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CHAPTER 2.

CLASSROOMS AND MINEFIELDS

JONATHAN SIMMONS; SANDRA SILVA-ENOS; AND SHANNON KELLEY

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Graduate school is a time of personal and professional challenges and changes. Engaging in personal reflection about your identity and your goals can help you make sense of these changes.

- Set and enforce your own personal and professional boundaries to protect all the parts of your identity; learn to recognize your own triggers and prioritize your own self-care.

- Create a set of lifelines—people and resources you can be vulnerable with and can turn to for both personal and professional challenges. You will need different lifelines to help with different problems such as identity whiplash or the many landmines you may hit. Recognize that each lifeline person will offer you a different set of responses.

Jon: Opening the door to room 4A, I take a look around at the classroom in which I'll be teaching, and I feel like I'm in a 1970s time-warp. The room has wood paneling, an actual chalkboard, and one large conference-style table with 20 chairs around it. The room can't be more than 10 feet wide, and in the back corner is a haphazardly stacked pile of chairs that looks like it could fall over at any moment. Most of my students are already there, talking to each other or checking their email, but I notice several of them glancing at me. They seem to know I'm the instructor and are attempting to guess what type of teacher I'll be. As I take a seat somewhere at the middle of the table, I'm struck by a sudden pang of uncertainty. How can I make learning engaging and exciting in a space that looks like the boardroom from Mad Men? Am I smart enough to teach this class? Did I write a good syllabus? What if they hate me?

These questions may seem familiar to many other graduate student instructors (GSIs) as they have plagued graduate students across the years. Teaching is often

viewed as a central element of preparing graduate students for future careers (Burmila, 2010). Yet, graduate students often receive no formal preparation and training to teach, leaving them alone to navigate this challenging role. Historically, graduate teaching was rooted in an apprenticeship model, with a graduate instructor working under one faculty member (Tulane & Beckert, 2011). In this model, the faculty member serves as a true mentor, learning the strengths and experiences of the graduate student and helping the student leverage those strengths and experiences in the classroom, adding new tasks as the graduate student is ready. However, as Sandi-Urena and Gatlin (2013) note, GSIs are often neglected as true partners in instruction, and their professional development is often overlooked. The experience of being a GSI can look very different. Some GSIs are paired with a senior instructor and assist in grading and clerical duties. Others lead laboratory or discussion sections for larger lecture classes. As enrollment numbers swelled and universities needed to offer more courses and sections, many GSIs have taken on the additional roles of holding office hours, writing examination questions, and taking full responsibility for courses (Tulane & Beckert, 2011). This trend has been exacerbated since the Great Recession in 2008 as states reduced funding for higher education by an average of 16% per student (Mitchell et al., 2017) and tenure track positions fell across the nation to just 45.1% of faculty (The Future of Tenure, 2021). Often, the courses GSIs teach are lower-level introductory courses or general education requirements (Ayres & Winterberg, 2020; BrckaLorenz et al., 2020). However, some graduate students find themselves asked to teach more advanced courses, which bring new responsibilities and challenges. Ultimately, serving as a GSI is often less about a graduate student's professional development and more about meeting the needs of the university.

Teaching as a graduate student is complicated and no two GSIs will have the exact same experience. Some are nervous to be in front of a classroom while others consider it an honor and are excited to teach; however, as the excitement wears off, the reality of the job sets in and can leave the GSIs experiencing significant anxiety. As current students, GSIs may be better situated to relate to undergraduate students and become partners in learning, which may increase students' performance (Ayres & Winterberg, 2020). But their status as a student also makes it challenging for them to be seen as legitimate authority in the classroom. While for some undergraduate students there may be no recognition of a difference between a full professor and a GSI, for others, a full professor carries automatic respect and assumption of knowledge simply by their title; a graduate student, though, must earn the respect of the students who may view them as a "trainee" (Burmila, 2010). Some students expect lenient treatment or that a GSI will allow them to get away with not doing the work or expect passing grades (Burmila, 2010; Ayres & Winterberg, 2020). Graduate students

themselves are also susceptible to these doubts as many do not view themselves as "real teachers" (Winstone & Moore, 2017).

