0453

Mon 06 Dec 2021

10:55 - 11:15

From PGCAP to PGCLTHE: Transition to a New Course During Times of Uncertainty in a Pandemic

Bianca Fox[1], Adam Tate[1]

[1]*Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, United Kingdom*

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

Abstract: Higher Education in the UK, and particularly in England, is in a state of flux due to the rapid shifts in how education is provided driven by the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper provides a reflective account of how a new Academic Practice course team have made decisions, supported participants, and responded to the challenges of introducing a new Academic Practice course in a time of uncertainty during the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper offers commentary on shifts in building resilience during such times impacts on academic identity formulation for both students (who are also academic members of staff) and the course team, here there is a complex interplay of hybrid identities. The paper further aims to stimulate reflection upon curriculum design, moving away from a modular towards a more flexible curriculum.

Paper: Higher Education (HE) in the UK has had to adapt at pace in response to the Covid-19 pandemic providing opportunities and challenges for all parties. Most notably this has involved navigating a great deal of uncertainty, at a time when the sector was already negotiating the outcomes of the Augar Review and the potential reprofiling of the sector (Ahlburg, 2020; Whalley et al., 2021). The HE Sector in the UK, as part of the Global Knowledge Economy, has been experiencing further challenges from providing financial sustainability in an increasingly connected and marketised place, making course design and delivery more dependent upon each HE provider securing student numbers (Nielsen, 2015). In such an uncertain landscape launching a new course, with a new course team, may not seem prudent, nonetheless, it was necessary for Nottingham Trent University to ensure that the staff have essential learning and teaching provision. This is a course for new academic staff (without significant prior teaching experience), and therefore takes a different positioning within the university being an internal facing course, and a key for providing the skills and knowledge to be an effective teacher in HE. Hence, in some regard this course provides an interesting area of focus as it the pressures that typically operate on course, as noted above are not as significant factors, however, it is influenced by the demands, needs, and professional standards of the sector and university. The course format consists of multiple overlayed strands which leads to three awards the Academic Professional Apprenticeship, the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, and Fellowship of Advance HE.

This paper provides an autoethnographically reflective account of how the new course team have made decisions and responded to the uncertainty, specifically focusing on two key areas. First, we present the opportunities and challenges of transition from the legacy Postgraduate Certificate of Academic Practice/Academic Professional Apprenticeship to the new Postgraduate Certificate of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education/Academic Professional Apprenticeship, focusing on the decision-making processes for the new course format (including the role of technology) during the Covid-19 context. The course has moved away from teaching in module blocks over 3-6 months to teaching in 6-8 week blocks. This move to teaching blocks has provided an active learning emphasis, allowing learning to be chunked more meaningfully allowing course participants to embedded what they are learning into their own practice (Kay et al., 2019; Moss, 2020). We have also found that a move to focus on smaller teaching blocks to provide greater agility and resilience in the course delivery and allows flexibility for course participants studying in different modes. The course has evolved in response to the current Covid-19 context and the subsequent shift to online teaching, the design of this course has allowed the course team to work with course participants to role model use collaborative learning to share best practice in the use of educational technology. Then, we present the importance of using a Grit methodology to build an online learning community with greater resilience for both participants and the course. By developing resilience and being reflective, it has allowed course participants to be more confident in exploring their academic identity and overcoming challenges of who the expert 'in the virtual room' might be in their own teaching.

This paper aims to elicit discussion on addressing uncertainty and providing more secure educational futures through flexible pedagogical approaches. It provides an opening for future discussion on courses not often considered in the dominant discourse in HE, and the complex competing agendas influencing the development and delivery of Academic Practice courses. Through a greater emphasis on reflective practice, the course team have engaged course participants to explore their shifting identities. The format of the new course has greater grounding and empirical engagement with diverse literature, engagement in skills development, and developing resilience; and this can be seen in the shifting growth ontologies of participants. Not only that but through building resilience in participants has provided a basis for a higher level of engagement with this new course and this can be shown through participation and outcomes in formative assignments. Through the course team's reflective experiences, we hope to highlight good practice, (re)forming academic identities, and how to create an engaged community of practice online.

References: