student, can't remember her name no surprise, and she was a pretty good student I mean C+, B type of student. [...] And looking back I was out of line. I wrote on her quiz something along the lines of "what is this shit or what the hell were you doing here?" I put, it wasn't a major swear word, but it was either shit or hell . And I would hand back the quizzes during lab. I found out later that she was having just a terrible day. I mean she was on the verge of breaking down at any moment and when I handed back her quiz and she got a really bad grade looked down and saw what I wrote on there she just started crying in the middle of the lab. I felt terrible and from that point on I could tell that the relationship between the two of us was never the same, she would never speak during discussions. She would never ask questions, never chime in with the actual discussion of the material and I think it was my fault. [...] But in grading quizzes and in grading labs, you need some semblance of professionalism and that wasn't professional. That was unprofessional. I should not have done it. It was a bad day for me. I was aggravated and I expected more out of my students, her included, and I overstepped the lines thinking back.
>
> And there's not much I can do about that so I back off because people sometimes think you're attacking their religion or something which I tell them that I'm not, but some of them take it very personally and which is good that they take it personally, but not to the extent that they feel

threatened. If it's your own ideas or beliefs, you should take it personally, but I don't want to threaten people and if I do that I back off.

In summary, the theme Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries was described as the relationship between the participants and their students as it was experienced by the GTAs. The relationship was experienced as a constant struggle to find a balance between developing personal relationships yet at the same time maintaining a distance with students. GTAs described the experience of making a connection as getting through to their students and at times having an impact on their students in a way that went beyond the classroom and impacted the rest of their lives. GTAs also experienced connection in the glint and spark of their student's eyes and in the way that students would begin to call them by their first name. Balancing the experience of making a connection was the process of keeping boundaries with students. GTAs reported not wanting to become too close or familiar with their students, but wanted to maintain a boundary that distinguished themselves as teachers. Maintaining a boundary was also commonly experienced when evaluating students.

There is another aspect of the experience of teaching that was not captured by the main themes. Included in the experience of three female GTAs was the relationship they had with their supervisors. These descriptions are not considered to be a theme because they were not included in the experiences of the other participants. Also, the relationship with supervisors did not seem to be integral to the structure of the experience of teaching such that if it was removed

then the experience of teaching would be considerably changed in the way if any of the other three main themes were removed. Although, the relationship with supervisors is not a theme, it was a salient component of three female GTAs' experiences of teaching and seems worthwhile to note.

Supervisors: Being There – Not Being There

Three female GTAs described at length the relationship they had with their teaching supervisors. Figural in their descriptions was the presence or absence of support from their supervisors. GTAs often described their supervisors as being there or not being there for them. For these three GTAs, a supervisor's support or lack of support had meaning for how they experienced teaching. The GTAs valued the presence and support of their supervisors and when it was absent they often experienced a change in themselves. One GTA in Biology experienced the absence of her supervisor as a loss of her own authority with the students:

> Yeah, let's see for the first year for the first two semesters I taught intro biology and we had a really good advisor for that class too. She was like an instructor level. And she was just really talented in teaching and in organizing classes and in organizing labs and stuff. It was really good. We had a lot of work. We had a lot of labs to do and a lot of things to grade, but she was really supportive and I think that's one of the most important things that a TA is to have your advisor whose advising the lab and lecturing to back you up because I've had situations that have happened and situations where that hasn't happened and if it doesn't happen then you lose all authority as a TA. [...] She was, I guess she was a really good lecturer, but you know as an advisor for the class and as an organizer for the lab she just wasn't there. [...] One of the major purposes is to be a higher authority that the students can go to, but she needs to back up the TA you know. [...] I guess they had that threat of the coach over them, but it wasn't me. They wouldn't have done that for me. And

> my lab supervisor, she kept telling me that she would take care of it. She would take care of it and she didn't, you know we had that meeting and she just completely did not back me. [...] Then the student sees that the TA actually doesn't have any authority. I guess kind of a straw man there. The TA's authority can be easily knocked down.

Another GTA in Geography was acutely aware of her supervisor's absence and experienced a lack of guidance and assistance. This experience was then contrasted with a different supervisor who she experienced as being there for her and giving her guidance:

> Supervisor – Not Being There
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> The faculty member who was supposed to be in charge of the grad students teaching 101 was not involved at all. This professor never had us meet, never gave us any instructions or anything. [...] And nobody would suggest you know this would be a good order to approach the different themes or these are the things that we really want you to teach in this class, the ideas we want you to get across to the students, no assistance at all. You figure out your own grading scale. If you want to assign homework, fine. There was no guidance whatsoever.
>
> Supervisor – Being There
>
> ...in Fall of 96, there was a different faculty member in charge of the graduate teaching associates and he was wonderful. [...] Every Friday we would have a meeting in his office. [...] And he wouldn't tell us what to do, but he would give just sort of some guidance. [...] He was wonderful. He was there anytime I needed it. Didn't dictate, would suggest. He has lots of experience teaching this course and just was a real mentor and it was wonderful.

A third GTA, from Anthropology, described a similar experience with her supervisor whom she described at times as doing very little for her which affected her confidence. Yet at times her supervisor has supported her which has been a validating experience:

Supervisor – Not Being There

I have an advisor who is very hands off and in fact when you said it would be anonymous, I thought great because he would probably come up. He's as hands off as you can get. [...] But he does as little as possible. I mean he's done almost nothing for me. [...] So I was passed over for funding several times which meant he wasn't in my corner...Well in truth I don't work with him. He'll sign on the dotted line. He won't do squat for me. [...] It's been absolutely negative. It's been horrible, awful. He hasn't done anything for me. We had a rocky start in that he expressed some interest when I first arrived in working with me. And I had trouble, I think he felt that I wasn't completely dedicated and so he gave up on me and I've never really been able to regain that sort of confidence, however little it was.

Supervisor – Being There

And when he asks me to do something, or he compliments me, or he asks me what my plan is and I can really let him know what I'm doing and I get positive feedback. I'm high for days. I feel great. There's that validation again, I suppose. And he has no idea. And there are other people I think that get that same thing again and so we'll go a long time without speaking and if we speak for five minutes and it's good, I'm good to go. [...] The first time I was funded and he told me I was funded I acted like a fool in front of him. I literally jumped up and down and I was glad that the money, but I felt like somebody believes in me in this freaking place, good, and I'll show them and I'll work and I did. And the first I worked so hard as a TA, I was just a TA for two sections each semester and I worked harder than any TA probably ever had. And I did that to show him so he'd hear nothing but positive things. [...] But when he has something good to say or I ask him a question or he seems pleased with some of my progress and I leave smiling for days, I smile. I tell you our meetings are no more than five minutes, little things like that. I feel that little by little I'm sort of building this sense of confidence with him. [...] So he has to come out smiling and has to talk to me and it's usually good, but he just has no idea how far I can go on five minutes of his time.

Although the relationship that a GTA has with a supervisor is not at the level of a theme, the descriptions of these relationships illustrate the interrelation among themes. As GTAs are aware of themselves in the context of their students they are also aware of themselves in the context of their supervisors.

They make sense of themselves as confident, authoritative, and belonging to the profession in light of their supervisors' being supportive or unsupportive.

Thematic Structure of the Experience of Teaching: Revisited

Analysis revealed three themes as essential to the experience of teaching for GTAs: Awareness of Self, Awareness of Students, and Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries. The themes, along with a brief overview of their organization, have already been presented in detail in earlier sections of this chapter. The purpose of this section is to provide a more complete description, including examples from the interviews, of how the themes are organized to form the basic structure of the experience of teaching for GTAs.

As noted earlier, awareness of the GTAs was constantly shifting. At one moment in the experience of teaching the GTA was aware of some aspect of him/herself. At another moment, awareness shifted to the students or to an awareness of the connection or boundary between GTA and student. As awareness shifted and different elements of the experience of teaching became figural, the other elements faded into the background. Although they shifted into the background, they were not lost or severed from the total experience of teaching. Instead they formed the context or "ground" by which the figural aspect was understood or made sense of. Although each theme has meaning on its own, it is the relationship of the themes to each other that forms the basic structure of the each experience of teaching. Each theme has to be understood

in relation to the other themes as they become the context for the theme that is figural in awareness.

As the first main theme, Awareness of Self, emerged as figural and GTAs were aware of themselves as being confident, knowledgeable, prepared, having authority, or performing, an awareness of the students receded into the background. The participants' awareness of their students' behavior and characteristics receded and formed the context from which the GTAs made meaning about who they were as teachers. A GTA's experience of being confident, knowledgeable, prepared, having authority, or performing was influenced by their awareness of their students. These self-ascribed attributes cannot be understood separate from an awareness of the students. Here are a few examples to demonstrate how Awareness of Self is contextualized by Awareness of Students:

> I don't like to feel like it's all coming from me and when they start talking it feels like they are learning from each other and from me and just by expressing themselves they are learning and it makes me feel like I'm doing a better job and gives me confidence and obviously I guess I've always been one that not the kind of person, I guess I don't have as big an ego so I don't feel like, maybe I don't know what it is, but I don't feel like I know all the subject matter so I've always been kind of questioning myself a little bit. So anytime that anything good happens like that, I feel like I'm doing a better job and I feel better about myself.

> I get them to bring in their own experiences for class and she said in class a couple of weeks ago that her best friend in high school smoked marijuana with all three of her kids, with all three of her pregnancies and we had been talking about teratogens and how it is so bad on the fetus and all that stuff and for a second I just stood there and I didn't know how to react to it. [...] So it was just strange because all of the sudden I was in a situation that I was not prepared for and I had not even thought about because we had been talking about teratogens and cocaine and marijuana and radiation and all these things and I always had the sense

that it was other, it was somebody else's problem and all the sudden that problem was in the class and I was just unprepared for it.

Previously when I would be there with discussion, I would kind of be, I'd be on stage basically. By nature I'm a ham. And to be, being in front of the classroom, somewhat in my territory where I know they're sitting in front ready with questions and most of them start kind of cloudy and unsure of some things and I'm there to fix that. [...] I get more into whenever they, they catch on and then like 'ah cool' you know. It's more of like when you're fishing you get that bite you get real excited because you think you've caught the fish so you get all excited and you're trying to reel them in. So when I see that glint with a student, when I see that encouragement and everything is actually started to work then I think 'ah cool'. Now that just puts me on stage even more.

The above examples demonstrate the shifting nature of awareness. The GTA's awareness shifted from the students to him/herself. As awareness shifted the GTAs became aware of themselves as confident, unprepared, and performing respectively. However, their sense of themselves as confident, unprepared, and performing makes sense and is best understood in the context of the experience of their students.

The second main theme, Awareness of Students, was described as the participants' awareness of the behavior and personal characteristics of their students. The participants' awareness of their students was contextualized by an awareness of themselves. The sub-themes, Who I Am and Self as Learner, of the main theme Awareness of Self, most strongly contextualized the awareness that participants had of their students. GTAs often made sense out of their students behavior and personal characteristics in the context of their own personal attributes, family/social influence, and experiences of being a student. In the following example, a GTA in biology was aware of the race of several

students that had been disruptive in class. Her experience of these students was contextualized by her own racial identity and experience with individuals of different races:

> Yeah that was about halfway through the semester and I felt like my authority had been edging away at like each class and I didn't know how much of that was my part because they were all, four of them, four of the five were black students. And I kind of felt like more aware of myself in disciplining them than I would with a white student and that's probably racist on my part, but...Yeah, I mean the town I was raised in was completely white in my class of maybe 500 students. When I graduated maybe two of them were black. So I mean, you know I don't, I have a really good friend who is black. I try not to you know pre-judge people because of their race, but I feel like if I discipline them, the basketball students for example then they are going to say you're doing that because I'm black. You know and my mom is an elementary school teacher and she's run into that with some black students where like, you know if that was a white student I'd say get the hell out of my class, what the f--- are you doing, you know. I guess I just gave them more leeway because I was being afraid of being called a racist.

Another example comes from one of the two male GTAs in Chemistry. He was aware that his students were not interested in learning the material for the sake of learning and he perceived they were only interested in the grade. He tried to understand their behavior by reflecting on his own experience as a student and approach to learning the material:

> I'd say most of the people that I run across, the students that I teach, they're in it for the grade. It's like what do I need to do to pass? What do I need to do to get a C? What do I need to do to get an A? And as far as really learning the material, I really haven't, I don't know if I've come across, well I'd say about .5% of the students I've taught really want to learn the material just for the sake of learning it. [...] I'd say the main cause or the main reason for not wanting to teach would probably the fact that just seeing that the students don't want to learn just for the sake of learning and I guess that's alright for some people, depends on your point of view. I mean I went through school, the classes that I took I took because I was interested in the material and I wanted to learn the material and it just so happens that I ended up with a degree in chemistry and I

didn't really plan on it. I was just taking classes because they were interesting to me so I wanted to learn the material.

The third main theme, Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries, has a unique place in the structure of the experience of teaching. Whereas the themes, Awareness of Self and Awareness of Students, functioned as grounds for each other, Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries was contextualized by aspects of both the GTAs and their students. More specifically, this theme was contextualized by the roles played by both the GTAs and their students. Participants often talked about the roles that they and their students played. GTAs referred to themselves as playing different roles such as instructor, teacher, friend, or counselor, and to their students as playing the role of student or friend.

> ...yes it's nice to know the students and personally interact with them, but they need to remember that there is some point where they are going to be tested and graded and that they have to know the material and not just be your friend.

> I guess, but I started off wanting to be my students' best friend. You know we're all going to be buddies and that just doesn't work and I guess that doesn't set up any authority for the TA on their own.

> And so I really, I didn't know what my role was. On one hand, I wanted to slide into the counselor role and say 'this woman needs help and you really need to, this is a serious issue, she's potentially ruining three children's lives already and she is pregnant again'. So I just, I didn't know what my role was in that situation. [...] I almost went into that role of service coordinator and said well has she hooked into this and this and name of program and uh that wasn't my role right then. I'm the teacher in the class. I'm supposed to impart knowledge about child development, areas of development, stuff like that, theories. Um, and another thing, another role, is that friend and I am not her friend. I am not there to be her friend. I am there to be her teacher.

> I found I'd get through to my students the most is if I don't necessarily separate myself and say I'm the teacher you're the student.

Regardless of whether the GTA was aware of making a connection or keeping a boundary with the students, they experienced the relationship in the context of the role that they and their students were playing. The following example from a GTA in Sociology illustrates how the experience of making a connection or keeping a boundary was grounded in an awareness of the roles played by the participants and their students:

> Yeah, there have been times where I pretty much had to cut someone off from talking about personal matters and I sort of felt uncomfortable talking about it, but I could see things going towards too much of a friend relationship rather than an instructor student relationship. [...] I don't think I can pinpoint any certain time, but there was a point where that boundary or that dividing line between student and instructor was starting to go away, becoming diminished. And I guess I knew there was a connection at the point when, I think he eventually started referring to me by my first name. [...] But to tell me specific problems about things is probably more than I need to know. And I think if I had participated in that conversation, well maybe it's this, or maybe you should try this then I would almost become a counselor...And so that's not my role and so I felt like if I gave him advice on that, if I listened to that and didn't cut him off then that would push us even farther away from that instructor student dynamic and push it closer to just two friends and one happens to be teaching and so.

The purpose of this section was to provide a more complete description, including examples from the interviews, of how the themes are organized to form the basic structure of the experience of teaching for GTAs. The shifting nature of awareness was discussed and each theme was presented along with the contextual grounds within which these themes were experienced. The findings of this study are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Most of the literature on GTAs has been directed toward program development and evaluating the effectiveness of different training methods to improve teaching (Abbott, Wulff, & Szego, 1989; Carroll, 1980; Levinson-Rose & Menges, 1981). Only two studies have investigated teaching as experienced by GTAs (e.g., Boehrer and Sarkisian, 1985; Worthen, 1992). The purpose of this study was to provide a description of the experience of teaching for graduate teaching assistants. Twelve GTAs were interviewed and asked to describe their experiences of teaching. Transcripts were developed from the interviews and then analyzed using a phenomenological method. Analysis revealed three main themes in the experience of teaching for graduate teaching assistants: (1) Awareness of Self; (2) Awareness of Students; and (3) Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries. Analysis further revealed that aspects of the main themes, Awareness of Self and Awareness of Students, served as grounds in the study.

The discussion of the results consists of two sections. The first section reviews the current findings of each main theme for connections with previous research presented in chapter two on GTA Socialization (Duba-Biedermann, 1994; Myers 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Pavalko & Holley,1974; Staton & Darling 1989; Williams & Roach,1992), GTA Experiences of Teaching (Boehrer & Sarkisian, 1985; Worthen, 1992), and GTA Attitudes and Expectations for Teaching (Bomotti,1994; Braxton, Lambert, & Clark, 1995; Hayward, 1993; McDowell,

1993). Additional resources may be introduced that contribute to the discussion of the current findings. The second section includes some final thoughts for GTAs as well as faculty and administrators that are responsible for their training and supervision.

One finding from the present study was that GTAs were aware of themselves in the experience of teaching and made sense of who they were as teachers in the context of their students. The main theme Awareness of Self was described by the GTAs an awareness of themselves as teachers in the context of their students. As GTAs focused on themselves in relation to their students they made meaning about who they were as teachers, which included their confidence to teach, knowledge of the material, authority in the classroom, preparedness, sense of being a performer on stage, sense of personal identity, and remembrance of themselves as learners at a point in the past. Of the seven sub-themes under the main theme Awareness of Self, three--Self as Knowledgeable, Self as Authority, and Self as Prepared--were addressed in the previous research. The current findings related to these sub-themes are reviewed for connections with the earlier research as well as with new sources that may be introduced in this section.

One of the most commonly addressed issues in the literature related to the theme Awareness of Self is the GTA's concern about knowing the subject matter they are teaching. In the current study, GTAs reported that knowing the subject matter was an important part of their experience of teaching. GTAs described their experience as students had questions and they were there to give

the answers. Having to say "I don't know" was figural for most GTAs and it was described as "daunting" and "uncomfortable". As one GTA in Geography said, "There is also the occasional, very daunting experience of having to say I don't know." For most GTAs in the current study, they believed they should know the material and be able to answer student questions. They often described it as their job to know the material and not knowing the subject meant they weren't doing the job for which they were being paid. The GTAs in the current study were aware of anticipating times in their classes when they would be asked questions and possibly not know the answers. They reported feeling a lot of pressure to know the answers. There were also certain topics that the GTAs did not know very well. Some approached these unfamiliar topics at a superficial level, not discussing the topic in detail because they couldn't and also wanting to avoid having their lack of knowledge revealed. For many GTAs, they were concerned about how their students would perceive them; would they seem competent to their students?

Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) interviewed three GTAs and combined data from the interviews with their personal experience to provide a description of the experience of teaching for GTAs. In their study, they also found that knowledge of the material was an important issue for GTAs. Boehrer and Sarkisian reported that teaching challenged the GTAs' sense of adequacy and that GTAs often entered their first semester wondering if they knew enough to teach. They reported that GTAs experienced teaching as something that pushes them to the

limits of their knowledge and beyond, putting them in a situation where they are teaching a subject unfamiliar to them.

These findings are similar to those in the present study. GTAs were concerned about knowing the material in the beginning of their teaching experience and at times found themselves teaching topics that they didn't know. Some dealt with the lack of information by bringing in "experts" from the field to address these topics. Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) reported that a perceived lack of knowledge leads GTAs to doubt themselves and feel inadequate in their teaching role. They further stated that GTAs feared their students would expect them to know all the answers. The GTAs in the present study shared the same concern that their students would expect them to know all the answers and learning to say "I don't know" was an important step in dealing with this expectation. Although, the GTAs in the present study did not describe themselves as inadequate, several did express concern that they weren't doing a good job because they perceived themselves as not knowing enough. Most were concerned about knowing the subject matter, but saw it as something to overcome instead of feel inadequate about.

Other researchers have addressed knowledge of the subject matter and its importance to the GTA experience of teaching. Staton and Darling (1989) were interested in the socialization process that GTAs experienced in the process of becoming a member of the professoriate. They identified that acquisition of knowledge pertaining to the relevant field was an important part in making that transition from GTA to professor. For some GTAs in the present

study, knowledge of the subject matter was an important goal and something they viewed as a professional responsibility. In some cases, GTAs described times where they perceived that they did know enough and gained confidence that they could answer questions from their students.

Nyquist and Sprague (in press) addressed the issue of knowledge in their research on stages of GTA development. They conceptualize GTAs as moving through three stages of development: Senior Learner, Colleague in Training, and Junior Colleague. Furthermore, changes in development can be charted along four dimensions: Concerns, Discourse Level, Approach to Students, and Approach to Authority. The category "Concerns" includes knowledge of the subject matter. In the beginning stage, Senior Learner, Nyquist and Sprague describe GTAs as most concerned about themselves and their survival. Included in this stage is a preoccupation with their knowledge of the subject matter and a concern of how students will perceive them if they don't know the material. Will they be seen as competent and be respected?

Although the present study was not designed to investigate developmental stages, some of the GTAs in the present study reported a concern similar to Nyquist and Sprague's first phase, Senior Learner. They described themselves as concerned with how they appeared to their students. Would they appear competent to their students and would their students respect them? Both questions were directly related to their knowledge of the subject matter. The appearance of competence and the respect of students hinged on their

knowledge of the subject matter and their students' perception that they knew the subject matter.

Concern about knowing enough is something that GTAs have to wrestle with in their experience of teaching. As they begin their teaching experience, most are concerned about the adequacy of their knowledge and address it in different ways. GTAs in the present study said they came to accept that they don't know everything and that there will be times when they have to say "I don't know". Although at first this was described as uncomfortable, it seems that most come to terms with their level of knowledge and find it more acceptable to not know everything. A GTA's sense of competence and adequacy is often related to their knowledge of the material. This too also seems to change over time as GTAs grow in their knowledge and accept their limitations.

A second sub-theme, within the main theme Awareness of Self, addressed in the literature is Self as Authority. In the present study, GTAs reported that having authority was an important aspect of how they perceived themselves as teachers. GTAs described their authority as something they set or established with their students, which was often done through grading. Furthermore, they were often aware of their authority when they perceived that it had been lost or was diminishing.

Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) stated that authority was also an important issue for GTAs. Whereas the GTAs in the present study seemed more interested in establishing and maintaining authority, Boehrer and Sarkisian described authority as something that GTAs were not sure of how to handle.

They said GTAs experienced authority as something given to them by the nature of the teaching position and struggled with how to deal with their newfound authority especially as it applied to how they related to their students. Boehrer and Sarkisian reported that GTAs were most aware of their authority when grading students' work. These GTAs worried if they knew enough to be an authority. They also felt responsible for the poor performances of their students and struggled with the lack of standards they had for grading. Their authority was often challenged when students argued a grade they had been given.

Worthen (1992) also found authority to be an issue for GTAs when grading. He reported that GTAs were mainly concerned about establishing credibility with their students. Worthen reported that credibility was established by disciplining students and exercising authority in grading situations. Worthen described authority as a technique used to send the message that the GTA is the one that will be giving a grade at the end of the semester. Using authority in this way was intended to produce credibility.

All three studies provide a somewhat different perspective on authority as it relates to the experience of teaching for GTAs. Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) described authority as something that GTAs learn to handle and deal with because they are not use to having it. Worthen (1992) described authority as a technique that is used to establish credibility with students. The findings of the current study paint a somewhat different picture. GTAs are aware of themselves as an authority in the sense that authority is to be established and maintained. GTAs in the current study did not describe their authority as a technique or tool.

Authority is something they were aware of about themselves. At times they experienced the loss of authority and described moments in which they felt their authority was diminishing in the face of confrontational students similar to the description in Boehrer and Sarkisian's study. One similarity between the current findings and those of the other two studies is the significance of authority in times of grading students. The current findings are more similar to Worthen's findings: authority is established through grading procedures. This is different from Boehrer and Sarkisian's findings that GTAs worry if they know enough to be an authority in order to grade exams and respond to challenges by their students because of arbitrary grading standards. It is important to note when comparing findings between previous research and the present study that different methodologies were used. Although both Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) and Worthen (1992) used interviews in their data gathering methods, other sources of data were incorporated with these results. Boehrer and Sarkisian included personal ideas based on their work with GTAs and Worthen included information from teaching logs and group discussions that changed the type of information gathered. The present study does not include the personal experiences of the researcher nor in any way prompted the responses of GTAs other than to clarify issues already introduced by the GTAs. These differences may account for some of the differences in the findings.

A third sub-theme of the main theme Awareness of Self addressed in previous research is Self as Prepared. The issue of preparation was a main theme in Worthen's (1992) study of seven GTAs' experience of teaching after

their first semester. Worthen collected data using three different methods: qualitative interviews, teaching logs, and group interviews with several GTAs. Worthen found that "Need Teacher Preparation" was the predominant theme across all three data collection methods. Worthen heard the GTAs in his study say they felt unprepared for the task of teaching. Despite an orientation program, GTAs still reported they were unprepared to teach. The lack of preparation stemmed from not knowing teaching techniques as well as duties and responsibilities related to their assignment. Some GTAs in Worthen's study described preparation as overwhelming because supervisors tried to present too much information at once. Others felt they didn't have enough time to prepare because their own research and course work came first, which limited their time to prepare for teaching.

Findings in the present study support findings in Worthen (1992). GTAs in the present study reportedly felt unprepared to teach. Similar to Worthen's GTAs, those in the present study reported a lack of training to prepare them. Even though several had been through training programs prior to teaching, it was often inadequate in preparing them for their teaching role. Furthermore, GTAs in both studies reported insufficient time to prepare and described time conflicts between their teaching and other responsibilities. Preparation time for teaching was sacrificed for research and personal course work. A second difference between the two studies is that GTAs in Worthen's study felt unprepared due to a lack of information about duties and responsibilities. GTAs in the present study did not describe similar experiences.

Preparation was an issue for the GTAs in Boehrer and Sarkisian's (1985) study, though not to the same degree as in Worthen's study. Boehrer and Sarkisian heard GTAs say they felt unprepared because they were informed on a very short notice of their teaching assignment. Reportedly, they did not have time to read the text in advance and prepare activities for their classes. Also, GTAs were surprised at how much time it took to prepare to teach and wished they had been told of the time demands beforehand.

In the present study, GTAs also reported not having enough time to prepare. As in Worthen (1992), preparation time for teaching was often reduced because other responsibilities were given priority. As a result, GTAs often felt unprepared to teach their classes. Two GTAs in the present study described experiences similar to Boehrer and Sarkisian's study where they were given short notice of their teaching assignment. These GTAs said they were often reading the text at the same time as their students and usually stayed only a class or two ahead. One issue not reported in Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) or in Worthen (1992) was the lack of preparation that GTAs felt during unexpected or odd moments. GTAs in the present study said they often felt unprepared in the face of unexpected questions or comments by their students as well as when their students confronted them about grades or some other issue.

One of the five characteristics of effective teaching and of effective instruction has to do with preparation for teaching (Sherman, Armistead, Fowler, Barksdale, & Reif, 1987). However, GTAs in the present study and those in both Boehrer and Sarkisian (1985) and Worthen (1992) consistently reported feeling

unprepared to do their job. Also, even though several GTAs attended teacher training sessions prior to entering the classroom, many still felt unprepared to teach and lacked the training they desired. Furthermore, departments and faculty often communicate that other graduate school responsibilities are more important than teaching. As a result, less time is invested in preparing to teaching, which would seemingly result in decreased effectiveness.

The sub-themes Self as Confident, Self as Performer, Who I Am, and Self as Learner of the main theme Awareness of Self were not addressed in previous studies. Self as Confident reflects the GTAs' awareness of themselves as growing in the dimension of confidence as the teacher. GTAs described confidence as an aspect of themselves that builds or increases over time as they gain experience and knowledge and also learn to anticipate questions and reactions from students. For some, confidence grew to a point where they experienced a change in how they related to their students and described themselves as taking charge and having ownership of the class.

Self as Performer reflected the GTAs' awareness of themselves as performing or acting when they were teaching. They compared it to being on stage or in a play. One GTA in Chemistry said, "Previously when I would be there with discussion, I would kind of be, I'd be on stage basically." Self as Performer also included the idea of putting on a new persona or personality that was more conducive to teaching and in that way became a strategy for stepping away from everyday problems that might interfere with teaching. The closest that previous research has come to this has been an emphasis on effective teachers

as being stimulating (Sherman et al., 1987) and effective teachers describing themselves as entertaining (Wilson, Gaff, Dienst, Wood, & Bavry, 1975). However, the present findings suggest that being a performer is more than being an entertainer or stimulating students. Being a performer is how some GTAs experienced teaching. Performing and being on stage is what GTAs said teaching was like for them. Furthermore, Self as Performer included a conscious taking on of a different personality which has not been previously addressed in the literature.

Who I Am and Self as Learner were important aspects of the experience of teaching for the GTAs in the present study. These sub-themes captured the GTAs' sense of their personal identity and their remembrance of themselves as learners. Who I Am and Self as Learner also served as the contexts for how GTAs understood their experience with their students. GTAs often reflected on their personal identity or experiences as learners when trying to understood attitudes and behaviors or their students.