Because being a GSI looks different for each person and at each institution, there is often not clear guidance, support, and training, leading GSIs to feel like they are navigating minefields and are particularly susceptible to stepping on what we have come to call "landmines"—unexpected strong negative emotions, particularly uncertainty, self-doubt, and feelings of imposter syndrome that affect graduate students as they navigate their many different roles and responsibilities. Here we offer examples of landmines of a personal nature, landmines during the act of teaching, and landmines that happen behind the scenes, all examples that come from our own experiences as GSIs. Part of what makes these landmines and their effects so problematic is that they affect each element of a GSI's identity. First, we will briefly discuss graduate student identity and introduce our notion of "identity whiplash" before sharing examples of landmines and how they led us to experience identity whiplash.

Some graduate students held professional careers before beginning graduate study and are able to tap into their wealth of personal professional experience and help students make stronger connections between the classroom and the real world (Labaree, 2003). We (Jon, Sandra, and Shannon) find ourselves in this position, able to draw on our previous professional experiences as we make sense of teaching as graduate students. All three of us first trained as K-12 educators—Jon as an elementary teacher and Sandra and Shannon as middle and high school teachers in K-12 education before beginning our doctoral studies. With backgrounds in education, our experience may be different than those GSIs who have not received any training on how to teach. However, as we began teaching as graduate students, we quickly realized that teaching K-12 students and pre-service/in-service teachers was not the same, and the transferability of skills, knowledge and confidence levels were not as smooth as we had hoped; we ran into many of the same landmines that all GSIs experience. Understanding the nature of these landmines, their causes, and their impacts is crucial for graduate students and will be the focus of this chapter. When GSIs encounter landmines, they can feel insecure and upset; often, the complexity of these experiences results in GSIs not being able to fully articulate why they feel this way. Meanwell and Kleiner (2014) refer to this as the emotional work of teaching and highlight that GSIs may feel an emotional "rush" after good teaching days, but bad teaching days have a large emotional toll on graduate students and require significant recovery time.

In our experience as graduate instructors, we have found that teaching is further complicated by the multiple identities we hold as graduate students. Winstone and Moore (2017) suggest that graduate education exists in an ambiguous

transitory space between "previously held and aspirational identities," where graduate students live in uncertainty, confusion, and frustration as they try to discover their new professional identity (p. 496). We view identity as "how a person understands his or her [or their] relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2000, p.5). Understanding identity is particularly challenging in the liminal space of graduate study. This is a fluid space where all our different identities mingle together and blur. Our past, present, and future learning trajectories collide and are complicated by our competing memberships and commitments in multiple communities of practice (Smith, 2006). In addition, many GSIs enter graduate school in their later 20s and early 30s with substantial responsibilities and commitments to their families and communities outside of the academy (Ayres & Winterberg, 2020; Burmila, 2010). The struggle to balance academics and personal life responsibilities is often of particular challenge to women, students of color, queer students, and non-traditional students (Brus, 2006). This may be in part because undergraduate students are more likely to turn to these GSIs to help them make sense of higher education, leaving these GSIs with a greater emotional and mentoring workload. Further, underrepresented graduate students are more likely to experience microaggressions in and out of the classroom and face additional challenges related to authority and privilege.

Additionally, GSIs are socialized into academic systems in which they may feel pressure to emphasize their research, resulting in teaching feeling like a burden (Burmila, 2010). Faculty expectations, including implicit assumptions that graduate students can make themselves available at any time for any project, further complicate the multiple identities of graduate students (Brus, 2006; Haynes et al., 2012; Martinez et al., 2013). These simultaneous roles of student, teacher, researcher, employee, family member and more can leave graduate students feeling like they have no coherent sense of identity or that they must constantly change their identity (Winstone & Moore, 2017). We have come to call this "identity whiplash" in our conversations about these challenges. Much of what is written surrounding identity frames graduate students as pulled in multiple directions by the tensions of their competing identities. While we agree, we have also come to think that the particular situation of graduate students lends itself to also experiencing identity whiplash. Rather than feeling each identity simultaneously, in identity whiplash, graduate students are rapidly shifting from one identity to the next—thinking as a teacher in one moment, a student in another moment, a researcher in the next moment, a spouse or partner in the next, and a mentor in the moment after that. The rapid shifting of these identities leaves graduate students feeling unable to ground themselves.

