



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

# Storying Identities, Experiences and Agency: Using fictional approaches to support GTA professional development

New Approaches to the Teacher Training of Doctoral Researchers, SRHE, 24 January 2020

Sarah Moore, The University of Sheffield  
sarah.moore@sheffield.ac.uk @saharafudge

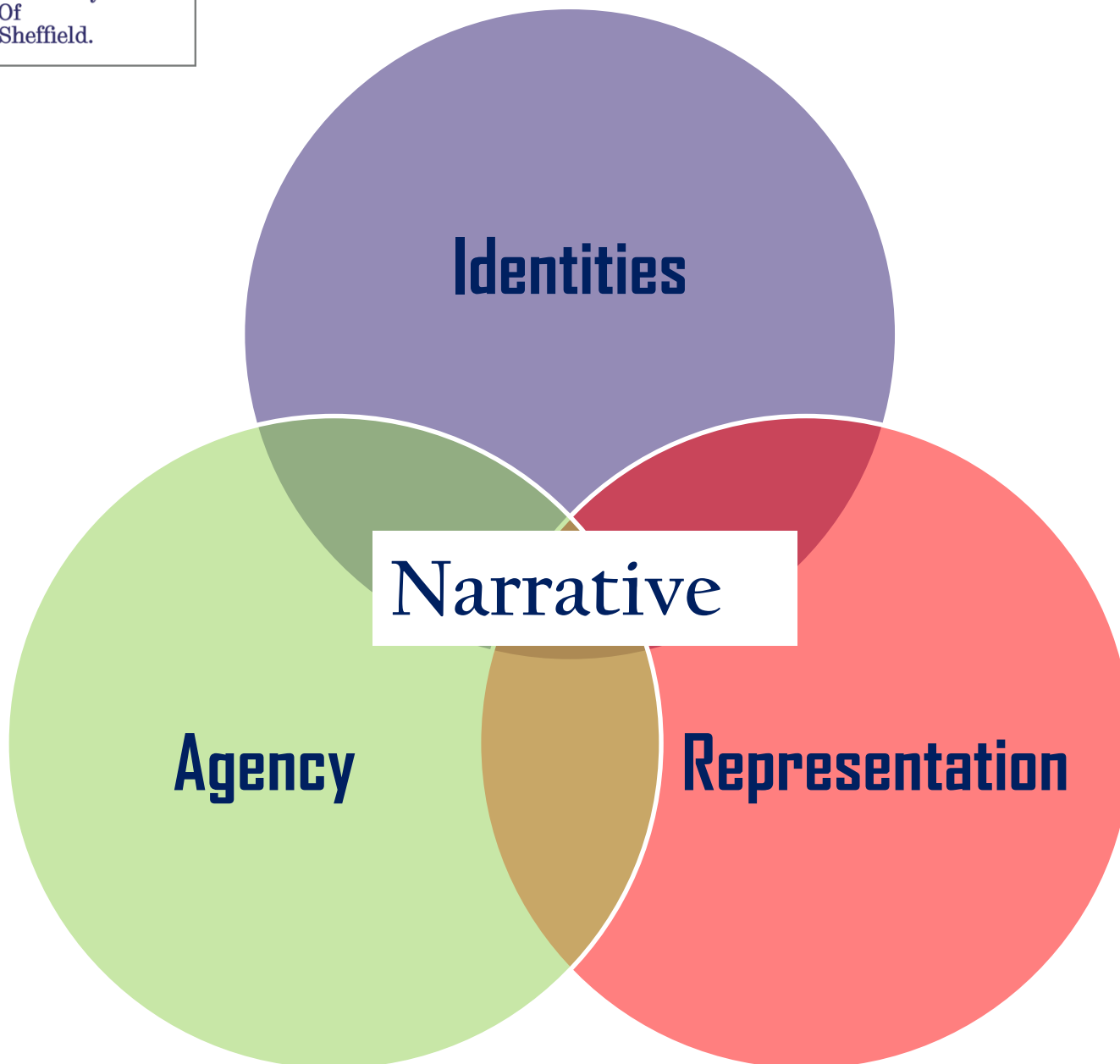
# Narratives

Listen to the narratives of Gina,  
Researcher:

Arthur



- *As you're listening, note down any aspects of their narratives that stand out or surprise you*
- *Two minutes to discuss with the person next to you*



# Research Questions (at the moment!)

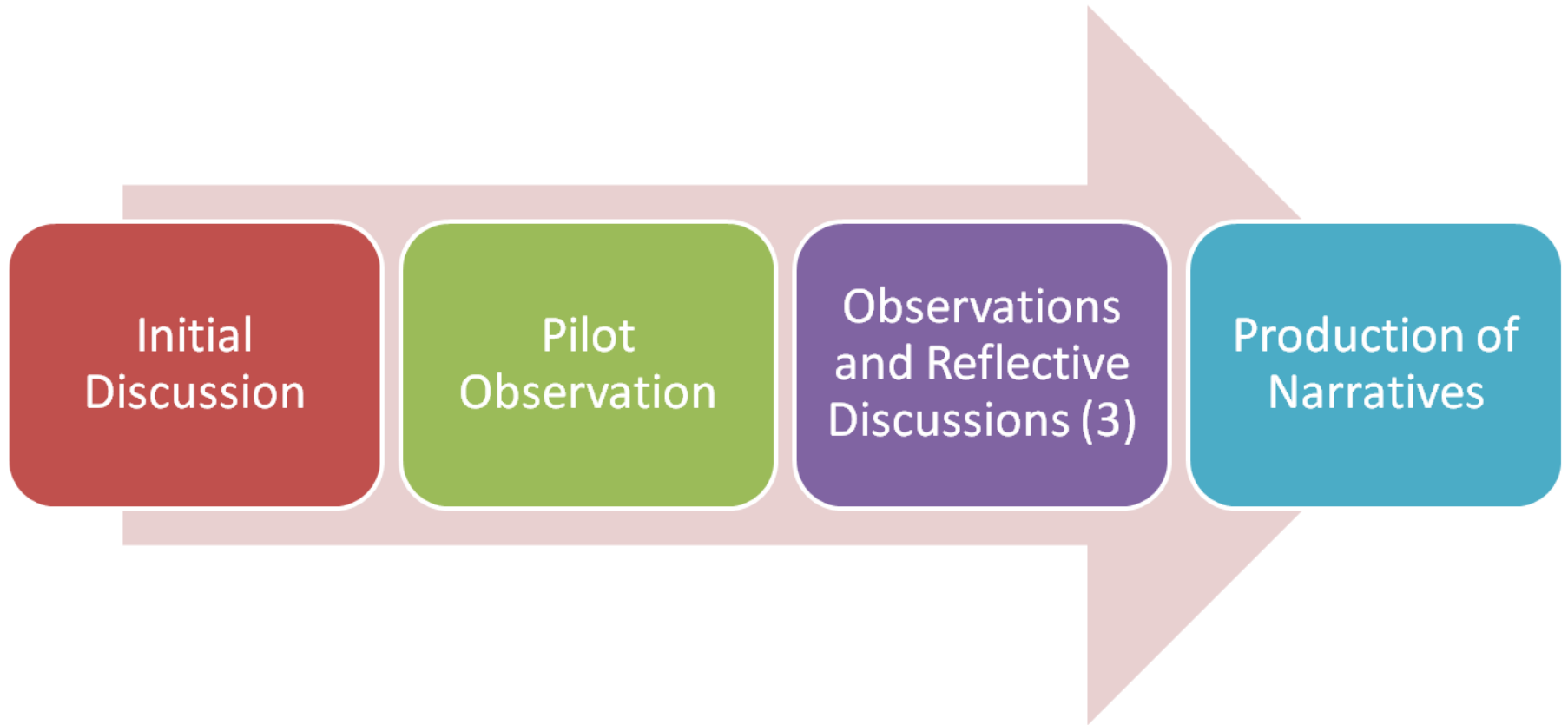
- How do GTAs perceive their role as teachers in higher education?
- What influences these perceptions?
- What is the relationship between these perceptions and the decisions that GTAs make in day-to-day practice
- How far do GTAs feel they have agency over what they do in their day-to-day practice, and what spaces exist in which they can enact this agency?