One possible reason why previous research has not addressed the GTAs' awareness of themselves as confident, awareness of themselves as performers, their sense of personal identity, and their experiences as learners is related to the research methodology. Other researchers have approached the study of GTAs with an idea of what is important and they determine the categories of experience to be investigated before talking to the GTAs. The present study employed a phenomenological method that included an open-ended, unstructured interview in which the GTAs determined the categories of

experience they thought to be important. Under these circumstances the GTAs talked about a growing sense of confidence as a teacher, teaching as similar to being on stage where they were a performer, their sense of personal identity, and their experiences as learners as important parts of teaching.

A second main finding in the present study was the awareness that GTAs had of their students as described by GTAs in the main theme Awareness of Students. When talking about their students in an open-ended unstructured interview, GTAs focused on students being interested or not interested in the subject matter, confrontations from their students, and in some cases the gender and race of their students. Across the interviews, GTAs in the present study were most commonly aware of their students being interested or not interested in learning the subject matter. GTAs perceive that a significant majority of their students were interested only in their grade and not in learning the material. Such students typically produced feelings of frustration for the GTAs. Also, GTAs reflected on their experiences as learners and perceived themselves to be different from their uninterested students when they were undergraduates.

Weimer (1993) in her book, Improving Classroom Teaching, notes that numerous national reports have confirmed the perception of students by most faculty as uninterested and unmotivated. She states the following:

> You hear a lot of complaints about students these days, but one is repeated more often and with more intensity than any of the rest. Students are passive...Regardless of the origins of the problem, faculty complaints have been substantiated by a number of prestigious and now frequently referenced national reports. In most of our classes, the intellectually curious, independently motivated, eager student is not in the majority. (p. 48)

Surprisingly, the previous research on GTAs does not address the perceptions that GTAs have of their students as a main issue. At best, their perceptions of their students is a side note.

The study that most closely resembles the present study in methodology and purpose, Worthen (1992), found that GTAs were aware of the interest level of their students and the subsequent impact it had on their experience of teaching. In Worthen's study, one of the main themes was "Frustrating Experience". An aspect of this theme included the perceived inability to motivate students.

> GTAs are also frustrated and upset by students who are unmotivated, don't listen in class, miss speech days or do assignments incorrectly. When students act like they "just don't care" GTAs feel: "pissed off"; "disappointed", "furious", "mad", "angry", "frustrated", and "ticked off". (Worthen, 1992, p. 13)

The GTAs in Worthen's study reportedly wanted to motivate their students, but found it to be very difficult. Some GTAs in his study wanted to just end class and at times would rush through material because of the perceived apathy of students and the perception that they could not motivate the students and make the class interesting. This often resulted in GTAs feeling as though they had failed.

These findings are similar to present findings in which GTAs described their students as not interested in learning. GTAs were aware of students reading the newspaper and having glazed looks on their faces. Similar to Worthen's GTAs, they reportedly felt as though they were doing a bad job, and

some believed they weren't good enough teachers. One GTA in the present study decided not to continue teaching largely because his students showed such a lack of interest in learning. Several authors talk about how to motivate students (Eble, 1988; Furhmann & Grasha, 1983; Lowman, 1984; Small & Lankes, 1996; Weimer, 1993). However, what seems important in the present study is how GTAs experience such students and make meaning for themselves as teachers in the context of uninterested and apathetic students.

The GTAs in the present study talked about challenges and confrontations from their students. Previous studies in the literature review did not address the challenges and confrontations that GTAs experience with their students. In the present study, GTAs described several instances of negative events where students disrupted class, read the newspaper, challenged their authority, questioned grades, and seemed uninterested in the subject matter. This isn't to say that GTAs did not have good experiences with interested, well-behaved students. However, they talked more about negative experiences with confrontational students.

Researchers and writers on teaching often write about classroom management and problematic students. The topic is common in texts on how to teach (e.g., Eble, 1988). To give one example, Statham, Richardson, and Cook (1991) studied rank and gender differences in how associate, assistant, and full professors managed their authority in the classroom. They were interested in how professors responded to student challenges and classified challenges into four types: Inattentiveness, Disruptions, Challenges to Competence, and Lack of

Participation. Inattentiveness was described as sleeping in class, reading the paper or writing letters. Disruptions were behaviors that disturbed the class and included talking to other students and monopolizing class time. Challenges to Competence included verbal attacks on a professor's knowledge or expertise. Lack of Participation was described as students not willing to interact. All four types of student challenges listed in Statham et al. (1991) were described in the present study and appear to be common in the experience of teaching.

Students that are challenging and confrontational seem to be a common part of the teaching experience. The GTAs in the present study reported several negative instances with such students. Except for the many positive statements from GTAs about their enjoyment of teaching and plans to continue teaching, it would seem that the experience of teaching was a negative experience for GTAs. However, for at least eight of the twelve GTAs in the study, they enjoyed their experience.

Possibly as teachers gain experience and reach status as full professors the importance of student challenges and confrontations is less important. Maybe they are more confident in their teaching abilities than GTAs or maybe they don't care as much anymore. This study was not designed to provide such answers. However, it is apparent from the twelve interviews in this study that confrontational students and perceived challenges by students has meaning for GTAs. In many cases, authority and respect were perceived to be threatened. One possible suggestion is that maintaining authority and respect from students is of such preoccupation for GTAs that challenges and confrontations from

students become major threats to an already wavering sense of authority. This relates back to boundaries because maintaining boundaries becomes a way to deal with such students and establish a sense of authority in the classroom.

In addition to uninterested and confrontational students, GTAs were at times aware of their students' gender and race. Most of the literature on the individual differences in students and diversity in the classroom is in the context of how to teach to different students (e.g., Chism, Cano, & Pruitt, 1989; Long, Devore, & Lapp, 1996). Researchers typically identify characteristics of different types of students and the needs of diverse students that should be kept in mind when teaching them. The literature is devoted to teaching techniques and understanding diverse ways of learning in an effort to increase effective teaching.

Although the present study is not about improving the teaching effectiveness to different types of students, some participants revealed that gender and race hold meaning for them. Some female GTAs were aware of gender when confronted by a male student and wanted to maintain their sense of authority. One male GTA was aware of gender when working with female students and not wanting to have even the suggestion of "impropriety" in the relationship. Other GTAs were aware of race in the midst of a difficult situation when the student was of a different race than their own. Some GTAs in the present study described themselves as highly conscientious of how they responded to students of a different race than their own. In summary, gender and race of students can have an impact on the experience of teaching for GTAs. The present findings suggest that GTAs were very aware of how they responded

to and treated students who differed from them in gender or race. At times they were uncertain of how to respond to such students, and if they should respond differently at all.

A third major finding from this study was the description of the relationship between the GTA and their students as described in the main theme Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries. In the present study, GTAs were asked in an open-ended interview format to describe their experience of teaching. The topics described in this study were determined by the GTAs as important to their experience of teaching. They were invited to describe their experience of teaching without any hidden or overt agenda on the part of the researcher. A common element in all of the interviews was the relationship they experienced with their students. As noted in chapter four, GTAs often wanted to develop relationships with their students on a personal level that went beyond the course. At the same time they described efforts to maintain a boundary with their students that limited the closeness of their relationship and separated "I the teacher" from "you the student".

Researchers (Bomotti, 1994; McDowell, 1993; Worthen, 1992) have suggested that interactions between teachers and their students are an important part of college teaching. Wilson, Gaff, Dienst, Wood, and Bavry in their 1975 book entitled, College Professors and Their Impact on Students, state the following:

> At the core of most critiques of American higher education is the assertion that effective education requires close working relationships between faculty and students. Indeed, whether implicitly or explicitly, many recent

> indictments of higher education have been made from a philosophical vantage point that posits the importance of close faculty-student interactions. (p. 30)

Although researchers cite the importance of relationships between teachers and their students and suggest that it is beneficial to both teacher and student, very little is really known about the helpfulness and benefits of such relationships (Wilson et al. 1975). Furthermore, very little has been done to describe the relationship between teacher and student as it is experienced by one or the other. In the present study GTAs provided a sense of what these relationships were like from their perspective.

Wilson et al. (1975) focused on the impact of faculty-student interactions and the characteristics of faculty and students that tend to engage in such relationships. In an effort to describe the impact of faculty-student interactions, they asked faculty from both colleges and universities from a variety of higher education settings to identify a college senior they had significantly impacted in their personal or educational development and describe their relationship. Likewise, college seniors were asked to describe a faculty person who had significantly impacted their personal or educational development. Results suggested that faculty attitudes and behaviors that view education as an interactive process and invite discussion in class were the primary factors impacting level of interaction with students. Wilson et al. referred to these characteristics as social-psychological accessibility. In addition, faculty that interacted more with their students also derived a lot of satisfaction from these interactions and were more likely to describe teaching as one of the most

satisfying aspects of their lives. When asked to describe their relationships with students, 72% of faculty reported their relationships were "casual and friendly", 22% selected "close and personal", and six percent said "impersonal". In most cases, the nature of the interactions evolved around the educational plans of their students and issues related to course content. To a lesser degree these interactions included a discussion of personal problems and concerns of students. Both faculty and students described significant relationships with each other as characterized by continuity. The relationship typically extended beyond one semester and often went beyond the classroom and included out-of-class interactions. From the students point of view, they reported openness and availability of faculty as the most important characteristics influencing interaction. Also, 81% of students reported that faculty, who had a significant impact on their personal or educational development, had stimulated them intellectually and sparked their interest in new ideas. Highly interactive faculty were also more likely to be physically available to their students and often attended parties, meetings, and visited the student lounge.

GTAs in the present study reported similarities to the faculty members described in Wilson et al. (1975). GTAs wanted to be accessible to their students and said that getting to know their students was an important part of teaching. As one GTA in Anthropology said, "I like to be accessible...and I really like close interactions with students." Several GTAs also described something similar to what Wilson et al. called continuity. They reported that students would often take other classes from them, or would drop by and keep in touch after the

course had ended. These interactions were often described as times of making a connection with students and rewarding for the GTAs, feeling as though they had made an impact or were getting through to their students. The faculty in Wilson et al. reportedly visited the student lounge, attended parties, and attended student meetings. They also reported discussing problems and concerns as part of their interaction with students even though such conversations were noticeably fewer than interactions about educational plans or course content. The GTAs in the present study described an effort to maintain boundaries between them and their students. In several cases they became uncomfortable when students began talking about more personal issues and problems they were having. They were also more aware of not wanting to be just a friend to their students, but to be their teacher. This was a constant dynamic in their experience and influenced the relationships with their students. The participants in Wilson et al. were at the level of professor status, which may account for some of the differences in how they related to their students.

Teacher-student relationships impact the experience of teaching for GTAs by influencing their decision to continue college teaching after graduation. Bomotti (1994) studied the factors that influenced a GTA's decision to continue college teaching as a profession and found that good relationships with students was a significant factor influencing a GTA's choice to continue college teaching. GTAs planning to continue teaching were more likely to describe their relationship with students as "TA has productive, interested, and friendly relations with students" as opposed to the item reading, "TA views students as the 'enemy'

and/or as hard to teach." GTAs who experienced productive, interested, and friendly relations with students were more likely to continue teaching. This study reflects an important difference in methodology. Although GTAs in the present study talked about developing relationships with their students as an important part of teaching, they did not say it was something that influenced their decision to continue college teaching. In fact, most described negative experiences with their students. Despite these negative experiences with students, eight of twelve specifically stated that teaching was something they planned to do after graduating. Of the remaining four, two identified more with research activities and two did not comment about future plans. GTAs in the present study did say that positive relationships with students produced a feeling that they deserved to be the teacher in the class and that they were good at teaching. This may lead to choosing college teaching as a career, but the GTAs in the present study did not indicate as much.

McDowell (1993) also suggested that interpersonal relationships between teacher and student play an important role in teaching. McDowell separated GTAs based on their level of experience (1-2, 3-5, and 5+ years of experience). McDowell found that GTAs with 3-5 years of teaching experience were more likely to develop close interpersonal relationships with their students and expressed a desire to develop such relationships. GTAs in the present study described wanting those personal relationships and also gave a sense of what such relationships were like. However, differences in the desire and development of relationships with students based on teaching experience was

not found in this study even though GTAs represented a similarity diversity of experience as the GTAs in McDowell (1993).

Worthen (1992) interviewed seven GTAs on their experience of teaching after one semester and found that relationships with students was an important part of their experience. Worthen reported a main theme of the study to be "Cares About Their Students". GTAs described themselves in a variety of ways that reflected their care for their students. They reportedly want to help their students and see them do well in their classes. The GTAs try to make themselves accessible and they want their students to learn. Also, GTAs feel a sense of accomplishment when their students succeed. The findings in the present study support these results. GTAs described themselves as wanting to help their students and wanting them to succeed. They often reported feeling responsible when their students did poorly as if they had not done a good enough job as a teacher. Also, GTAs in the present study reported positive feelings about themselves as teachers, the idea that they could do the job and deserved to be teaching, when their students did succeed.

Some researchers view teacher-student relationships from a developmental perspective and suggest that the way GTAs relate to their students changes as they move through particular stages of development. Nyquist and Sprague (in press) identified three phases that GTAs move through toward becoming a professor: Senior Learner, Colleague in Training, and Junior Colleague. Nyquist and Wulff suggest that progress through the stages can be observed in how GTAs relate to their students. GTAs in the Senior Learner

phase want to be liked by their students and often view their students dichotomously as friends or enemies. Sometimes at this developmental phase, GTAs may feel intimidated by some students or by the entire class. In the second phase, Colleague-in-Training, GTAs become more analytical about their students and are more concerned about being respected by their students. In the last phase, Junior Colleague, Nyquist and Sprague suggest that GTAs "re-engage their students in a more complex relationship" (p. 7). GTAs in this phase are less likely to be concerned about their students liking them as a friend and wanting to be respected. They concern themselves more with the learning needs of their students and see themselves as providing a service to their students.

In the present study, the relationship between teacher and student is described as a constant struggle between developing relationships and making connections with students balanced by maintaining a boundary between teacher and student that serves to maintain a sense of authority and respect for the teacher. Nyquist and Sprague have found results similar to the current study, but conceptualized the relationship differently. What the current study describes as a balancing process, Nyquist and Sprague conceptualize as phases of development with each development phase emphasizing some aspect of what is described in the main theme, Making a Connection and Keeping Boundaries. For example, in the Senior Learner phase, GTAs are interested in getting to know their students and wanting to help them. Also, in the Colleague-in-Training phase, GTAs were concerned about students respecting them. They also became analytical of students at this point.

These same descriptions were evident in the current descriptions given by GTAs. GTAs in the present study were concerned about getting to know their students, helping them, and having their respect. Being analytical of students conveys an idea of distance between teacher and student. However, the present study did not approach the experience of teaching as having a developmental sequence and therefore did not try to categorize the data in such a way. GTAs were asked to describe their experience of teaching and to talk about what they deemed important. GTAs did talk at length about relating to their students, but did not describe their experience as moving through phases.

One advanced GTA did describe a change in herself and how she related to her students. This finding was similar to the findings by Nyquist and Sprague (in press). She reported that as she became more experienced she felt ownership of the class and her students. She reported that she knew how to handle her students and was more comfortable being in charge of the class and handling confrontations by students.

One finding in the present study not addressed in previous research was the importance of boundaries GTAs described between themselves and their students. Several GTAs in the present study were concerned about maintaining a boundary between them and their students that separated "I the teacher" from "you the student". As one GTA in Sociology said,

> One thing I always try to do is I always try to keep sort of a dividing line between instructor and student. I can't really operationalize it, but I mean there is sort of a point of going too far as far as I'm concerned in terms of the relationship between a student and an instructor.

Boundaries were often recognized when crossed by students becoming too familiar with the GTAs, treating the GTAs like they would a friend, and showing a lack of respect.

A fourth major finding was the importance of the GTA's relationship with their supervisors and the impact of that relationship on the GTA's experience of teaching and awareness of themselves as teachers as it was described by the GTAs. In the present study, three female GTAs described their supervisors as being there or not being there. All three reported a lack of guidance and support from their supervisors. They felt like their supervisors were not there for them, to give them direction, back them up when confronted by students, and to provide encouragement and support.

Other researchers report similar findings. In Boehrer and Sarkisian's (1985) study, one focus of their research was on the relationship between GTAs and the institution where they worked. Included in this focus was the relationship that GTAs had with their supervisors. Boehrer and Sarkisian reported that GTAs typically experience a lack of support and guidance from their supervisors. They also report a lack of information about their duties and responsibilities which often comes from supervisors.

Worthen (1992) found similar results in his study of the experience of teaching for GTAs and their training needs. Worthen described the experience of teaching for GTAs primarily as a frustrating experience. A primary source of this frustration came from a lack of support, guidance, and feedback from supervisors overseeing the GTAs and their teaching duties.

In an article directed toward improving the relationship between GTAs and their supervisors, Wilson and Stearnes (1985) provide an analysis of the working relationship between supervisors and their GTAs:

> The promise of the TA-professor relationship is that, without any added formal requirements, the TA one way or another will learn from supervising professors whatever he or she needs to know about teaching. Such training can proceed personally, informally, and individually. As we see it, however, that promise is all too often an empty one. (p. 35)

This statement rings with expectations that supervisors will be there to guide and instruct GTAs on how to teach. This seems to be the expectation that GTAs often have entering the institution, but are often disappointed. Based on their observations from working with GTAs, Wilson and Stearnes suggest a possible reason for the lack of attention given to the teaching responsibilities of their students; supervisors don't feel responsible for the teaching of their GTAs and consider their job done if they have attended to the research of their GTAs.

Nyquist and Sprague (in press), in their research on phases of GTA development, identify relationships with authority as a dimension in which change can be observed. Nyquist and Sprague suggest that GTAs in the first stage, Senior Learner, are typically quite dependent on their supervisors to provide practical guidance on how to teach. GTAs in this early stage are concerned about teaching the "right way" and often require significant amounts of support. Good supervisors were defined in this study as individuals who provide structure and guidance. In a related article by Nyquist and Wulff (1996), they further emphasized the importance of a good relationship between supervisor and GTA and suggest that supervisors be sensitive to the interpersonal needs for empathy

and support of their GTAs. In summary, Nyquist and Sprague suggest that guidance and support from a GTA's supervisor are important. However in most cases good supervision is absent. They further suggest that GTAs move from being dependent on their supervisors to gaining autonomy and establishing a more collegial relationship with their supervisors.

Supervisors are important to GTAs in other ways besides providing guidance and support. Weiss (1981), in a study of professional role commitment among graduate students, reported that supervisors play an important role in a graduate student's professional identity and commitment to a profession. Weiss found that frequent and informal contact with faculty was the most significant factor in a graduate students' commitment to a profession over other factors such as student ability, time in the program, interaction with the university, and the prestige of the university. It can be reasoned from this that supervisors have an impact on a GTAs professional identity with the teaching role.

Bomotti (1994) studied GTA attitudes toward college teaching as a career and reported similar findings to Weiss (1981). GTAs were surveyed to identify factors that influenced their decision to continue college teaching. The seven factors included in the study were: (1) teaching assistant training, (2) teaching assistant supervision, (3) teaching assistant's academic department, (4) teaching assistant as teacher, (5) teaching assistant relation with peers, (6) teaching assistant relations with students, and (7) pragmatic constraints such as finances, discrimination, and the job market. Of the seven factors included in the study, findings suggest that good supervision was the strongest influence on that

decision to become a college teacher. Good supervisors were described as those who provided constructive and supportive feedback in addition to discussing teaching issues, techniques, and answering questions about course content.

Findings from the current study support previous findings and reveal some differences. The GTAs in the current study reported a lack of support and guidance from their supervisors. They often described their supervisors as being there or not being there, which reflects the sense of support that GTAs wanted from their supervisors, but often did not get. Current findings suggest that GTAs want their supervisors to provide practical guidance and to back them when students confront them or challenge a grade.

It is interesting to note the importance that researchers on GTA training place on the role of supervisors. It seems ironic that authors create models for effective supervision and emphasize the importance of the supervisory relationship, but GTAs continue to report negative experiences with supervisors who are not helpful and seem to have minimal interest in the teaching aspects of their GTAs. Furthermore, the present study was not an attempt to chart the developmental phases of GTA development. GTAs in the present study did not describe their relationship with supervisors as changing over time as depicted in Nyquist and Sprague (in press). Current findings suggest that GTAs were mainly concerned about the felt presence and support of their supervisors. It is also important to note that present findings do not necessarily support Bomotti's (1994) findings that good supervision is the most influential factor for GTAs

wanting to continue college teaching. The current study was not designed to study the relationship between good supervision and the decision to continue college teaching. However, when GTAs were asked to describe their experience of teaching, they primarily reported examples of bad experiences with supervisors. Despite such experiences, these GTAs typically enjoyed teaching and reportedly planned to continue teaching in their professional career.

The current findings also contribute to the discussion on supervisors in ways not mentioned before. In the context of supervisors being there or not being there to provide guidance and support, GTAs often experienced a change in their perception of themselves as teachers. When supervisors were supportive, GTAs reported feeling more confident. They also had an increased sense of personal authority in the classroom when they perceived that their supervisor would back them up and stand behind them. Likewise, when supervisors were perceived as unsupportive, GTAs often experienced themselves as less confident and less of an authority. A GTA in Biology said:

> We had a lot of labs to do and a lot of things to grade, but she was really supportive and I think that's one of the most important things that a TA is to have your advisor whose advising the lab and lecturing to back you up because I've had situations that have happened and situations where that hasn't happened and if it doesn't happen then you lose all authority as a TA.

These findings suggest that the impact of supervisors on the experience of teaching for GTAs is beyond influencing career choice and professional identity. The perceived presence or absence of supervisors has meaning for how GTAs

experience themselves as teachers. It impacts their self-perception as a teacher who is confident in their abilities and is an authority in the classroom.

The GTAs in the current study also described moments when their supervisors were supportive. Such supervisors had a powerful impact on their GTAs. As one GTA reported, she only needed five minutes of her supervisor's time. And when she received positive feedback she felt validated. She reported feeling that she deserved to be teaching and described herself as "high for days" after even such short exchanges:

> And when he asks me to do something, or he compliments me, or he asks me what my plan is and I can really let him know what I'm doing and I get positive feedback. I'm high for days. I feel great. There's that validation again, I suppose. And he has no idea. And there are other people I think that get that same thing again and so we'll go a long time without speaking and if we speak for five minutes and it's good, I'm good to go.

The supervisor who makes suggestions, provides feedback, and is available to GTAs conveys a message that teaching is important and what the GTA is doing is worthwhile.

Final Thoughts for GTAs, Faculty and Administrators

The purpose of this study was to provide a description of the experience of teaching for graduate teaching assistants. The idea for the present study originated in the author's experiences as a teaching consultant for graduate teaching assistants over a period of four years. During this time, the author had the opportunity to talk and listen to numerous GTAs. It became evident during these conversations that GTAs had much to say about their experiences of

teaching. Few researchers have taken the time to listen to these individuals talk about their experiences. In this last section, some final thoughts on the experience of teaching for GTAs are presented with implications for GTAs and the faculty and administrators that work with them.

First, GTAs have a story to tell about their experience of teaching. GTAs are constantly making sense of who they are as teachers based on their experiences in their classrooms. They struggle with being confident in their abilities, knowledge of the material, sense of authority, and level of preparation. GTAs need opportunities to talk about their experiences and help clarifying what their experiences mean to them. Before assuming what a GTA is experiencing, supervisors or others working with GTAs should obtain their perspective and the meaning that different teaching experiences have for them as teachers.

Second, GTAs often encounter students that are different from them in terms of gender, race, political beliefs, religious values, and attitudes toward learning to name only a few. When encountering students differing from them in such ways, GTAs often reflect on their own values and experiences as learners as a way of understanding their students. With the current emphasis in higher education on diversity, GTAs will consistently face students that differ from them in significant ways. At times in the present study, GTAs were highly conscientious of their response to such students and sometimes unsure how to respond at all. GTAs may benefit from exploring their own personal values and beliefs as well as their experiences as learners. This exploration could help

clarify and heighten awareness of those values, thereby limiting their impact on interactions with students.

Third, GTAs are concerned about their knowledge of the subject matter. Most GTAs worry they don't know enough about the subject matter to be teaching their class. This lack of knowledge often creates a sense of anxiety that students will ask questions and they will not have the answers. GTAs worry that if this happens then their students will have less respect for them and see them as less competent. In addition, GTAs will often question their ability to do the job they are getting paid to do. This questioning seems to be a very common experience among GTAs and it produces an enormous amount of pressure and anxiety in some cases. Some GTAs may benefit from having this concern normalized. Knowing that most GTAs worry about not knowing enough, yet eventually come to accept it and find it helpful to say, "I don't know" to their students may alleviate some of the pressure and anxiety.

Fourth, most GTAs don't feel prepared to fulfill their teaching duties. Researchers have found that from 27% up to 58% of undergraduate courses are taught by GTAs in universities across the country. A common experience of GTAs in the present study and other studies is that they do not feel prepared to teach their classes. GTAs said they receive very little if any training. Many GTAs report that brief workshops at the beginning of the academic calendar are insufficient. Furthermore, GTAs report inadequate time to prepare for their classes and find it hard to balance personal research and course work with their teaching loads. Unfortunately, teaching is often sacrificed. GTAs would benefit

from ongoing training and instruction on teaching that continues beyond the beginning of the academic year.

Fifth, a major issue for GTAs is how they relate to their students. At times GTAs were aware of making meaningful connections with students, getting through to them, having an impact, and getting to know students on a personal level. Several GTAs experienced times with their students that were uncomfortable because their students began acting "too familiar" with them. Several GTAs expressed the need to establish a boundary between them and their students. This boundary often served to create a sense of distance between teacher and student thereby maintaining the roles of teacher and student. GTAs recognized they were not friends or peers with their students. The GTAs were teachers and having a boundary with students often helped the GTAs maintain a sense of authority and respect with their students, which was helpful when doing things that weren't always pleasant such as giving bad grades or setting deadlines. How and when this line was perceived to be crossed varied from one GTA to the next. Where that boundary is and how its crossing will be dealt with is something each GTA has to address. GTAs could benefit from understanding what their role is in the classroom. What does it mean for them to be the teacher and how will that subsequently influence the relationship they have with their students, if at all?

Sixth, GTA supervisors play an important role in the experience of teaching for most GTAs. Results suggest that GTAs need supportive supervisors who will provide practical guidance on how to teach. GTAs often feel

"thrown in" their classrooms and learn how to teach by trial and error. Good supervisors not only provide practical guidance, but they also provide a sense of support to GTAs. GTAs like to know that their supervisors are there to help them and will be an advocate for them, backing them up if problems with students arise in class. Supervisors have a tremendous influence on GTAs self-perceptions and their views on the importance of teaching. GTAs reportedly feel more confident, have a stronger sense of themselves as an authority, and feel validated as a teacher when supervisors are perceived to be supportive of them. Furthermore, supervisors communicate important messages about the value of teaching. These messages impact GTAs' perceptions of teaching and its importance to the institution and state very clearly what is important and what is not.

Finally, although many of the interviews consisted of negative experiences with disruptive and confrontational students, unsupportive supervisors, insufficient training, and inadequate time to prepare, nearly every GTA in the present study stated that they enjoyed teaching and wanted to do it for a career. Most of the GTAs in the present study had a passion and love for teaching and wanted to do it well. Despite the hardships that come with teaching as a GTA, there are many who find it very fulfilling and believe that teaching is an important scholarly activity that should be ranked equally with research and other educational activities. Hopefully, this love for teaching, desire to do it well, and scholarly approach will not disappear before they become the professoriate of tomorrow.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTER INVITING PARTICIPATION IN STUDY

APPENDIX A: LETTER INVITING PARTICIPATION IN STUDY

Dear Graduate Teaching Assistant:

I am a 6th year doctoral candidate in Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at the University of Tennessee. For my doctoral dissertation, I am studying the experience of teaching for graduate teaching assistants. In order to complete this study, I need the help of graduate teaching assistants who have taught for at least two semesters, have had primary responsibility for the teaching in their respective assignments (i.e. lecture, discussion, lab), and would be interested in talking about their experience of teaching. The following is a brief description of my study including details about what your involvement as a research participant would entail if you decide to participate.

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe the experience of teaching for graduate teaching assistants. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to talk about your experience of teaching as a graduate teaching assistant. This will involve participating in an audiotaped, 60 to 90 minute, unstructured, question-and-answer interview. After the results of this study have been compiled you will be asked to review and provide feedback about the summary of the results from the interviews. This will be done in person or by mail and should take between 30 to 60 minutes.

Your confidentiality is very important. The audiotapes will be numerically coded before they are transcribed to maintain your anonymity. Your identity and responses will be kept confidential by the researcher. All identifying information, such as names and locations, will be deleted from the transcript and any subsequent oral report in order to provide confidentiality.

I am interested in interviewing GTAs with varying levels of experience and your participation would be greatly appreciated. If you are considering participation and/or have questions about the study, please call me so we can schedule a time to meet that is convenient to you. I can be reached at work (**974-2196**), home (**525-2861**), or by e-mail (**jmarsh@utk.edu**).

Sincerely,

Jim Marsh

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: A Phenomenological Investigation of the Experience of Teaching for Graduate Teaching Assistants

You are invited to participate in a research study on the experience of teaching for graduate teaching assistants. All aspects of your participation in this study are voluntary and you may decline to participate in this study without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study, any data that has been collected from you will be returned to you or destroyed.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to describe your experience of teaching as a graduate teaching assistant. This will involve participating in a 60 to 90 minute unstructured question-and-answer interview with the researcher. You will be free to talk about the topics of your choosing and understand that the researcher may ask follow-up questions for clarification or further exploration. After the results of this study have been compiled, the researcher will contact you and ask you to review and provide feedback about the summary of the results from the interviews. This will be done in person, or by mail and should take between 30 minutes and one hour. Since your participation in this study involves a question-and-answer interview there should be minimal to no risk or discomfort on your part.

The interview will be audiotaped for transcription purposes. Your identity and responses will be kept confidential by the researcher. The audiotapes will be numerically coded before they are transcribed to maintain your anonymity. The researcher will transcribe all tapes. When the tapes are not in use, they will be stored securely in room 54 of the Student Counseling Services Center. After the research project is completed, all tapes will be erased. Signed informed consent forms will be kept for 3 years after completion of the study. The forms will be stored securely in a University of Tennessee facility.

Transcripts will be made of your interview for analysis purposes. All identifying information, such as names and locations, will be deleted from the transcript and any subsequent oral report in order to provide confidentiality. Segments of your transcript may be presented to a research group and may also appear in the final dissertation or in a published journal. All research group members will sign a Confidential Guidelines for Research Group Members form stating their intention to maintain confidentiality of the information they read in the transcripts.

Results from this study are expected to have implications for the training and development of graduate teaching assistants and also provide a foundation for further research on the experience of teaching. In addition, by discussing your personal experience of teaching this could be beneficial to your understanding and awareness of yourself.

This study is being conducted by Jim Marsh, a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology Unit at The University of

Tennessee, to fulfill the dissertation requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the College of Education. The study will be supervised by Dr. Mark Hector of the same department.

If you have any questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher (Jim Marsh) or project advisor (Dr. Mark Hector) at the locations and phone numbers listed below. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Compliance Section of the Office of Research at (423) 974-3466.

I have read the above, had my questions answered, and understand what my participation in the study involves. I have received a copy of this form. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study as stated herein.

For the purposes of this study, your interview will be audiotaped.

( ) I agree to be audiotaped.

Participant's signature_____ Date_____

_____
Printed name, address, and phone #

Investigator's signature_____ Date_____

Please send me a copy of the final results:
( ) Yes ( ) No

Project Researcher:
Jim Marsh
Student Counseling Services Center
900 Volunteer Boulevard
The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996
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Project Advisor:
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APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTERVIEW

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE INTERVIEW

R: So, wherever you would like to begin, tell me about your experience of teaching.

P: When I first came here, my first year at name of university, they didn't really know quite where to put me yet. I hadn't had a lot of correspondence with the professors in the department before coming here so they weren't sure which way I was leaning, more towards the physical camp or the cultural camp. So I was the last TA hired and they put me where they had a slot which was the physical geography course and I was to do the lab portion. And the way the lab is conducted, we have a workbook with all the exercises already done or already written. The lab TA really has no latitude in creating material. Basically you float around the lab room for however long it was, an hour and a half-two hours, something like that answering questions and explaining things to students. Once a week we had a meeting led by the head TA, go over the exercise and we would work things out. And my semester, good heavens, you probably remember this I had the most horrible wretched class. I didn't know what I was doing. As far as techniques for teaching I had no preparation at all. I understand the lab material, but as far as communicating it to the students or controlling the class, I didn't know what I was doing. And a lot of the students, being a 100 level class you know it's freshmen sophomores inexperienced college students, and there was a lot of negativity. A lot of students were having trouble making that high school to college transition. I couldn't relate to that because I didn't go straight from high school to college. So there was some friction. I didn't really enjoy a lot of what I was doing. I had had an undergraduate professor who told me at one time that when you're teaching class, you have to just pick out the gems and teach to them and not concentrate on the rest of the students. And I did have some gems. I still remember one guy who was just marvelous. My second semester doing lab was much better. I decided the better attitude to approach the class with, I wasn't quite as rigid and the labs are a lot more fun too. More stuff with working outdoors with gadgets and gizmos and stuff. So that worked out much better. Then, I'm trying to think what year it was, I guess it was immediately the next semester, the fall of my second year here. I came back from summer vacation and there was a note in my box from the department head "would you be interested in lecturing Geography 101", which on the cultural side of geography we have two introductory classes, 101 and 102. It's just the way the world is divided. 102 deals with Europe and the Americas, and those courses are always the property of two of the tenured professors. These guys like to teach these courses, so that's off limits. But the 101, Asia and Africa - the Pacific Rim, is occasionally taught by the tenured professors, but more often we really fill up the ranks with grad students. This is a course that fills requirements for a lot of different majors. It is sort of a, I don't know what the requirements are for undergrads here in various programs, but apparently this will do the trick for an awful lot of them. So, we get a real diverse mixture of students usually freshmen

sophomores the occasional upper classmen and when I poll them we get majors clear across the spectrum and if you have one geography major and two geography minors that's pretty par for the course. But my first semester of teaching 101, like I said I found out about this about 3 weeks before school was supposed to start, 2 or 3 weeks before. Again, like with the lab, it was sort of my first. It was a baptism by fire and my first time out was definitely the worst. The faculty member who was supposed to be in charge of the grad students teaching 101 was not involved at all. This professor never had us meet, never gave us any instructions or anything. We were basically given a textbook, a textbook that I did not particularly like. And did we have a workbook then? No, we didn't have a workbook. It was basically here's the text, go teach 'em. And boy oh boy that was daunting and my first class had, oh what, somewhere between 80 and 90 students probably right around 90 or so.

R: Can you talk more about how it was daunting?

P: Well it was basically, it was just like being taught how to swim by being thrown in the deep end. I had no, no one helping saying here are some things to think about when preparing your syllabus. These are, at that time the way the course was taught was on a thematic basis. We didn't divide the world into parts. We taught you know themes, globally. And nobody would suggest you know this would be a good order to approach the different themes or these are the things that we really want you to teach in this class, the ideas we want you to get across to the students, no assistance at all. You figure out your own grading scale. If you want to assign homework, fine. There was no guidance whatsoever.

R: It was really left up to you to do everything.

P: Everything was left up to me. Yeah and to make matters worse. I had a friend in the department, a grad student friend who had come in at the same time I did. And he said boy I want to be your TA cause we were close friends, so I went to the secretary who does the assignments and said 'gee I'd really like to have you know name of student as my TA.' Fine. Well that turned out to be a disaster. It was a nine o'clock class, he was late half the time or more. He dropped the ball on any number of occasions, couldn't help me correct an exam because 'gee my parents are coming into town and I have to show them around'. I asked him one time to do up a simple little map for homework exercise, I said it doesn't have to be fancy. Do it in, just xerox it and draw things in by hand. Oh no, instead he took two or three weeks to get it just perfect on the computer when I want this in two to three days so we could just slap it together and give it to them. So, anyhow I first had to decide what things am I going to cover. There was another grad student who also had come in when I did and she was also offered a class, the same class. So name of student and I worked together a little bit at times and we sort of gathered syllabi together from everyone, we went around asking professors if they had old ones we could look at and got some

ideas for what we would cover and then we had to go through and figure out ok what book, text book readings should we have them do and had to make out a schedule so that we could put together a syllabus, you know we'll be covering agriculture for five lectures, for two whatever. So we kind of got these outlines together and then boom!, it was the day, here you go. And I can't even really remember very well how it was. At one point nearly every time I've lectured, my brain will suddenly flash this message: 'what am I doing here?'. Also quite often at the first of last year, I would get the this thought 'there is no one to fall back on'. If a student asks a question in class, I have to say something. You know when you're a TA you can defer to a teacher or some such thing, but no I'm the one.

R: Can you tell me more about that realization and how it was frightening?

P: Well, it was more exciting than frightening actually, very mixed feeling. It sort of reminded me of going on stage in a play in high school kind of feeling. There's the exhilaration of realizing that yeah I can answer those questions, yeah I do know my stuff. It's a great feeling. There is also the occasional, very daunting experience of having to say 'I don't know, I'll try and find out and get back to you on Tuesday or whatever'. I do that because I appreciate it when doctors, professors, or other professionals come right out and tell me 'I don't know'. You know I can usually spot when they are just shining me on and I know my students could do that too.

R: So it sounds like when you did know the answer it was real reinforcing, that 'yes I can do this'.

P: Yeah, it's quite an ego boost. It really is.

R: But the reverse whenever you didn't know...

P: Well it wasn't so bad, I guess at first I was a little bit frightened that it would undermine their perception of my authority. I didn't want the students to think 'who is this geek? We're supposed to be learning from a teacher in this class and she doesn't even know what she's supposed to be teaching'. But that was never a real strong feeling because it didn't happen that often. One thing that I was constantly trying to keep in mind is that I'm not from the South. I don't share the same type of religious background that most of the students here do. I certainly do not share this conservative, republican type leaning that you find in location so much and it's very very, you have to keep all these things in the back of your mind whenever you're talking, try not to offend anyone's religious, racial, political sensibilities, but at the same time don't back away from things.

R: You mentioned a couple of things there, I wonder if you might be able to talk about authority, can you tell me, can you think of a time when authority became an issue for you?

P: Oh boy, when I taught in the Fall of '96, now things were very different in '96 I'll get to that in a second. But there were these two guys who sat in the back of the room. And I come right out first day of class and announce that I have some difficulty hearing, please don't talk in class. If you want to talk to your friend, leave or wait 'til after class, you know if you didn't get something, don't lean over and say 'what did she say', raise your hand and ask me. I try to announce this in a very adult fashion. There were these two guys, sat in the back, right in my line of sight. I think that was the big problem, was they were straight in my line of sight. And I finally I mean I pulled them aside two or three times and tried that- guys please don't say anything. So I would look up and I would see these guys talking and sometimes I would hear them and it just made me madder and madder. A couple of times I tried taking them aside and again giving them the 'hey guys you know this is really, it's distracting to me it's interfering with my ability to do my job, don't do it'. And finally it was what the last week of regular lecture or the week before that, you know the end of semester and I was preparing to show a video and right before class I was walking around putting down blinds and stuff and one of these two guys was in there and he was reading the name of student newspaper, and he also fell asleep an awful lot in class, and I said to him, you know end of the semester I've got all these concerns you know of my classes, of my projects I'm late on, my plans all that stuff. I was on the edge and I said, 'do you think you could manage to stay awake and not talk through the video?'. He didn't respond and I said, 'do you think you could make eye contact with me when I'm talking to you'. And he looked up and said, 'is it ok to read the paper before class?' and I lost it, I started, mind you there are students filtering into the class and I said, 'look all semester, I've tried to reason with you and your friends here' and I don't even remember what else I said, but I went into, he was a little bit confrontational, but more of a stony silence, then his buddy came in and I snapped at him. And I even, I said that I wanted them to sit on opposite sides of the room. Now at that point, I had to get things going. It's a long video that needs to be started right on the dot. So I kind of abandoned it, went up and started the class, just spoke to the whole class and started the video. And they didn't move. At the end of that time I thought well, it's so close to the end of the semester, it's not worth putting anymore effort into this. But I think that was the wrong thing to do. Although I don't think I had my voice raised, it was obvious that I was mad and chewing somebody out and I don't think that was a very professional thing to do. It certainly didn't get the results I wanted. It wasn't the best way to handle the situation and um I think that kind of detracted from my professionalism. And you know I think professionalism and authority are so closely interrelated.

R: So by feeling unprofessional, being unprofessional, you feel like that took away from your authority in the class some?

P: Well, I thought so at the time. Now looking back and thinking, reflecting on experiences I've had as a student, it probably didn't make that much difference, but at the time I thought 'man I blew this'. And if I had waited all semester to get that worked up, obviously I should have taken care of the problem well before or else just let it slide and say, 'there is one more week who cares'. Now this semester it has been interesting. I've had three newspaper fights. Well not fights. I saw one fellow, you know that students read the newspaper in class, you know they do. What bothers me is when they get blatant and hold it up in front of their face and that's just a little more that I can handle cause I know that as I stand up there and lecture, I look out, I see these people, it's gonna make me mad, it's gonna make me lose my train of thought, gonna make me lose my place in my notes and I won't be lecturing well. So, the one guy was sitting near the front. I'm talking talking I walk over towards him. I lean down to him and say, 'would you please, if you want to read the newspaper, go somewhere else'. And then I retreated back, talking talking talking, didn't break up the lecture at all. He looked chagrined and put the newspaper away. Another time it was a young woman also sitting near the front, same thing happened, I didn't break the lecture, I just walked over leaned down and said, 'if you want to read the newspaper, please go somewhere else'. What I'm trying to convey is your an adult, you have a choice to be in this class or not. The third time it happened was a fellow sitting near the back. This room is packed with chairs. It's very difficult for me to walk down between aisles, there's just not the space. And so I stopped the lecture and said excuse me Mr. _____, and I called him by name. He didn't look up because he was so engrossed in his story I guess and suddenly he looks up and every student in the class as well as me is staring at him. And I said, 'please don't read the paper in my class' and he turned beet red and put it away and hasn't ever read the paper since. Well I went back to the lecture, that was all I ever said and you know I haven't had to jump on anyone since. They're being much more surreptitious about it. When people sleep, I let them sleep, I've fallen asleep in classes and also I don't know, my whole philosophy is these people are adults and I'm going to treat them like adults whether they are really mature enough or ready for it or not. I started working when I was 18 and expected to be an adult. So I don't think that they should, it's not my job to prolong their adolescence.

R: So it sounds like you had some expectations for how they would behave and conduct themselves.

P: Yeah, now sometimes I wonder, again I wasn't in this situation myself. I didn't go to college straight after high school. So sometimes I'm not sure where I should start and stop with certain concepts. Let me give you an example, I gave an exam today. My exams are all essays and then a little application section.

Choose 8 out of 10 questions and answer each one of them with roughly a paragraph. Well first exam did not go terribly well. So on Monday, the day before yesterday which was the last time the class met before this exam, I answered questions that they had about the material and then I said, 'now let me give you some tips for this'. And I said things like read the question carefully, pay attention to the verbs like discuss, explain, list. I said write in complete sentences with a noun, a verb, a subject and an object, I said proofread your work, ask yourself, 'would I use these words in this order if I were speaking out loud?'. As a matter of fact when they handed in their papers, I was standing up at the desk, 'did you proofread it?' And putting myself in that place, I would be a little offended by that because my thought would be 'of course I know how to write a complete sentence. You know I'm in college for crying out loud'. But it's been my experience that they don't. And I think, I don't know if anyone else shares my view, but I think there is more to my job, I have more responsibility than just teaching world regional geography. I think that teaching an introductory level course, it is also my responsibility to work on building critical thinking skills and to help them build those skills that they are going to need in their college career and certainly writing is something everyone needs. One of these days most of them will get out of here with a piece of paper saying they are educated and they darn well better know how to write or else that degree doesn't mean anything.

R: So you sort of played the role of sort of going beyond and making sure they get certain things, checking up on them, following up on them.

P: To some extent, to some extent, now I TAed for a professor one time who said that if you don't come to my class I will call your mother. And he did that. You know how on Friday attendance can be a bit sparse. I think that's ridiculous, if I want to do that I'll teach high school, you know. But there's so many things that are standing in the way of a lot of these new students and their ability to learn what they should be learning in this class. And things like critical thinking skills, anytime we talk about a country for the first time I usually throw some stats up, rate of population growth, life expectancy, blah blah blah and you see them madly scribbling in their notebooks and I try and tell them over and over you again now you have these figures in the course materials, what's important here is not the actual numbers, but what do these numbers mean. And I think I've gotten through to most of them that the, what's important about the statistics is their interpretation, their meaning. I call that a critical thinking skill. I think I'm getting through, but there are some kids who still don't have it.

R: Let me ask something about what you were talking about a little earlier. In thinking about these students you talked some about students that have been real gems, and you said that there was this one gem student that you remember.

P: Oh dear yes, he came to class, he was one of my lab students and we started calling him the geography genius. He was a philosophy major, English major, something that had nothing to do with geography. He wasn't interested in the course, he hated doing the labs, but he came to ever yone of them. He worked very hard. He did his labs neatly. He took the entire period. He would ask me questions and I would have to. He demanded that I make sure he understood the processes, not just that he could answer it, but he wanted to know what the answer really was and to understand the processes going in the atmosphere or whatever we were studying. Even though this was not his field he was trying to learn the material and get his education from it. But he also had a sense of humor and I just really enjoyed him. I have had students from time to time and I've found that there are students and then there are people and one of my favorite people was not a particularly good student. I think she was a high C or a low B, but she had wonderful personality, never whined or griped when she got a bad grade and was very pleasant to be with. So I can appreciate the really good students and I can really appreciate the good people. What gives me trouble are people that sit there like a lump on a log, they're not engaged, they don't make eye contact. And some of them can do very very well and get good grades, but they still aren't terribly engaging people.

R: So the important thing for you in your distinction of people in your class is that some of them are engaging?

P: Well, not so much engaging, but people who are, who make eye contact, cause I do sweep my eyes around the room regularly, people who are at least paying close attention, concentrating, who will ask questions, when I throw out a question to the class, who will respond. Those are the gems. The people who will actually come to my office hours or who will come up to the desk after class and speak to me or come chat with me before class.

R: What I'm trying to get a sense of, what is it like for you to have the gems in the class, to have the students answer questions, respond, to make eye contact, to be engaging, what is your experience of that?

P: That's the kind of student that I've always been for most of my classes. I don't know if I've just been lucky or what, but it seems like I very seldom had a class that I didn't find interesting at some level. To be perfectly honest it's a real ego boost. You know they are sort of recognizing me as an expert which feels good. I also want to communicate my passion that I feel for the topics we are discussing. Obviously, geography is my thing. I recognize not everybody, it isn't everybody's. But I like to try and communicate to them that yeah I think this is really neat and really interesting. And if someone's response is wow that is pretty neat. That feels real good. Sort of confirming.

R: Can you think of a time or example when you felt confirmed or that it was an ego boost for you.

P: Oh dear, you know when it really gets going, is in these big lecture sections with between 80 and 90 students it's hard to get any kind of class discussion going, but sometimes when I can get that going, that is just the best. Uh, I have an overhead I show, it's an ad for a handmade sweater selling at a very low price and I ask them, try and ask them things like 'would you buy the sweater', 'what things would you think about?', the laborer, who made it, you know blah blah blah. Uh, and when we can get a real debate going and I can just sort of stand there and just very occasionally throw in a little bit of steering of the conversation. That makes me feel like man, I did it, I did it. That's really neat. Or when one time in the Fall of '96, I had been talking about something, I guess it was textile workers and one student raised her hand and said you seem to be very passionate about this or something. She said 'why is that?' And my first response was (?) (laughs) I don't know. But what I said was, 'yes I am interested'. I guess it was because you know I blah blah blah and I had to actually think on my feet and number one analyze why do I feel strongly about this and how can I explain that and not get real preachy and judgmental about people who don't feel real strongly about this and all this is going on at once and I'm talking at the same time sort of like juggling, juggling while you are doing something else. And I think I was pretty successful and it felt real good, felt like wow I was able to really think on my feet and do that.

R: Well it seems that by there picking up on your enthusiasm and passion, seems to be real reinforcing for you.

P: It's very, I find it very, I could get preachy really easily about the issues that I do feel strongly about. That would be very easy. I'm aware of it so I try and fight that temptation and just sort of throw things out at the students and let them come up with their own interpretation. Sometimes you can't do that. I showed a short video about the sex industry in Southeast Asia and these customers are slimeballs, that's all there is to it. There's no way to mask it out and I don't even try.

R: And that's when you become preachy?

P: I usually don't with that because it is so apparent. When I would tend to become preachy would be in things like, oh talking about the globally economy and I take a more liberal progressive type of view of what you know how the global economy should operate rather than this conservative point of view that I know most of the students would share and it would be very easy for me to slip over from the world bank does this over to the world bank should do this. And I try not to do that because I think it will be, well for one thing I don't want to get stuck in some kind of argument with some member of the Young Republicans.

Another thing is that I think that it will be a stronger lesson if the student has to put some of the pieces together himself, him or herself. And come up with a conclusion of well doggoned they should do that, by themselves, I think it would be much stronger.

R: You seem to be real aware of your own values and philosophy of things, how that might fit or not fit with your students.

P: You know I have to keep in mind all the time my, what my job is. My job is to teach geography. It is not to teach ethics. On the other hand there are values I want to communicate like when I was talking about when we were studying India and I was talking about Hinduism and talking about you know sacred cows and some guy started laughing. And I said you know a Hindu might think your beliefs are just as silly. Starting on Friday, I'm going to be talking about Islam and it's kind of hard to basically tell people what are the tenets of this religion and how has it been misinterpreted or whatever. I don't want to misrepresent the people that really believe that and I don't want to antagonize anyone. What I try to communicate is that I think people regardless of culture, generally deserve respect, slimeball sex tour operators excepted. And I'm hoping to sort of lead by example that you know I would like them to be, to recognize that people have differences of lifestyle and opinion and perception and just because you respect doesn't mean you have to agree with it all.

R: So would it be fair to say that in your experience of teaching that you try to communicate value yet at the same time try not to misrepresent or offend, because you said something earlier about now wanting to offend anyone, I'm wondering if you could talk about that or give an example.

P: There is a couple of components to that. One component is that I don't want to be sidetracked. It's a rather tight schedule to finish all the stuff I want to do in a semester. And it could be so easy, I mean if you ever brought up the word abortion in class it would just go off like a train off the rails and you could lose valuable time, you know I could see 15 to 20 minutes of yammer yammer yammer going on and meanwhile I'm falling behind on the schedule. So I don't want to get sidetracked by making someone believe that they have to stand up for their position. On the other hand, I want to be courteous. I like to try and call people what they like to be called. That's why I use terms like African-American, even though it's many more syllables and sometimes more cumbersome sounding than black because that seems to be the preferred term and I should call people what they want to be called. I think it is just a matter of courtesy.

R: Can you remember a time when you were aware of not wanting to offend someone or be careful not to offend someone?

P: Um, I did offend someone one time. I had been talking about how some U.S. servicemen had been arrested in Okinawa, Japan and how the Okinawans were fed up with the boorish behavior and I thought I had made it clear we were talking about a minority of U.S. servicemen and the next day a lady came up and said "my fiancé is in the Navy and I really resent what you said" and I went one on one with her and said I'm sorry if I gave that perception. I thought, I tried to make it clear that it was a small minority. But as far as people that are different from me.

R: I was just wondering, you said, talked about not offending someone and I wondered if you had a specific example when you were aware of that.

P: No I think it is more just being familiar with the demographics of the students knowing that most of them do come from the Southeast with a majority of those coming from (State) and knowing that the general demographic from this area is very conservative politically, fundamentalist religions, and I don't want to step on those toes because I don't like to offend people. I think that it is counterproductive and just rude and also I don't want the distractions of having to deal with, you know quieting down offended people and I don't want to give anybody a platform to start you know going off on their beliefs and again getting the class off schedule.

R: You mentioned distractions, getting off schedule, being on track...would you like to say something about that and how it relates to your teaching?

P: Well you know what I've noticed, I've noticed this in all the way from grade school clear up into grad school, that is so often you can get off on a tangent and come down to the end of the semester and well we won't be able to talk about this area or this topic or this time period or whatever because we've run out of time. And it usually turned out to be that topic that I was most interested in and really had wanted to cover. The way our course is organized now, we have to use a departmental workbook and the way the workbook is organized, Africa, sub-Saharan Africa is the last region we cover. Well it's the region that I find the most interesting. It's the one I have the most to say about. I think the students get really interested in. But if I get behind on my schedule that means last time to talk about Africa and that means Africa is going to get short-changed so I think that really helps. On the other hand, if something happens, say if the US actually had gone and bombed Iraq, you have to acknowledge it and you have to kind of shuffle things around because it really does need to be addressed.

R: So as things happened in the world around you that relate to your course, you incorporate those things into your class.

P: Well I used to try a lot more than I do now because the sad truth is that the majority of the students just are not connected with the world around them. They

don't read major newspapers, they don't listen to in-depth radio reporting. If they watch anything on TV, the network news is just so awful. So many of them just don't seem to be interested in what's going on in the world which I find impossible to conceive of, I've been a newsjunkie since I was twelve. And I found that if I ask things like OK so what's going on, what happened in India last week? I'll have two or three students, the same two or three students who can say something about it and the rest of them neither know nor care. And I don't want to be a broken record talking about how it's so important and you ought to pay attention to what's going on, you know that's just not going to work. So, I've kind of abdicated that and I'm not happy with the decision and it's something I need to think about before I teach the course again, how I want to handle this. One thing I was going to tell you about though if I sort of a, take a big jump back was, you know I said my first two semesters I was completely on my own as far as faculty assistance, then I did not teach in the department for a year I had a position within the Energy and Environment Resource Institute. And when they offered me the chance to teach again in Fall of 96, there was a different faculty member in charge of the graduate teaching associates and he was wonderful. There were two of us teaching that semester, two GTAs. Every Friday we would have a meeting in his office. He would say I found these articles I thought you might be interested in. He'd say 'What are you planning on covering next week?'. And he wouldn't tell us what to do, but he would give just sort of some guidance. I could take a rough draft of an exam to him and say you know 'would you read through this for me?' And he'd say if you ask this question this way, you won't get the answer you want. They might be able to you know blah, blah. He was wonderful. He was there anytime I needed it. Didn't dictate, would suggest. He has lots of experience teaching this course and just was a real mentor and it was wonderful.

R: Sounds like a real positive experience.

P: We'd also changed to a different philosophy towards this course where we set it up by parts of the, by regions instead of by theme. And it's just, it's the way I was taught as an undergrad and it just makes so much more sense. And it's just been so much more positive an experience, so much easier to do. Now it was sort of like starting over again. I couldn't use my notes from the first couple of times I taught. So that Fall '96 man oh man I put time into that class. I was constantly reading articles and trying to stay on top of the latest stuff and everything and say well I really don't know enough about this so I need to research it. This time around, this is the second time I've taught using that way and it's a lot easier and also we have had a number of graduate teaching associates starting roughly in the Fall of '96 or Spring of '95 when I wasn't teaching and were building up this real body of information. I've loaned my notes, my overheads, you know ideas to other people when they were teaching. Right now I've borrowed lecture notes from someone else um some of his approaches were different. There have been times when I've found that his

lectures about you know a particular topic are a lot better than what I was thinking. On the other hand I have the overhead with the sweater made by the sweatshop in Nepal. That has gone through about four different teachers now and we are developing this body of work and I am trying to put together some sort of a central resource where we can put these things that really work well like the sweater example together for future teaching associates. The department head was not overly captivated by the idea, she was saying, 'I think maybe we have a binder somewhere that we can find for you. So I think I might jump on this next Fall, we're moving department and grad student offices. So what I might do is just wait until we are in our new quarters in the Fall before people get really cramped in their schedule and go around to this little group and say 'you know do you have a particular exercise or example or whatever'.

R: Sounds like you're aware of advisors or supervisors and how they responded to you seemed to have a definite impact on your experience.

P: Well it sure can. As a matter of fact, these most recent times when I've taught when I said that we had that great professor really helped out a lot. When I first started and he had said that he wanted to meet once a week, I went in with a real chip on my shoulder like well hey I could have used this when I was brand new, when I just kind of got tossed in. So it took me two or three weeks to get over that resentment and gee well how come nobody helped poor little me?.

R: I didn't know if there was anything else you wanted to say about how these other people fit into your experience of teaching.

P: There has not been as much help as I would like to have seen. I think that the, among the grad students it's been great, we have made a community for ourselves and we are supporting each other, loaning material back and forth, ideas, you know giving each other teaching tips and I think that's been wonderful. But why aren't the professors doing this also? You know, I know that over [the] course of over twenty or thirty years you learn a lot of little things. Why aren't they more enthusiastic about sharing? And quite often you'll go to a, one of the more senior faculty members and say, 'hey you know I'm going to be talking about blah dee blah and I know that you've studied that can you help me out?'. So often they'll say something like, 'well all my materials are real outdated'. There is one professor that is very nice about coming in an guest lecturing. He's done a lot of work in foreign country and he'll come in and show slides and actually talk about what it's like to be there. But really you have to reach out and sort of try and shake these people to get any help from them and quite often not even that. There's, like I said that one fellow who was of so much assistance even now that he's not doing the weekly meetings because we've all taught at least once. But still I was having a little trouble trying to figure out some economic stuff and I went to his office and said do you have a few minutes. Can you explain the Indonesian economic crisis to me? He said well what happened,

and that was great. I just wish that there were more people that we could do that with.

R: Sounds like this one professor that was so helpful was a rare bird.

P: Yeah pretty much. Pretty much. And I think partly, I don't know, that might reflect on this being a research oriented university. We have some dynamite researchers and teaching, especially this undergraduate introductory level teaching, is I think not a real high priority for most of the faculty. Which is a shame because that is not what I want in my career.