The complications that can be caused by identity whiplash leave graduate instructors particularly vulnerable to landmines in the classroom. This chapter is our attempt to make sense of these landmines, our multiple identities, and how they influence our teaching and our developing professional identity. The work of David Labaree was especially influential in how we made sense of our experience as graduate teachers. He examines some of the challenges and complexities involved with transitioning from a practicing teacher to educational researcher. In this transition, Labaree outlines a potential "cultural clash" between the separate worldviews held by both positions (2003, p. 15). He concludes that "the gap is not as wide as it seems, that the differences are more a matter of emphasis in professional practice than of total opposition" and that explicit acknowledgement of the cultural divide between teachers and researchers is essential in helping people make sense of that divide (2003, p. 21). When we considered the potential "cultural clash" faced by GSIs, we identified two primary areas for that clash that are likely to leave GSIs hitting landmines and experiencing identity whiplash: between specialist and novice, and between personal and professional. The potentially conflicting worldviews of the personal and the professional and between specialist and novice highlight the tensions GSIs feel amid their multiple identities. The relationship between identity whiplash and landmines is cyclical. At times a GSI will hit a landmine and then experience identity whiplash. At other times, GSIs will experience identity whiplash and then hit a landmine. In the next section of this chapter, we offer stories from our own experiences that show how we experienced landmines and identity whiplash. By naming and sharing these tensions, we hope to make explicit the multiple identities we have struggled with, the minefields we have navigated, and how we have coped with identity whiplash and ultimately come to realize that the gap between our multiple identities may not be as wide as it initially seems.

THE SPECIALIST AND THE NOVICE

For most GSIs, shifting between knowledgeable specialist and novice is the most common transition they must navigate. As students themselves, they may feel like novices in their own coursework and when they meet with advisors and professors they are positioned as novices. Yet when they enter the classroom, they are positioned as an expert. However, the novice feelings that they experience in other situations follow them, resulting in an identity whiplash. Here we share stories from our own teaching experiences that have exemplified this clash and the tension between being both a specialist and novice in hopes that our personal reflection may help other GSIs make sense of their experiences.

Sandra: *I was sitting in my supervising professor's office while he skimmed through my student's final paper and the text from the website where my student had directly copied the second half of the paper. Noticing the blatant plagiarism, my supervisor looked at me and tossed me a huge landmine. He told me that as the instructor of record, I had a decision to make. I could give the student a zero for the final assignment, causing him to fail*

the course or I could report it to the university in violation of the Academic Honesty Policy. The student was an athlete, and my choice would impact his athletic scholarship. As a GI who wasn't much older than my students, I felt immediately overwhelmed. Who was I to make that call? How is this going to impact the student's future? Why was I only given options when hoping for guidance? What happens if I make a decision and then regret it? Did I fail as a teacher for letting my student even fall into this situation?

It is not unusual for GSIs to find themselves in predicaments where they must consider all the different possible consequences of a decision they make. GSIs are often unfamiliar with how decisions have been made in the past or unaware of the full range of consequences. Additionally, their status as students themselves, their age, and the age of their students complicates their ability to make these decisions. This can leave the GSI feeling paralyzed and unsure of the right course of action. All GSIs, novice and experienced, need a trusted mentor to go to who can help them understand the systems and structures, power dynamics, and relationships between colleagues, departments, and the institution as a whole. Often this mentor is their academic advisor, but they can also be a professor or other faculty member who the GSI develops a relationship with. This person should help the GSI understand the sometimes hidden "rules" of working at an institution and help GSIs make sense of these systems. We recommend that before they begin teaching, GSIs have a conversation with this mentor to ask questions about working within the institutional systems. These conversations may be especially important if the GSI is teaching a course that has a clinic placement or laboratory session. Some questions to get you started with this conversation include:

1. What are the academic policies that guide my work as a GSI? (Academic integrity, religious holidays, supporting students with accommodations, etc.)

2. How have you used the university's learning management system or other resources in impactful ways, and do we have members in the department who are "experts" in those systems to go to for guidance if needed?

3. If I find myself in a situation where a student is failing my class, what do I do?

Through this example we wish to highlight the difficulty of decision making that GSIs must engage in. While some situations may only involve one classroom, here the decision of how to respond to plagiarism required input from multiple departments. Although as a GSI, you are developing expertise in your field, you may still feel like a novice in some situations, unsure of what decision to make. Having a more experienced mentor to guide you in instances like this, someone who you can ask clarifying questions and who can help uncover the complex relationships between colleagues and departments can help reveal the norms and practices at the departmental and institutional level and help you make sense of those complexities.