# Identity, agency and experience

“Identity is understood not as a fixed property, but as part of the lived complexity of a person’s project” (Clegg, 2008, p.329)

- Links between teaching practice and identity (Zeichner and Liston, 1996)
- Curriculum as dynamic, ongoing, active (Apple, 2014)
- Critical realism (Archer, 2000)
- Liminal space in which GTAs are working (Winstone and Moore, 2016, Muzaka, 2009)

# Methodology



# Narrative – ‘rival musings and interpretive openings’ (Gallagher, 2011)



# “Becoming” (Todd, 2001)



*“On the one hand, [pedagogy] touches on the hope that people can think differently, can change the way they relate to each other, and can form new understandings of themselves and the world that makes possible the very act of teaching and learning.”*

*“On the other hand...if pedagogy is about the becoming of the subject, then it can become a tool for the most oppressive ends.”*

*“People bring a host of idiosyncracies and unconscious associations that enable them to resist, transform and create symbolic attachments which pedagogy cannot predict or control.”*

(Todd, 2001, pp.435-6)




# What does this mean for academic professional development?

- Whose narratives are we promoting through our professional development activity? Whose narratives are missing?
- How far do our own experiences influence the narratives we use?
- How far do we perpetuate the myth of “complete” narratives?
- How do/can we honour the diverse voices and experiences of GTAs and other early career teachers in professional development activity?
- What spaces for agency do GTAs and other early career teachers have? In what ways are they constrained by external forces?
- How do we encourage agency while recognising wider structural issues that constrain GTAs and other early career teachers?

# Our previous GTA programme

- Academic Culture and Transitions
- Small Group Teaching (seminar facilitation)
- Small Group Teaching (lab demonstration)
- Lecturing
- Teaching: Design and Delivery
- Assessment and Feedback
- Problem Solving
- Research Supervision
- Foundation Pathway Orientation

# Introduction to teaching as a GTA



Introducing  
yourself

Roles and  
attributes  
of a GTA

Scenarios

Thinking  
about your  
practice

# Introduction to teaching as a GTA

## Who are you as a teacher?

In the first section of the handout, map out the stages that have brought you here today using the following questions:

- What did you do before you came to Sheffield?
- Why did you come to Sheffield?
- What interests you about teaching / why do you want to be a GTA?
- What sort of things have helped you as a learner?
- What has made learning difficult for you?
- Who or what inspires you as a teacher?

# Introduction to teaching as a GTA

## Introducing yourself

Using the second half of the handout...

**On this side of the table, write down a few notes about how you introduced yourself to colleagues at the start of today's session.**

**And on this side, write down a few notes about how you would introduce yourself to students.**

- Discuss in pairs:
- What are the similarities/differences between the two boxes?
- Why have you chosen to introduce yourself in that way to students?



How have you set out your expertise as a teacher?

# Introduction to teaching as a GTA

## Questions to ask your department

- What activities will you be paid for?
  - Teaching
  - Session design/planning/preparation
  - Assessment/giving feedback
  - Meeting students
- How much time is allocated for these activities?
- When will you see the materials for the sessions you're teaching?
- Which (if any) departmental meetings are you expected to attend? What review and development opportunities are available?
- How do you feed back to senior colleagues?



# References

- Akinbode, A. (2013) Teaching as lived experience: the value of exploring the hidden and emotional side of teaching through reflective narratives. *Studying Teacher Education*, 9(1), 62-73.
- Archer, M. (2000) *Being Human: The problem of agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Clegg, S. (2008) Academic identities under threat? *British Educational Research Journal*, 34(3), 329-345.
- Gallagher, K. (2011) In search of a theoretical basis for storytelling in education research: Story as method. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 34(1), 49-61
- Jones, A. (2011) Seeing the messiness of academic practice: exploring the work of academics through narrative. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 16(2), 109-118.
- Taylor, C., Downs, Y., Baker, R. and Chikwa, G. (2011) "I did it my way": Voice, visuality and identity in doctoral students' reflexive videonarratives on their doctoral research journey. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 34(2), 193-210.
- Todd, S. (2001) "Bringing more than I contain": Ethics, curriculum and the pedagogical demand for altered egos. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 33(4), 431-450.
- Winstone, N. and Moore, D. (2016) Sometimes fish, sometimes fowl? Liminality, identity work and identity malleability in graduate teaching assistants. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 14 June 2016, 1-9.