R: Well you've talked about quite a few things, I didn't know if there was anything you felt like you didn't get to cover or anything you would want to include that you haven't talked about already.

P: The only thing is the disasters that come along. Every now and then you have, you leave a lecture going 'Oh man that was a bomb'. The worst one I ever did was I was talking about Australia and I went on and on about those weird mammals you like kangaroos and duck-billed platypus and stuff. You look out at all these glassy eyes, I have one student that was interested in it and he was a pre-vet major. It happens to everybody, hopefully later than sooner, that you'll have just a bomb of a lecture.

R: Can you tell me more about a time when you had a bomb or a disaster?

P: It's kind of hard to bring up a thing where a whole lecture has gone bad. But sometimes you go off into some anecdote or something and it just lays there. No one like makes eye contact. Everyone seems to be bored. I realize in the middle of it gee this is not the correct way to illustrate this topic. This is not good. Quite often I'll feel unorganized. I do have a tendency to organize my lectures at the last minute. And quite often I'll go in and I'll feel like I didn't do things the way I wanted to. I should have structured things differently, and I wanted to get to this topic and I didn't or whatever. And I'll feel like this was a dog. Quite often I ask my TA and the TA will say, 'No, I thought it was fine'.

R: When you perceive it as a bomb or disaster, you seem to be real aware of the interest level or what the students are doing and real aware of your own preparation or organization.

R: Yeah, I do have a tendency to say it's my fault. You know, not that it's Friday afternoon before a game or something. I tend to focus on 'Well, I didn't do a very good job today'. And it's nice to have somebody else to talk to, either a professor who can say, 'there, there, we all do that from time to time' or a fellow graduate teaching associate that says, 'hey that happened to me last week'. And that's really important.

R: Thanks for sharing that. Is there anything else you feel like you'd want to include.

P: It's really funny, I was never involved in drama at all in school. I think I was last in a play in like Junior High you know. But there's so much of this, it's so closely related to acting and putting on this persona and there's this feeling, it goes back to what I said earlier about gee it's all me, the students are looking at me, the answers have to come from me. There have been times when I have been sick or feeling lousy for one reason or another when had I been a student in a class I would have stayed home. I was like I can't get a hold of the TA, there's nobody to sub for me. I've got to be there. I'm the one and I can be say upset about something in my personal life whatever, but I still have to go talk about the economy of China. No matter what's going on. One day I was furious because my car wasn't running well and the shop was giving me a hard time, but I had to go in and turn that personality off and turn on lecturing about whatever.

R: And that for you is the part of being of acting of being on stage.

P: Yeah, Yeah. You have to put on your teacher hat.

R: Can you think of a time when you were aware of putting that teacher hat on or aware when you took on that persona and it was like acting?

P: I notice it when I first begin to do it at the beginning of the period, but when I get into the lecture, when I get into the stuff I'm interested in then it becomes less of a role. I do have a tendency whenever students start giggling in class or something I think 'Oh no, did I just do something stupid?' But I just go ahead and do it, just go on and do what I'm doing.

R: You push through that and do what you need to do.

P: I'm thirty-five, they're nineteen. We aren't peers. If they want to think I'm a geek fine. I don't care. I probably am.

R: You seem to be aware of age difference.

P: Oh good heavens yes. Older professors told me this was going to happen and sure enough it happened. When I talk about communist countries, I have to realize that most of these students were born in the late 70's or even 1980. And you know the Berlin Wall came down in '89, the Soviet Union went belly up in '91 before these people were politically aware of the world. If I want to talk about communism, they are not going to have that visceral response that people, say, are over 30 do. You have to explain things that were just part of the world for, part of my personal memories have to be explained to them because they don't

remember. Sometimes it can you make you feel gee wow I really am a lot older than they are. I was talking about Katmandu and I said like that old Ted Nugent song and they just kind of ... But it's not necessarily a bad feeling. You know I wouldn't want to be 18 again for anything. So I don't envy them.

R: Well I just wanted to check out what that was like for you. Does that about do it?

P: That's about all I have to say.

APPENDIX D

CONFIDENTIALITY GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH MEMBERS

APPENDIX D: CONFIDENTIALITY GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH GROUP MEMBERS

As a member of this study's research group, I understand I will be reading and discussing transcripts from confidential interviews. The information in these transcripts is produced by subjects who participated in this study in good faith that the content of these sessions would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentiality agreement. I agree to abide by the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and will not share any information in the transcripts with anyone except the researcher (Jim Marsh), the project advisor (Dr. Mark Hector), or other members of the research team. I realize a violation of this agreement would result in unethical standards and behavior. I agree to abide by the above stated guidelines.

_____ _____

Research Group Member Date

_____ _____

Jim Marsh, Researcher Date

APPENDIX E

COVER LETTER AND DESCRIPTION OF THEMATIC STRUCTURE SENT TO PARTICIPANTS

APPENDIX E: COVER LETTER AND DESCRIPTION OF THEMATIC STRUCTURE SENT TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant,

As you may recall from our first meeting, I indicated that I would contact you after I had finished analyzing the interviews and get your feedback on the results. I have completed my analysis and arrived at tentative results of the study in which you participated. Enclosed you will find a summary of the results. I have provided two copies. One copy is for you to keep and the other is for you to edit and return to me. Before reviewing the results, let me update you on my progress.

I interviewed twelve GTAs for my study. Each interview was then transcribed and analyzed for common thematic elements in the experience of teaching for graduate teaching assistants. What I am sending you today are the results of my analysis.

The text I am sending you today only contains a description of the themes and sub-themes of my study. In my dissertation, I will include quotes from the interviews for the purpose of illustrating and supporting the themes. The figure that I have included, describes the relationships among the themes and the overall structure of the experience of teaching.

As you are reading and editing the results, remember that some aspects of your experience of teaching may not be presented here. Individual experiences vary and this is to be expected. However, the main themes presented in the results should not contradict your experience of teaching. If the results contradict your experience, it is important that you let me know. I would like for you to make note of things that you disagree with and provide any suggestions you might have that would help clarify the results. My goal has been to understand and describe the experiences of teaching that you shared with me. I welcome any feedback you might have that will let me know how well my description fits your experience. There are a few ways that you can provide the feedback. One way is to write the feedback on the results and return them by mail (a self-addressed stamped envelope is enclosed). You can also call me at home (525-2861) anytime that is convenient for you. I am usually at home writing. One final possibility is to send the feedback via e-mail. My address is jmarsh@utk.edu. I look forward to hearing your feedback as soon as possible. What you have to say is very important to me and I will incorporate it into the final results. Thanks again for all your help with my dissertation.

Cordially,

Jim Marsh

DESCRIPTION OF THE THEMATIC STRUCTURE

The thematic structure of the experience of teaching is presented in Figure 1. The figure consists of the three themes of the experience of teaching represented by the two overlapping circles and the oval area shared by the circles. One circle represents the theme Awareness of Self and the other circle represents the theme Awareness of Students. The oval area shared by the two circles represents the relationship between the Self (GTA) and the students described by the theme, Making a Connection vs. Keeping Boundaries.

Awareness in the described experiences of teaching is constantly shifting. At one moment the GTA is aware of some aspect of him/herself. At another moment, awareness shifts to the students and they become figural in the experience of teaching. Still at another moment, awareness shifts to the nature of the relationship between teacher and student. The dashed lines represent the ever shifting nature of awareness in the experience of teaching. As one aspect becomes figural and focused upon, the others fade into the background. Yet they are not lost or severed from awareness. For example as the theme Awareness of Students becomes figural and GTAs focus on some behavior of their students, such as being confrontational, their awareness of themselves recedes from awareness and becomes a context from which they experience their students. As the theme Awareness of Self emerged as figural and participants were aware of themselves in the experience of teaching, their awareness of their students receded and formed the context from which participants made meaning about who they were as teachers. The theme Making a Connection vs. Keeping Boundaries is contextualized by the perceived roles that GTAs and students play which incorporate aspects of both Awareness of Self and Awareness of Students. Although each theme has meaning on its own, it is the relationship of the themes to each other that forms the basic structure of the experience of teaching. Each theme is an essential aspect of the experience of teaching.

Theme I: Awareness of Self

The main theme of Awareness of Self describes the participants' awareness of themselves as teachers in the context of their students. Predominant in the participants' experience is a shifting awareness of personal attributes that the participants identified as meaningful for themselves. These personal attributes describe how they experience themselves in the process of teaching. The theme Awareness of Self consists of the following sub-themes which represent the personal attributes that participants were aware of in their experience: Self as Confident, Self as Knowledgeable, Self as Prepared, Self as Authority, Self as Performer, Who I Am, and Self as Learner. Each sub-theme has meaning in a temporal context. Sub-themes Self as Confident, Self as Knowledgeable, Self as Prepared, Self as Authority, Self as Performer, and Who I Am have meaning in the present context of time. Self as Learner is grounded in the historical context. It refers to a time preceding the participants' experience as a teacher typically when they were a learner in their undergraduate studies.

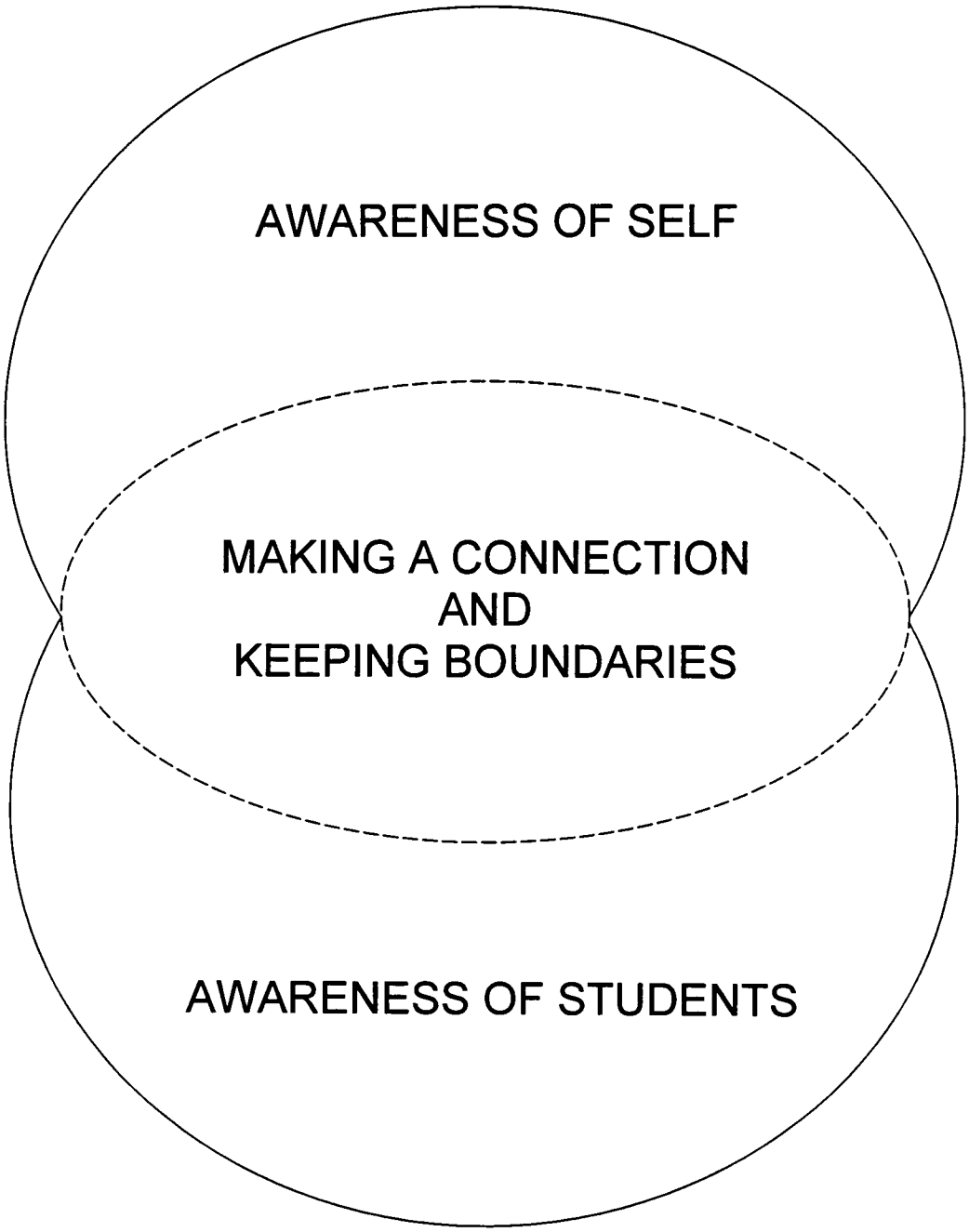

Figure 1. Thematic Structure of the Experience of Teaching

Participants' awareness of themselves changes. Awareness shifts from moment to moment. One moment GTAs are aware of themselves as being confident and then awareness may shift the next moment to themselves as being a performer. Each of the sub-themes will be briefly reviewed.

Sub-theme 1: Self as Confident

The sub-theme Self as Confident reflects the GTAs' awareness of themselves as growing in the dimension of confidence as the teacher. Confidence is described as an aspect of themselves that builds or increases over time as one gains experience, knowledge, and learns to anticipate questions and reactions from the students. For some participants, their sense of themselves as confident grew to a point where they experienced a change in how they related to their students and described themselves as taking charge and having ownership of the class which was a positive experience for them.

Sub-theme 2: Self as Knowledgeable

The sub-theme Self as Knowledgeable reflects the participants' awareness of themselves as knowing or not knowing the subject matter they are teaching. This sub-theme reflects the GTAs' experience that students have questions and that they are there to give the answers. In several descriptions, GTAs were aware of not knowing all the answers and not having a total understanding of the subject matter. For some the experience included having to say "I don't know" to questions asked by students and believing they should know the answers to the questions asked by their students. Some GTAs reported feeling uncomfortable and nervous making this statement because they felt it was their job to know the material and not knowing meant they weren't doing what they were being paid for. Others nervously anticipated times in their classes when they would be asked questions to which they did not have the answers and felt enormous pressure to have the answers. For others the awareness of themselves as knowledgeable extended beyond how they understood themselves and included awareness of how they thought their students were perceiving them.

Sub-theme 3: Self as Prepared

The sub-theme Self as Prepared reflects the GTAs' sense of their own perceived readiness to teach their respective classes and to handle unexpected situations involving student questions and behavior. Being prepared was often a short-lived experience that required significant effort and time to stay ahead of the students. Being prepared includes knowing teaching techniques on communicating information and dealing with students, reading class texts and related articles, reviewing notes before class, doing course-related research, and creating a syllabus.