Shannon: *In week three of the first course in which I served as a teaching assistant, the professor received an emergency phone call and stepped out early in the lecture, leaving me to cover the remaining content. Although*

we were discussing reading assessment, a topic I was intimately familiar with as a classroom teacher, I could not yet speak with any authority on the full range of different assessments the students might encounter in their future settings. Feeling like a fraud, my face grew red, and my palms sweated. I silently hoped the students wouldn't see through my lack of knowledge as I flipped through the slides as though each was a landmine. I rushed through the material, barely adding any explanation or taking questions, even though I knew that this was not effective teaching. And when the professor finally returned to clarify what I had hastily instructed, I sat heavy in my chair and breathed a sigh of relief.

This brief but embarrassing experience highlights a major challenge that many GSIs face: the difference between mastering content and teaching content. In a multiyear study of teacher knowledge, Shulman (1986) determined that teachers relied on both subject matter knowledge (i.e., mastery of content) and pedagogical content knowledge (i.e., understandings of what makes content challenging or easy to learn and the best representations or explanations to teach it). New GSIs often have the subject matter knowledge necessary to teach a course but lack the pedagogical content knowledge to deliver that material in effective and engaging ways. When GSIs struggle to convert their subject matter knowledge into pedagogical content knowledge, their self-efficacy as an instructor is tested, which can lead them to doubt their capacities as an instructor (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). While there is no guaranteed way to avoid the difficult feelings that accompany these experiences, there are certainly actions GSIs can take to navigate the doubts and develop pedagogical content knowledge. These include:

1. As you are planning your instruction, consider reflecting on how you learned the material you are now teaching to students; this will allow you to identify how to scaffold the instruction to build from easier to harder concepts. In addition, lean on your knowledge base and professional experiences to create concrete examples to illustrate complex material. Students benefit from learning new concepts in many different forms, and having concrete examples of how content is used in different settings allows them to develop more robust understandings of the course material. It also provides you a place to be a confident and engaging instructor, which you will not always be initially.

2. Before teaching a new lecture or giving a new assignment, complete the lecture or assignment like you are a student in the course. This will initially be time consuming and challenging but will allow you to identify what is especially hard or easy to learn, how to incorporate examples and clearer definitions into your materials, and what might be engaging and better prepare you to respond to student questions.

3. Take advantage of your campus resources on teaching and learning to learn the foundations of effective pedagogy and learning theory and to gather resources for turning your content knowledge into pedagogical knowledge.

Through this example, we wish to highlight the relationships between your knowledge as a student and the responsibilities of being a teacher. As a GSI you may struggle to transfer your own knowledge

to the classroom setting and to figure out how to best leverage your own professional experiences. A common challenge faced by GSIs is that they know the material as a student, but knowing material as a student and being an effective teacher of that material are not the same thing. This can leave you feeling embarrassed because you believe the lack of pedagogical knowledge is perceived as lack of content knowledge by your students. Practicing the assignments and activities you plan to use as a teacher allows you to recognize potential challenges for students and build your pedagogical content knowledge.

Jon: My advisor and I had been working on a project related to my dissertation, and we were meeting to discuss what theoretical framework to apply. As he started asking me questions, it became clear that my understanding of the theoretical framework was not as complete as I had thought it was. He brought up great points and asked questions that I couldn't answer. As we wrapped up our meeting, I was swimming in notes and unanswered questions, feeling like I had misinterpreted everything and was not cut out for this kind of work. Feeling discouraged and confused, I headed toward the class that I was scheduled to teach, a junior-level seminar. As I walked in the room, two students stopped me, each with a question that turned out to be a landmine. One asked if they could talk with me after class about a problem they were having in their clinic placement. The other said they didn't understand the reading at all. Here were two students looking to me to provide guidance and clarification about their learning, but how was I supposed to do that when just fifteen minutes ago I was feeling like I was not cut out for academic work and I should quit?

Part of what makes teaching so challenging is the many other roles that are bound up in being a teacher. Jon's experience foregrounds two of those unique roles. In one role, GSIs serve as curriculum writers. They make decisions about what topics to cover and materials to use. In particular, finding appropriate readings can be a challenge. As a student, GSIs are likely reading foundational texts and contemporary research in their field, yet these readings are often not suited for the courses GSIs teach. Another role that GSIs hold is as mentors for their students. To be an effective mentor, one must consider where their mentee is heading in life and how you as a mentor are positioned to help the mentee meet those goals (Norman & Ganser, 2004). It can be tempting to provide brief, solution-focused techniques, but Norman and Ganser (2004) suggest that mentoring relationships built on humanistic traditions that truly listen to the mentee and build empathy for the mentee's situation are more beneficial. A unique challenge that GSIs encounter is that both the undergraduate student and the GSI are grappling with the same types of questions about their identity and conceptualizing their future. This leaves the GSI likely to feel unsuited to offer guidance and advice. The roles of curriculum writer and mentor would be challenging enough, yet for GSIs, those roles are added on top of their role as teacher and their role as student. These multiple roles and identities each require their own reflection. These reflections might include:

1. Consider a wide range of potential resources as course readings: practitioner publications, newspaper and magazine articles, book chapters, journal articles, etc. Evaluate the range of

voices you are highlighting through your selected readings. Are there perspectives from historically marginalized communities that would benefit your students' learning?

