Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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Transitions into higher education professional and professional identity

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Research Domain: Academic practice ,work, careers and cultures (AP)

Abstract:

The study draws on an IPA analysis of 8 interviews, conducted in 3 UK universities (Post/Pre 1992). It explores the perceptions of dual professionals, specifically: what aspects of professionalism are important to them, how they express their professional identity and negotiate it in an academic context. The focus of this paper is chiefly on how dual professionals conceive professionalism and how these beliefs affect their capacity to negotiate themselves in their new HE career. Insight into how these individuals negotiated their professional identities, as they experienced inbound trajectories ranging from peripheral to full membership of a university community is very relevant to those responsible for professional development. The findings may aid fellow academics and university management to consider, develop and create a sense of HE identity and belonging for dual professionals.

Hoyle, E. & John, P, D. (1995) *Professional Knowledge and Professional Practice,* Cassell: London

Paper:

This SRHE Early Career study aimed to investigate the transition experiences of disciplinary professional practitioners in the UK who have current or recent industry experience and are making a mid-career transition to being academics. The participants experienced similar inbound trajectories, despite coming from different previous occupations. This study investigated the transition experiences of dual professionals' understanding of their new role and how their beliefs about university teaching, learning, and becoming a lecturer are framed and evolve and whether formal professional development enables dual professionals to explore ideas, experience strategies and practices towards creating their own professional identities.

The study addressed the following questions:

- what supports and hinders their new identity formation as lecturers?
- how does participation in new communities of practice in HE (e.g. professional development,

academic discipline, and their HEI) affect their transition, beliefs and their view of themselves?

- how do dual professionals' beliefs about teaching and their transition experiences differ by discipline and by institution?

- The focus of this paper will focus predominately on question 2. The definition of a professional will be based on Hoyle and John (1995) and Ingersoll & Merrill (2011), such that a professional is an individual who is able to work autonomously, is responsible for the application of professional judgement and conducts work that involves highly complex set of skills, intellectual functioning and knowledge that are not easily acquired and not widely held.

The importance of professional identity in lecturer development has been highlighted by a number of studies (Bathmaker & Avis, 2005; Izadinia, 2012; Swennen, Jones & Volman, 2010; Trede, Macklin & Bridges, 2012; Wilkins et al., 2012). Unlike professionalism, which can be used to describe the behaviour of a group as perceived by those either in the group or outside the group, professional identity has been defined as the perception of oneself as a professional and it is closely related to the knowledge and skills one has, the work one does, and the work related to significant others (Robson, 1998). MacLure (1993:311) sees professional identity as a 'resource that people use to explain, justify and make sense of themselves in relation to others, and to the world at large'. The interviews averaged around an hour in length and produced some extremely rich and revealing data. As this is an emic study that used IPA, the themes identified are closely associated with each other and have overlap. Interviews of up to 1 hr took place in person at the participant's institution. A range of professions, ethnic groups, ages were represented. All had undertaken taught and accredited CPD programme to prepare for teaching.

Identified themes from IPA analysis.

Theme
Becoming a university lecturer
Influence/credibility
Network
Independence

The key aspects relating to question 2 were **Influence/credibility and Independence**.

The key overarching theme of this study was the concept of intercultural competence, the ability of the dual professionals to engage in successful intercultural interactions, and lead to a capacity to

make links between their practice and HE lives. Intercultural competence, did not "just happen" it occurred through an institutional taught formal teaching qualification In the case of dual professionals the competency to work successfully within two spaces (to create the 3rd space) was due undertaking CPD in HE (just in time intervention as well as formal programmes) which aided their transition into the academy. Undertaking professional development in helped them think creatively about their identity. The taught and accredited CPD programmes to prepare for teaching courses they undertook were delivered by staff at their universities. All the lecturers commented on how beneficial their course was in terms of understanding how students learn. The pedagogical knowledge and skills provided were recognised as useful by all participants and aided them to understand how to adapt their own teaching styles to meet the learning styles of the students. The constructivist approach helped the lecturers to determine what they were required to teach, based on the existing knowledge and skills of their students.

Findings suggest that dual professionals will negotiate their own professional identity based on how they are viewed by others but, more importantly, how they view it themselves, based on their own experience, knowledge and confidence. One of the most surprising findings was the consistent view of all participants regarding the teaching development programmes. This was key aspect that appears to have been instrumental in dual professional's transition to developing credibility, influence and influence to become a university lecturer. They found the learning outcomes of their programmes useful and relevant, but all agreed that the course did not provide them with the practical skills to be a lecturer. All the lecturers in this study considered that the practical teaching and learning skills were essential to becoming a competent lecturer.

Prior to undertaking the teaching CPD programmes the lecturers' views of education were based on their experience as students at school, college, university or when they have had the opportunity to teach/train, however informally. This view, when combined with their professional experience, promoted particular expectations based on prior knowledge of what it means to be a lecturer. All the lecturers expected to be given the knowledge and practical skills to teach, equivalent to the 'tools of the trade'. Based on their experience they were not expecting topics such as student-centred learning, learning styles, different cultures and reflective practice among others.

These 'new' areas of understanding of learning and teaching were found to be very beneficial to the lecturers and aided their transition in their new roles. However, the perceived gap, between what was expected and what was delivered, still existed on completion of the training and this knowledge and these skills had to be found 'on the job'. The potential issue was that there was not any formal guidance on what needed to be learned and when. The participants all considered the responsibilities of the individual lecturer to their colleagues and organisation as very important and that the team depend upon each other for success. The transition of these individuals from professional careers, where they were confident and often enjoyed high status, to new careers as lecturers meant that they initially negotiated their credibility based on their previous occupational identity. As they progressed from the periphery of their new lecturer role, they began to develop their identity as a lecturer. Findings indicate that the context in which the lecturer has previously worked is seen as just as important as the knowledge and skills the lecturer has developed. Those with the most relevant background to the subject they were teaching initially positioned themselves as 'qualified' with many years of experience. This, they perceived, afforded them a degree of credibility that they observed as legitimate and some perceived this as an advantage over their

colleagues, who did not have a 'professional' background. Many participants stressed the relevance of their professional background and how this gave them credibility with their students and colleagues. This self-perception and perceived legitimisation by others was important to them aided their transition.

All were aware that they were operating in an environment that is subject to external pressures but that collegiality helps to support individuals in this environment. Whilst this is a small-scale study and no claims of generalisation are being made, the model has some resonance and transferability to other similar groups, in the transition from practice to Higher Education posts.

Andreas Fejes and Susanne Köpsén, Vocational teachers' identity formation through boundary crossing, 2014, Journal of Education and Work, (27), 3, 265-283. Journal of Education and Work

Bathmaker, A.M. and Avis, J. (2005) Is that 'tingling feeling' enough? Constructions of teaching and learning in further education, Educational Review, 57, 1, pp.3-20.Izadinia, 2012;

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Trede, F., Macklin, R., & Bridges, D. (2012). Professional identity development: a review of the higher education literature. *Studies in Higher Education*, *37*(3), 365-384. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.521237