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Title Developing critical reflection in academic workplaces: lessons for the Apprenticeship for Academic Professionals from a sociocultural perspective
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Developing critical reflection in academic workplaces: lessons for the Apprenticeship for Academic Professionals from a sociocultural perspective

The Apprenticeship for Academic Professionals is set to become the main route by which UK early career academics become qualified to practice, because of the funding following the newly introduced UK Apprenticeship model. The Apprenticeship Standard for Academic Professionals will become the main umbrella by which early career academics become Fellows of the HEA, and complete a postgraduate certificate in academic practice. This shines a spotlight on the role of workplace learning in the professional development of early career academics. Workplace learning through peer observation and mentoring has traditionally been integrated into most postgraduate teaching qualifications for academics, however, the Apprenticeship model places workplace learning at the heart of academic induction into professional practice.

This research, based in one UK university, analyses the reflections of early career academics on their learning through Peer Support supplemented by department based mentoring, in order to better understand what and how academics learn in their departmental workplace, and the resources they draw on to support critical reflection on their practices. These reflections on learning were recorded in the Reflective Commentaries that academics completed to become Fellows of the HEA, which was a condition of their probation. The sample includes all the Reflective Commentaries of early career academics over a two year period. These are significant, because they were written by a cohort of academics without the support of a taught programme, apart from a 2 day introduction to learning and teaching. Instead, academics' workplace learning was scaffolded by a department based mentor, and Peer Support of teaching. The Reflective Commentary required academics to reflect on their learning from engaging in Peer Support.

Where previously academics on probation had been required to complete a postgraduate taught programme in academic practice, this had been replaced by the lesser requirement to become a Fellow of the HEA via the University's HEA accredited Professional Recognition Scheme. This change followed national policy announcements indicating that HEA Fellowship, rather than a formal postgraduate teaching qualification, would count towards university rankings criteria. This lesser requirement to complete HEA Fellowship was attractive to universities where early career academics were expected to meet demanding research targets while also taking on heavy teaching loads, because it minimized

the amount of time allocated to early career academics to develop their teaching practices. However, with the introduction of the Apprenticeship levy on universities, the Apprenticeship for Academic Professionals is likely to become the standard probationary route for early career academics.

It has been argued that postgraduate programmes in academic practice provide early career academics with a critical interpretive space in which they can reflect on locally developed teaching practices, rather than simply absorbing uncritically the teaching practices developed locally (Mathieson 2011, Pilkington 2014). However, little is known about how academics learn about their teaching through engaging in socially situated workbased practices in the absence of a formal taught programme, as taught programmes have become standard practice for early career academics in the UK. This research explores the nature of academics' reflection on their teaching practices in the absence of a taught programme. It identifies the resources academics draw on to support critical reflection on their teaching practices, and investigates whether there are differences in the learning of academics across departmental workgroups, and what this can tell us about differences in the quality of the learning environments afforded by different departments. This could inform our understanding of how the Apprenticeship for Academic Professionals should supplement academics' workbased learning across varying departmental contexts.

This research is located in sociocultural understandings of organisational learning, which builds on research by Lave (1993) on the development of socially situated identities through participation in everyday practices. Sociocultural research in higher education has focused on the centrality of departmental workgroups in the induction of academics into tacit, localized, informal teaching practices (Knight and Trowler 2000). Because workplace learning is often tacit, and based on historically developed power relations, it can reinforce the development of teaching practices that do not support student engagement in learning, just as much as supporting the development of effective teaching practices. Workplace learning thus needs to be made explicit in order for academics to critically reflect on the practices they are being inducted into.

Sociocultural theory has grappled with accounting for how academics exercise agency in the context of the complex discursive environment of contemporary higher education (Barnett and Di Napoli 2008). Stronach et al (2002) explore the agency of academics in the interpretive space between the performative agenda of higher education policy and the 'ecologies of practice', where academics critically reflect on the received wisdom, as they enact their own teaching practices.

This research explores the extent to which academics are able to construct 'interpretive spaces' to critically reflect on their teaching practices, in the absence of a taught programme that explicitly encourages critical reflection on teaching practices. It addresses the following questions: if learning is situated in departmental workgroups, supported by departmental mentors, how effectively are academics able to reflect on their developing teaching practices? Are they able to take a step back from their immediate contexts to reflect on their

developing teaching practice, or do they become absorbed into tacit practices developed locally? Do differences in the quality of locally developed departmental cultures of learning and teaching become more powerful in shaping early career academics, in the absence of a central programme for early career academics?

These questions are significant in informing debates around the development of the new Apprenticeship for Academic Professionals, given that apprenticeships foreground the role of workplace learning in professional development. It provides us with an opportunity to take a fresh look at the role that should be played by central taught programmes in supporting workplace learning, by understanding the nature of learning about teaching that takes place in departmental workgroups, its strengths, but also its limitations.

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