2. As a mentor, listen to your students and their challenges. Students need to feel like they are being heard and supported as they express their thoughts and feelings.

3. Allow yourself to be vulnerable as a teacher and a mentor, which can be a powerful experience for you and for your students. Don't be afraid to share moments of uncertainty or struggle from your own life to help your students realize that growth is possible.

Earlier we discussed our notion of identity whiplash, and this example shows how a GSI can struggle simultaneously with multiple identities. As a graduate student you are asked to be a student, a teacher, a mentor, a family member, and more. Each person has a unique constellation of identities, each with their own expectations. One key challenge of graduate study is that you are asked to be all of these things at the same time, forcing you to rapidly change your most salient identity, which can leave you feeling lost and unsure of who you are. Because your identities are all related, when you feel imposter syndrome or inadequate in one identity is also has consequences for your other identities. Alternatively, when you have a positive interaction that highlights your growth or competency, that can have positive effects on your other identities. Be sure to take time to notice and celebrate those moments.

THE PERSONAL AND THE PROFESSIONAL

Another common shift for GSIs involves balancing the personal and the professional. Today's GSIs are much more than students—they are research and teaching assistants, caretakers, partners, community members, full or part-time employees, children, parents, and friends. Each of these roles demands time and attention, and, in many cases, these roles have competing values, leaving GSIs struggling to prioritize their time, which can impact their quality of life. We offer examples of our struggles with the tension between personal and professional to help other GSIs consider their own context.

Sandra: I found myself spending hours at my desk. Between grading, working on my own course work, and progressing on my professional writing pieces, I noticed I left less and less time for my family. There were many days where I would see my husband for an hour in the morning as we got ready and an hour before bed. I had taken it to be the norm, and yet still I felt like I was falling behind on grading and writing. I had mentors who reminded me that family time and mental breaks were a necessity, but I also had colleagues and professors sharing about the family time they sacrificed and continue to sacrifice well into their careers. I felt that if I neglected my grading and feedback to students, then I was failing at my job and failing my students; if I neglected my writing, then I was failing as a scholar; and if I neglected my family and own wellbeing, then I was failing myself. Little did I know that I could hit a landmine where I felt I was failing all aspects of my identity. How could I keep on track with grading and model the importance of self-care to my students? How could I make my coursework a priority without dropping the ball on other projects? And most importantly, how do I balance all of this while giving my family the time they deserve?

GSIs can feel like they are buried under a mountain of stress from unfinished projects, anxiety from upcoming deadlines, and exhaustion from balancing life,

academics, and teaching. We often say, and hear other GSIs say, that there aren't enough hours in a day to be able to keep up with the never-ending to-do list. In these instances, it is essential for GSIs to remember that setting boundaries and sticking to their boundaries is a necessity. Self-care practices like exercise, eating healthy foods, family time, and getting adequate sleep are necessary to give your brain a rest and support our mental health (Bryan & Blackman, 2018). It is essential for GSIs to reflect on their "non-negotiables" and what they need to live a healthy and full life, both as an academic and as a human, and set boundaries to protect the time for these activities. For example, a "non-negotiable" for Jon is yoga 3 times a week, so he builds a schedule around that. Additionally, when planning projects, GSIs need to be honest with themselves about how much time they need to complete a task. An effective approach that has worked for the authors has been to determine how much time certain tasks require, for example, recording how long it takes to read and annotate a research article or recording how long it takes to respond to a student journal prompt. Once we know how long one journal response takes, then we can develop a realistic timeframe for how long it will take to respond to all of the students' journals. Knowing this information, we are able to set more realistic and truthful timeframes. This has also helped us say "no" to projects as we know how much of our time is already committed to other tasks. This has helped us organize and prioritize our projects and our time. Every person's priorities and non-negotiables are different, so while peers and colleagues may have suggestions, GSIs should remember that everyone has different circumstances (Burmila, 2010; Hernandez, 2021). This is especially challenging as the implicit messages of graduate study train us to not notice these boundaries. We often look at other graduate students and professors, see their prolific publication record, and feel as though we need to take on additional work (Bryan & Blackman, 2018). However, if you look for these boundaries in others, you can see them in professors who cancel meetings because of a sick child, block off time in their calendar for a workout class, or limit their email response time to an hour daily.

