



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MA University of Victoria, 2009
BA University of Victoria, 2004
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**“Learning to teach: Teaching assistants (TAs) learning in the
workplace”**

Interdisciplinary Studies

Friday September 6, 2019
12:30 pm
Clearihue Building
Room B007

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Margot Wilson, Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Gweneth Doane, School of Nursing, UVic (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Tatiana Gounko, Department of Educational Psychology & Leadership Studies, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Cheryl Amundsen, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Carmen Galang, Gustavson School of Business, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

Through an exploratory qualitative, interpretive frame that employed an ethnographic methodological approach, this research focuses on teaching assistants (TAs) teaching in a lab, tutorial, or discussion group. Nine TAs share their learning journey as they begin teaching in higher education. The theoretical lens that frames this research is workplace learning. Interviews, observations, video-recordings, field notes, and learning diaries were subjected to thematic analysis, looking for dominant themes associated to TAs' characteristics, their learning process related to teaching, and the knowledge they developed about teaching and student learning. Key findings include the recognition that TAs bring robust conceptions and dispositions to their first teaching position that is approached from a student subject position as they are becoming teachers. As TAs are being teachers, they control their self-directed learning process as they make decisions on-the-fly within a diverse learning environment that ranges from expansive to strategic to restrictive affordances. Coupled with a discretionary reflective practice, TAs' knowledge development about teaching and student learning is solely dependent upon their experience, making forthcoming development of knowledge about teaching and student learning relegated to chance. This focus on TAs' learning in the workplace illuminates the need for a deep learning approach to learning about teaching and student learning that needs to begin with graduate students' first appointment as a TA. In addition, this deep learning approach needs to be encased in an expansive learning environment that provides opportunities for continuous support through various forms of mentorship, instruction, and development of reflective practice.