

Danger! Quicksand. The experiences of teaching-only academics in UK Higher Education (0234)

Sarah Dyer¹, Helen Walkington², Rebecca Williams³, Katherine Morton⁴, Stephanie Wyse⁵

¹University Exeter, UK,

²Oxford Brookes, UK,

³University of Hull, UK,

⁴University of Bristol, UK,

⁵Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), UK

The number of teaching-only academics is growing. In the UK, by 2013-14, they represented over a quarter of all academics (Locke, Whitchurch et al. 2016). The United Kingdom is not unusual in having a large number of academics working in teaching-focused roles, often on precarious employment contracts. Ten percent of academics who teach in Australia have teaching-only contracts (Probert 2013), a figure which excludes sessional lecturers. Including sessional lecturers and GTAs, (May, Strachan et al. 2011) estimate that over half of teaching in Australian Universities is done by staff on casual contracts. In the United States, it was estimated that of the 1.8 million faculty members and instructors recorded in 2009 in degree-granting institutions, just over 75 per cent, were 'employed in contingent positions off the tenure track, either as part-time or adjunct faculty members, full-time non-tenure-track faculty members, or graduate student teaching assistants' (Coalition on the Academic Workforce 2012); see also Purcell (2007), for a broader discussion).

The growth of teaching-only contracts marks significant reconstruction of academic work. Over the last couple of decades the pressures shaping universities and the working lives of those employed in them have intensified. Funding and accountability regimes that first led to specialisation (Sidaway and Johnston 2007) and are now leading to an 'unbundling' of academic work (Locke, 2014; Probert, 2013). Locke highlights 'the increasing differentiation and diversity of the profession and the gradual unbundling and disaggregation of academic work – not just the link between teaching and research, but of these core academic activities themselves' (2014:11) and the creation of new academic and para-academic jobs, including teaching-focused/teaching-only contracts and educational support positions. These divisions of labour are happening in conjunction with increasing casualisation in, and segmentation of, labour markets (Bauder 2006). Teaching-only and teaching-focused contracts are becoming a key area in which academic work is differentiated and stratified.

This paper contributes to the literature seeking to make teaching-only posts visible and to include them in our wider discussions of academic work (Dowling 2008)(Gill 2009). Not least to include them in analysis of the gendering of academic work and institutions, and in the initiatives aimed at addressing inequalities (Angervall, Beach et al. 2015) . Academic identities tend to obscure job function and contract type (Bauder, 2006) which in practice normalises full-time permanent working conditions. Powerful cultural stories about 'non-standard' (or 'not-standard-enough') career paths and the deficiencies of those on them persist (Purcell, 2007). Teaching-

focused academics are constructed as servicing the 'real' work of a department. Purcell (2007: 121) describes such staff as 'not *really* members' of the department, 'they move in the shadows, teaching the big introductory classes, providing indispensable service to the department, and drawing little in return' (Ibid: 121-122).

We use the metaphor of 'quicksand': what appears to be solid ground, to be crossed with skills developed as a PhD student and hard work, is shown to be unstable. It is difficult to make progress and disorientating because there seems to be no obvious route nor map to secure ground. Temporary teaching-focused contracts marginalise those on them through their precarity, the low regard in which their work is held and because they can serve as a barrier (rather than a 'rite of passage' even) to a 'proper' academic career. Permanent teaching-focused contracts may offer a degree more stability but only in a context of employment contracts and department cultures which construct these academics in ways which condition the possibilities for the rest of their careers. We describe how this 'quicksand' plays out for academics employed in different teaching-focused roles: as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), in temporary often fractional posts, and in permanent posts.

A small but growing body of autoethnographic writing demonstrates the importance of reflexive accounts in understanding how our academic cultural stories reify a standard career path and 'other' those not willing or able to access such a path (Purcell, 2007; Rossi, 2008; Peters and Turner, 2014). We inquire and write as a collective, in part because we want to acknowledge the individualising effects of emerging career structures (Dyer, Williams et al. 2016). In our case, we contribute as members of a teaching-focused network for academics in Geography, Earth, and Environmental Sciences (GEES) (Bearman, Dyer et al. 2015). The auto-ethnographic narratives we analyse were collected after our inaugural meeting attended by 15 teaching-focused academics. The participants were from a range of universities across the UK, two-thirds were within five years of completing their PhDs. In discussion of our experiences, participants identified common themes. Three participants whose stories typified these themes volunteered to write our narratives.

We end our paper by reflecting on the need to challenge the assumptions inherent in our stories about 'a standard career path' and make visible the effects of these stories. The current marginalisation of teaching-only academics has real effects for students and Universities, as well as the academics themselves. We outline interventions at various scales which we believe would be effective in beginning to address the problems we identify.

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