As GSIs we quickly realize that teaching responsibilities can take up a significant number of hours if we allow them to, leaving us feeling like we have little time to work on other projects that may help our continued professional growth or cater to other parts of our identities. Here are some practical suggestions that come from our experience as K-12 educators that can help GSIs balance their time:

1. Think smarter not harder. Creating efficient resources such as clear rubrics for assignments and starter template response banks (templates that you can add additional personalized comments) for discussion boards, journals, or reflections is an efficient way to provide quick

and clear feedback to students.

2. Pace and time yourself. Set a timer for grading and spread out your grading over multiple days. Limiting yourself to a fixed time or number of assignments in a day will help keep you focused and productive while ensuring that students receive meaningful feedback.

3. It is okay to ask for help and okay to say no. The fear of portraying oneself as a novice, unprepared, or unable to handle the challenges of being a GSI and scholar can easily influence the choice to seek help or turn down a task. However, asking for help and being willing to say no are ways to protect the boundaries that are so essential to help GSIs maintain self-care.

It is important to note that you can't take care of others (including your students) until you take care of yourself. Therefore, GSIs need to ensure that they respect their own boundaries and take moments for themselves to prevent a decrease in their wellness and/or the quality of their work as teachers and scholars (Punia & Kamboj, 2013). In addition to the boundaries GSIs must set to preserve their personal time, they must also consider the boundary between scholar and teacher.

Shannon: As I developed my dissertation proposal, I spent hours reading and writing literature related to my topic. I found this work captivating, and I couldn't help thinking about how I would teach undergraduate students about the material even if it was slightly outside of the course goals. So, I carved out an hour from one of my lectures to teach them about the nuances of instructional policy implementation. After 20 minutes of mostly confused silence, however, it was clear to me that either I was instructing these concepts poorly or the students weren't nearly as interested in the topic as I was, or some combination of the two. While the material was endlessly fascinating to me, it was only tangentially related to the goals of the course and to my students' degrees. It was in this moment that I realized understanding things for my own research did not mean those same understandings seamlessly translated into good or engaging instruction for my students, most of whom were much newer to the field.

Each day, your schedule as a GSI might look different—you may be reading and writing a manuscript with colleagues, meeting with students, gathering data for your dissertation, taking advanced courses, or teaching a course to first year students. You can spend your entire day thinking, learning, and teaching about the same topic, but at very different levels of detail and complexity. As you advance in your graduate studies, you work with increasingly abstract ideas as you attempt to "make the familiar strange" (Fillery-Travis & Robinson, 2018, pg. 847). You are often working to develop complex arguments that don't yet make total sense to you, let alone to others. However, we have chosen the topics we research, we understand their value, and we often want to communicate these new understandings to others, including to our students. As you wrestle with increasingly specialized content for your research, it can be hard to separate out the foundational building blocks of knowledge for your field and what you know and understand as a developing content area expert. This poses particular challenges for converting your knowledge to pedagogy and for scaffolding the knowledge to teach it in ways that are engaging and comprehensible to students who are newer to the field (Bliss et al., 1996). Being cognizant of this challenge, however, provides you a vantage point for more purposefully considering what and how you teach content to students.

1. Try to briefly explain the topic or argument to a friend or loved one and gauge their response. When you're finished, ask them to tell you what they just learned. As you listen, pay attention

to what ideas are clear, which seem to be missing, and which they have questions about.

2. Consider the foundational skills and knowledge that a graduate in your field needs to know and leverage those to guide your planning when building lessons based on increasingly complex ideas.

3. Probe your students to gauge what their prior knowledge is on a topic and use that to determine the level at which to start your lessons.

This example highlights how GSIs can struggle with the relationship between dissertation research and teaching. At times these can feel like opposing ideas, because as a graduate student, you are engaging with increasingly more complex and abstract ideas, but as a teacher you are breaking down those ideas to introduce them to students. Incorporating your research into your instruction can be both highly engaging and generative for students, as long as you actively work to identify which of those complex ideas might align with the goals of the course and enhance your students' learning. In addition, by analyzing those ideas alongside people who are less familiar with your content, you can better determine how to break down then build up the multiple pieces of knowledge in a way that makes sense and enhances the classroom experience.