In the process of making sense of their own preparedness or readiness to teach, GTAs were often aware of three related issues: 1) A lack of training and experience in teaching; 2) Time; and 3) Unexpected or odd moments with

students. First, GTAs described themselves as having very little if any training at all or experience on how to teach. Secondly, GTAs were aware of time as it related to being prepared. GTAs were often surprised at how much time they invested in preparing to teach and sometimes saw it interfering with other duties and responsibilities. Thirdly, GTAs were aware of themselves as being prepared or unprepared in the context of unexpected or "off the wall" situations. These unexpected situations usually consisted of students asking questions or making comments that the GTAs did not anticipate or they consisted of student behavior that was unexpected. Some GTAs described such situations and felt unprepared to respond to the students and were often taken aback by their students.

Sub-theme 4: Self as Authority

The sub-theme of Self as Authority refers to the GTAs' awareness of themselves as an authority in their classrooms. GTAs described authority as something they set or established and then worked to maintain, sometimes this was done through their grading procedures. Most were acutely aware of authority when they perceived it had been lost due to their own unprofessional behavior or when a student challenged or confronted them, which they seemed to interpret as a loss of control of the classroom suggesting their authority had been lost or diminished. Challenges and confrontations typically came in the form of behaviors such as students talking, reading the paper in class, or arguing with the GTA about some class-related issue or over a grade they had received. GTAs experienced student behavior in these circumstances as a perceived loss of control over the students which caused them to reflect on their own sense of being an authority.

Sub-theme 5: Self as Performer

The sub-theme Self as Performer reflects the GTAs' awareness of themselves as performing or acting. For these GTAs, the experience of teaching is like being on a stage in front of the class. Some even compared it to acting in a play. Performing was described as the turning off of one personality that was present prior to teaching and turning on a different personality or persona as they started to teach. Some described the experience as stepping into and back out of the new persona. This new persona that is put on or created is more conducive to teaching and possesses characteristics that are perceived to be helpful to teaching such as being energetic and liking people. Performing also helps GTAs put behind them whatever distractions or difficulties they were experiencing at the time and focus on teaching the class.

Sub-theme 6: Who I Am

The sub-theme Who I Am reflects the GTAs' sense of personal identity. This theme describes more of a core sense of who the participants are as people and not just as teachers in the classroom. When GTAs were describing Who I Am they often referred to how they were raised and the influence that family and society had on their identity. GTAs also referred to personal characteristics that

were central to their identity and heavily influenced their approach to teaching.

Sub-theme 7: Self as Learner

The sub-theme Self as Learner has an historical context. The previous sub-themes have all been in the present context as the GTA is currently aware of him/herself as a teacher. Self as Learner describes the experience of the participants remembering when they were learners in their undergraduate experience. This sub-theme captures a picture of how GTAs remembered themselves in the past as learners which includes an understanding of their attitude toward learning and interest in the material. It also includes remembrance of their behavior in terms of what they did and would never have done in a classroom. Self as Learner includes a recollection of helpful and unhelpful teachers and the way in which they learned the subject matter they are now teaching. GTAs' awareness of themselves as learners often occurred in contrast to what the GTAs experienced with their students. They typically reflected on their own experiences as learners when their students attitudes and behavior were different from what they perceived their own to be as learners. It is as if GTAs tried to make sense out of negatively perceived students' attitudes and behaviors (e. g. lack of interest, grade-focused, being confrontational) by thinking back to their own experiences and remembering what they were like as learners.

Theme II: Awareness of Students

Students are an important part of the experience of teaching for GTAs. This main theme reflects the participants' awareness of their students and how they related to the GTAs' experience of teaching. The GTAs in this study talked often and at length about their students. At times awareness focused more directly on students as other aspects of the experience of teaching, such as the GTAs' awareness of themselves, shifted into the background. Awareness may shift and different aspects of the experience of teaching may become figural as others fade into the background, but awareness of one aspect is never severed from the others. This situation is reflected in the GTAs' awareness of their students. GTAs become focused on their students and what becomes figural about their students often has meaning for how they experience themselves and make sense of themselves as teachers. As awareness shifted to their students, participants were aware of their students in ways reflected in the following sub-themes: (1) Students as Interested/Not Interested; (2) Students as Confrontational; (3) Gender; and (4) Race. One way to think about the sub-themes is to organize the first two sub-themes, Students as Interested/Not Interested and Students as Confrontational, as describing the behavior of the students. The last two sub-themes, Gender and Race, have to do with types of students experienced by the participants and describe the personal characteristics of their students. Although GTAs described other types or categories of students, such as pre-meds, majors, and non-majors, gender and

race were the two most prominent categories used. Each of the sub-themes will be briefly reviewed.

Sub-theme 1: Students as Interested/Not Interested

Figural for several GTAs in their experience of teaching was the awareness of their students as interested or not interested in the material. The latter group, not interested, was commonly described as the students who were just interested in getting a grade and having no interest in really learning the material. This group was described more often and GTAs perceived that a majority of their students were not interested in learning the material. These students often stood out in contrast to the GTAs' recollection of themselves when they were learners and interested in the material. A few GTAs described experiences with interested students, noticeably fewer than the number of non-interested descriptions. The interested students wanted to learn the material and seemed less preoccupied with their grade. They often asked questions and responded to the GTAs in class. While the non-interested students left GTAs feeling frustrated and questioning their ability, interested students often produced a sense of confidence in the GTA's ability and right to be teaching the class as well as a certain enjoyment of the teaching process.

Sub-theme 2: Students as Confrontational

The sub-theme Students as Confrontational reflects the GTAs' awareness of student behavior that was experienced as challenging or confrontational. GTAs described experiences in which they had conflict with their students. GTAs described instances where students argued and fought with them, used profanity toward them, behaved recklessly in class, and were generally disruptive of the class and their efforts to teach.

Sub-theme 3: Gender

The sub-theme Gender portrays the importance that the gender of the students had for some GTAs. Although all transcripts included references to male or female students, four female GTAs and one male GTA were specifically aware of gender in their experience of teaching and the dynamic it created between teacher and student. The female GTAs were commonly aware of gender when being confronted or challenged by male students. One male GTA was aware of gender and potential problems that could possibly result from relations with his female students.

Sub-theme 4: Race

This sub-theme reflects an awareness of the student's race and the impact it had on how GTAs responded to students of a different race from their own. Some GTAs were specifically aware of their student's race during instances of potential confrontation. These GTAs described themselves being aware of how they react to students of a different race and showing precaution not shown with students of a similar race.

Theme III: Making a Connection vs. Keeping Boundaries

The main theme of Making a Connection vs. Keeping Boundaries reflects the participants' experience of the relationship between themselves and their students. It is important to keep in mind that both the experience of making a connection and keeping boundaries are from the perspective of the GTAs and not their students. The relationship between the participants and their students consists of both making a connection and keeping boundaries with each experience operating as polar opposites on the same continuum. Both of these experiences happen with a small number of students. In most descriptions, it is only one student that the GTA makes a connection with and only one student that the GTA experiences as crossing the boundary. On one end of the continuum, Making a Connection includes getting to know the students on a more personal level and developing a professional relationship that goes beyond the course. The main theme Making a Connection vs. Keeping Boundaries has four interrelated sub-themes that are specific aspects of the Making a Connection end of the relationship continuum. GTAs further described their experience of making a connection as: (1) Getting Through; (2) Going Beyond; (3) Seeing it in the Eyes; and (4) Use of First Names. Each of the sub-themes will be briefly reviewed.

Sub-Theme 1 of Making a Connection: Getting Through

For some GTAs, Making a Connection includes a sense of getting through to the students. When GTAs make a connection they feel like their students are understanding them, grasping what they are trying to communicate at a deeper level, a level beyond simply listening to the GTA dispense information.

Sub-theme 2 of Making a Connection: Going Beyond

The sub-theme Going Beyond reflects the desire of some participants that what they do as teachers will have an impact on their students' lives beyond the classroom. GTAs hope their students take the information and experiences they've been exposed to in class and carry them throughout the rest of their lives. Going Beyond means that the GTA has made a contribution to the lives of their students in such a way that the students will apply their knowledge outside of the classroom, be able to form their own opinions and explain them, and in some way have a better quality of life.

Sub-theme 3 of Making a Connection: Seeing it in the Eyes

This sub-theme describes the facial reactions of the students when GTAs experienced making a connection. For some GTAs their experience of making a connection included an awareness of their students' eyes as a signal that a connection had been made.

Sub-theme 4 of Making a Connection: Use of First Names

In addition to Seeing it in the Eyes as a signal of connection, some GTAs experienced the making of a connection when their students called them by their first names. The use of the GTA's first name when referring to them indicated that the boundary was being diminished and the distance between them and the student was being shortened. Some GTAs described the importance of knowing their students' names to making a connection with them. Knowing the students' names was a way of communicating to the students that they were important to the GTA.

Making a Connection is balanced by Keeping Boundaries on the other end of the continuum. Boundaries delineate the distinction between "I the teacher" and "you the student". Keeping Boundaries is about maintaining a wall, a boundary line, a sense of distance or separateness from your students. Whereas Making a Connection is about breaking through the wall and decreasing the sense of distance and separateness from the students, Keeping Boundaries describes the experience of developing, maintaining, and reestablishing, if necessary, the boundaries that separate "I the teacher" and "you the student". Some GTAs describe boundaries, such as a glass wall or sense of distance, between them and their students as something to be overcome in order to reach their students. On the other hand, some GTAs describe boundaries, such as a glass wall or sense of distance, as something to be maintained. Just as GTAs are aware of making a connection and getting through to someone, they are equally aware of boundaries they want maintained and of times when those boundaries are crossed by them or their students.

GTAs use a variety of words to describe the opposite end of the relationship continuum, Keeping Boundaries. It is described as a glass wall, a boundary, a dividing line, a thin line, distance, and being separate. The interesting thing to note about a glass wall, boundary, or line, is that the GTA can still see their students and their students can see them. Keeping Boundaries is not about being cut off from the students as might be the case if GTAs described a brick wall between them and their students. But Keeping Boundaries is about an awareness that the teacher and the student are not the same. They are different and each has a different role to play. And it is when the teacher or student does not play their role that the boundary is experienced as being crossed and subsequently it has to be reestablished. The relationship is experienced as a constant struggle to find a balance between developing personal relationships yet at the same time maintaining a distance with students.

When boundaries are crossed, GTAs describe it as a loss of respect, an uncomfortable feeling that the students have become too familiar with them. GTAs often feel compelled to reestablish the boundary and create some distance between themselves and their students. This distance serves to reestablish the roles of "I the teacher" and "you the student" and create a sense of respect enabling the GTA to teach the class and more specifically to evaluate the students and give grades.

Some GTAs were aware of boundaries when giving grades to their students, especially poor grades. For many GTAs, giving a bad grade to a student was described as hard to do and in some cases GTAs felt bad or like they had failed when giving a bad grade. Grading produced a realization for these GTAs that the personal relationship with students has limits. These GTAs recognized that they would eventually have to give a grade to their students and possibly a poor grade. Having a boundary between them and their students gave them enough separation in the personal relationship to give a poor grade to a student if necessary.

There is another aspect of the experience of teaching that is not captured by the main themes. Included in the experience of three female GTAs was the relationship they had with their supervisors. These descriptions are not considered to be a theme because they were not included in the experiences of the other participants. Also, the relationship with supervisors did not seem to be integral to the structure of the experience of teaching such that if it was removed then the experience of teaching would be considerably changed in the way if any of the other three main themes were removed. Although, the relationship with supervisors is not a theme it was a salient component of three female GTAs' experiences of teaching and seems worthwhile to note.

Supervisors: Being There – Not Being There

Three female GTAs described at length the relationship they had with their teaching supervisors. Figural in their descriptions was the presence or absence of support from their supervisors. GTAs often described their supervisors as being there or not being there for them. For these three GTAs, a supervisor's support or lack of support had meaning for how they experienced teaching. The GTAs valued the presence and support of their supervisors and when it was absent they often experienced a change in themselves. This change was reflected in their sense of confidence and authority as a teacher.

Although the relationship that a GTA has with a supervisor is not at the level of a theme, the descriptions of these relationships illustrate the interrelation among themes. As GTAs are aware of themselves in the context of their students they are also aware of themselves in the context of their supervisors. They make sense of themselves as confident, authoritative, and belonging to the profession in light of their supervisors' being supportive or unsupportive.

Thematic Structure of the Experience of Teaching: Revisited

Analysis revealed three themes as essential to the experience of teaching for GTAs: Awareness of Self, Awareness of Students and Making a Connection vs. Keeping Boundaries. The themes, along with a brief overview of their organization, have already been presented.

As noted earlier, awareness of the GTAs is constantly shifting. At one moment in the experience of teaching the GTA is aware of some aspect of him/herself. At another moment, awareness shifts to the students or to an awareness of the connection or boundary between GTA and student. As

awareness shifts and different elements of the experience of teaching become figural, the other elements fade into the background. Although they shift into the background, they are not lost or severed from the total experience of teaching. Instead they form the context or "ground" by which the now figural element is understood or made sense of. Although each theme has meaning on its own, it is the relationship of the themes to each other that forms the basic structure of the experience of teaching. Each theme has to be understood in relation to the other themes as they become the context for the theme that is figural in awareness.

The first theme, Awareness of Self, describes the participants' experience of themselves as teachers. As this theme becomes figural and GTAs are aware of themselves as being confident, knowledgeable, prepared, having authority, or performing, an awareness of the students recedes into the background. The participants' awareness of their students' behavior and characteristics recedes and forms the context from which the GTAs make meaning about who they are as teachers. A GTA's experience of being confident, knowledgeable, prepared, having authority, or performing is influenced by their awareness of their students. These self-ascribed attributes cannot be understood separate from an awareness of the students.

The second main theme, Awareness of Students, reflects the participants' awareness of the behavior and personal characteristics of their students. The participants' awareness of their students is contextualized by an awareness of themselves. The sub-themes, Who I Am and Self as Learner, of the main theme, Awareness of Self, most strongly contextualize the awareness that participants had of their students. GTAs often made sense out of their students behavior and personal characteristics in the context of their own personal attributes, family and social influence, and experiences of being a student.

The third main theme, Making a Connection vs. Keeping Boundaries, has a unique place in the structure of the experience of teaching. Whereas the themes, Awareness of Self and Awareness of Students, function as grounds for each other, Making a Connection vs. Keeping Boundaries is contextualized by aspects of both the GTAs and their students. More specifically, this theme is understood in the context of the roles played by both the GTAs and students. Participants often talked about the roles that they and their students played. GTAs referred to themselves as playing different roles such as instructor, teacher, friend, or counselor, and to their students as playing the role of student or friend. Regardless of whether the GTA was aware of making a connection or keeping a boundary with the students, they experienced the relationship in the context of the role that they and their students were playing.

VITA

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