IDENTIFYING AND NAVIGATING LANDMINES IN THE CLASSROOM: FINDING YOUR LIFELINES

Each of these stories shares an instance where the full range of our identities impacted our decisions and actions. In some cases, it was our identity as a student, where we were reminded of our own struggles to balance all of our assignments and felt lost and overwhelmed. In other cases, it was our identity as a scholar, which pushed us to analyze concepts in new ways, often at odds with the needs and desires of our students. Still yet, in other instances, it was the non-academic roles we hold, challenging us to nurture the relationships we value and prioritize our time. Initially, the full range of our identities emerged as a conflict, with an insurmountable "cultural clash" between the differing priorities and worldviews of each aspect of ourselves (Labaree, 2003). However, through additional experience, reflection, and sharing our challenges with other graduate instructors, we have come to understand the clash might not be a clash at all. Rather, as Labaree suggests, it is simply a difference of emphasis, and we could leverage the full range of our identities to be more successful in the classroom.

Considering the full range of your identities when planning and teaching is hard work, and it doesn't happen automatically. Additionally, we acknowledge that this recognition won't prevent you from hitting landmines and struggling with the feelings of imposter syndrome, uncertainty, and self-doubt that make it challenging to enact our role as teacher. Part of what made these landmines so difficult for us was that they caught us completely off guard. As highlighted in the stories shared in this chapter, these landmines came in many different forms—a question from a student, grades, the physical space of the classroom, situations our advisor put us in, the endless to-do list, and many more. Perhaps a GSI's first line of defense for these landmines is recognizing the many types of

landmines that exist. By sharing our experiences and naming our landmines, we hope to offer other GSIs not only things to be aware of, but also some strategies and lifelines that we have used when we hit those landmines. To do this, we have categorized the landmines into three broad types: landmines that happen during the act of teaching, landmines that happen behind the scenes, and landmines of a personal nature.

Landmines that happen during the act of teaching: These can feel the most dangerous because they happen publicly. They leave you in front of the class unsure what to say or do next. In this moment, it is easy to get lost in feelings of helplessness. At times, these landmines occur because you do not know the answer to a question asked by a student. In that case, we believe it is important to admit and acknowledge what you don't know. You don't have to have all the answers all the time. At other times, you have the concrete knowledge to answer the question, but perhaps the topic was not what you had planned to address in class that day. Here, GSIs must leverage their skills of flexibility and adaptability to pivot to new learning. In order to make that pivot, you typically need a few moments to gather your thoughts, so we offer a few ideas to give your students a task while you center your thoughts and decide on the best course of action. In creating this list, we have drawn on our experience in K-12 schools, and we recognize that they may not work for all settings.

1. Preset discussion groups in your class. Then, when you need a moment, have the students get together with their discussion groups and share their thoughts and questions.

2. Reflective writing/journaling. Ask the students to take a few moments to write down their thoughts, find or create an image that resonates with the topic of inquiry, or brainstorm a list of questions they want to explore.

It is easy to assume that both we and our students "check ourselves at the door" and enter the classroom with learning as the only thing on our mind. However, our experiences as K-12 teachers have taught us that students at all levels are unable to do that. Neither they, nor we, cease to feel frustrated simply because the lesson starts. And although with age and experience we become better at bracketing those feelings, they still influence our actions as teachers. As K-12 teachers we learned to "take the temperature of the room" and adjust accordingly. In the K-12 classroom, we closely observed the body language of our students, noticing when they became extra fidgety or when their heads tilted in confusion. These body language cues prompted us to add in a five-minute break or discussion time or to re-explain a concept in a new way.

Landmines that happen behind the scenes: These can be triggered by grading student assignments, planning class periods, and writing your syllabus. While graduate students typically hit these landmines when they are working alone at

their desks, they are no less frustrating and can leave you feeling unqualified to teach and unsure where to begin.

1. Rely on essential questions and enduring understandings. Structure your course so that students try to answer 1-3 big questions and have 1-3 key takeaways that they should know by the end of the lesson.

2. Use rubrics and response banks to help grade assignments.

3. Know who to talk to! All three of us have run into challenges where we weren't sure what to do. Before the semester begins to figure out who you can go to for help and guidance.

As beginning K-12 teachers, the first year was very challenging, but each year became easier as our confidence grew. When we began teaching as GSIs we went through the same process, with the first time teaching a course feeling very overwhelming. But each subsequent time teaching felt easier, and we were more comfortable. Through the first year as K-12 teachers, we leaned heavily on mentors, and we learned to do the same as GSIs. Leaning on this experience and knowledge has been helpful as GSIs, as it helped us recognize that while we may feel frustrated and overwhelmed now, as we continue to teach courses, we will gain confidence and skills. For example, Jon has now taught the same seminar course three times, and each time he has grown in confidence and been able to bring in new ideas and concepts.

Landmines of a personal nature: These may be the most challenging to navigate because they are connected to the human side of your identity. These landmines make you feel like a failure in all areas of your life and may leave you feeling shame about yourself.

1. Know your boundaries. There will always be additional projects and work, so prioritize your time, recognize your boundaries, and say "no" when you need to.

2. Bring parts of your authentic self to the classroom, sharing your successes and your struggles with your students, allowing them to see you as a human.

3. Engage in self-care. Self-care can take many different forms, from seeking physical activities or relaxing activities to seeking quality time with people you care about, to seeking healing. Learn to recognize your own needs and figure out what self-care techniques work best for you.

Additionally, as K-12 teachers, we consciously created opportunities to get to know our students and build a classroom community. Through these experiences we learned how students responded to different approaches. Some respond best to a teacher being kind and nurturing, while others work better with a teacher who is hard and demanding. We must do the same thing when teaching at the college level, responding based on what we perceive our students to need. Building this classroom community has made it easier for us to bring ourselves into the classroom and share who we are with our students. Through tapping into each part of our identity when we plan and deliver our lessons, we are able to build better relationships with our students, adapt to their needs, and be more effective instructors.

Tied up in the challenges of navigating landmines is the nature of graduate education itself, which can be both intellectually and physically isolating, especially under certain circumstances (i.e., an international pandemic). To this end, we have found that developing what we term "lifelines", or consistent support from certain colleagues, mentors, family members, or friends, can drastically enhance the graduate teaching and broader graduate school experience. Central to the idea of lifelines is recognizing that we need different types of support in different situations. When we hit some landmines, we need someone to help us think about pedagogy, but with other landmines, we need someone to eat ice cream with and share our feelings. Naming your feelings and recognizing what you need helps you decide which lifeline to reach out to. We have found that having many different "types" of lifelines can be especially helpful. By "types," we do not mean to suggest you reduce any one person to this category or solely reach out to this person for these needs; rather, we believe that by intentionally considering who to reach out to when, you can develop a robust support network and balance the support among many busy professionals. In particular, you might consider identifying a teaching-related problem solver, a research-related problem solver, someone to vent to, someone to laugh with, and someone to ask advice, among others. It is important that you first identify what the problem is and where in your life it is located (i.e., teaching, research, personal) before deciding who to reach out to. From there, you can determine who in your community has the knowledge and skills to support you in your time of need. In some cases, one person may represent many of these lifelines; in others, people may overlap. The bottom line, however, is that by developing critical lifelines to navigate the inevitable landmines, your teaching, research, and life will benefit.

Teaching is so much more than just sharing information with students. In our experiences as K-12 teachers we had to also serve as counselors, advisors, referees, nurses, disciplinarians, and friends. Too often, GSIs enter the college classroom without adequate preparation for the work of teaching or an understanding that the role of a teacher goes far beyond what is covered on the PowerPoint slides. Here we have identified two of the primary transitions that graduate students must navigate: between specialist and novice, and between personal and professional. These perspectives have different worldviews that may at times be in conflict, but graduate students are uniquely positioned to leverage these multiple worldviews in their teaching. Because of the lack of training and support and the challenging nature of teaching, GSIs often feel frustrated and emotionally and physically exhausted. They wonder how one can be expected to fill all of these roles on top of their responsibilities as students and researchers. All of these questions take place against the backdrop of the liminal space of graduate school and the challenges of graduate students discovering their professional identity. This leaves GSIs particularly ripe to experience identity whiplash, feeling suddenly jerked from one identity to another and unable to ground themselves. Identity whiplash leaves graduate students more susceptible to hitting "landmines" while teaching, which bring about negative feelings, insecurity, and frustration. In this chapter, we have identified and shared three types of landmines from our own teaching experiences, described our challenges with navigating identity whiplash, and

offered some strategies to cope. Through sharing and naming these experiences, we hope to help other graduate instructors recognize potential landmines and begin to develop their community of lifelines. Further, we hope GSIs realize that the full range of their identities is an asset in the classroom and can be leveraged to become more effective teachers.

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