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"But you're not an academic, are you?" A study exploring the development of academic identity in dance lecturers.

Lauren Vincent
Buckinghamshire New University, High Wycombe, United Kingdom.
University of Reading, Reading, United Kingdom

Research Domains

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Abstract

Dance is a discipline which many people have an opinion on, but this rarely includes an association with academia. The Cartesian duality of the body and mind is arguably still evident in the hierarchy of disciplines in the academy and particularly when it is suggested that dance can be an academic subject. This study sought to explore the career journeys of fifteen dance lecturers from seven HEIs, focusing on their transitions into HE and their ongoing identity development. Whilst research exploring academic identity development exists in other disciplines such as nursing and teaching, there is a paucity of research in the creative disciplines. As the research is not yet complete, this presentation will give an overview of the literature that has informed this research, introduce the conceptual framework and rationalise the choice of narrative life-history interviews and interpretive phenomenological analysis.

Full paper

Introduction

Academics are at the heart of any Higher Education (HE) institution in leading research and innovation, and in nurturing students in their HE journeys. Academics may take different routes into and through

academia (Smith & Boyd, 2012). Traditionally this journey may have involved completing a doctorate qualification prior to moving into an academic role (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2008), however, in the current day, given the diversity of disciplines in HE, the route into academia may not be so linear. Whilst some may argue that entrance into academia from a professional field, without holding a pre-requisite doctorate, may lead to feelings of inadequacy and imposter syndrome (Debowski, 2016), it is arguably necessary to ensure the needs of certain industry-focused courses are being met. This is particularly evident in the current HE climate given the emphasis on Graduate Outcomes and the consideration of these in relation to what may be classed as a 'high quality degree'.

The caring professions such as nursing and teaching consistently rely upon academics who have previous/current professional experience (Wyllie et al., 2016). Research has shown that such academics often have the relevant industry knowledge, experience and networks desired by HEIs in relation to embedding employability into courses and respected by the students themselves, however they may lack the pedagogical and academic understanding expected in HE (Boyd & Smith, 2016; Debowski, 2016). Arts-based academics, many of whom also enter academia following a professional career (Doughty & Fitzpatrick, 2016; Lam, 2018), may face additional challenges given the discipline hierarchy evident in HE, a hierarchy where dance is often at the bottom. This research therefore aimed to address this gap in the literature by exploring the professional identity development of dance academics in Higher Education institutions (HEIs).

The research aimed to address the following questions –

- What are dance academics' experiences of transitioning into academia?
- How may their career journey have affected their identity development?
- How may early life experiences have affected their professional identity development?
- What are some of the challenges and opportunities faced during the development of an academic identity?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework comprised identity formation, academic identity and career journeys. Identity formation was approached from the view that identity is a flexible socially constructed concept (Giddens, 1991), and used Goffman's Presentation of Everyday Self (1959) to consider whether dance academics might hold multiple identities. Career journeys were, therefore, deemed important in recognition of the fact that careers in the current day are not necessarily a linear entity but involve progression, regression and detours along the way which may also affect one's identity (Nesje et al., 2019). Academic identity was explored focusing on themes from previous literature such as socialisation into the academic environment, dress and language (Smith, 2010; Tsaousi, 2019), with consideration given to dance being externally viewed as a body-based subject.

Methodology

The study was interpretivist and used qualitative methods, due to the socially constructed nature of identity (Lawler, 2014). A narrative methodology was adopted which allowed for deeper exploration of the participants views, enabled a focus on language and involved both analysis of the bigger picture in the form of the participants' life as a whole as well as focus on certain experiences within that (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000).

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over seven months and involved two interviews with fifteen dance academics from seven different UK HEIs. Interviews were conducted either in person or online on Teams based on the participant's preference. Prior to the first interview, participants created a timeline of their career journey detailing any significant events and/or people. This was used to design individualised life history interview schedules. The second interview involved further exploration of common themes such as how participants introduce their job role to others, whether their chosen work attire is important to their professional identity and challenges faced within their current roles. Within the second interview participants were asked to reflect upon two incidents they deemed critical to their professional identity as a dance academic; one positive and one negative. All interviews were around one hour long

and were audio-recorded.

Data Analysis

All data were transcribed within two weeks of collection. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was then undertaken. This process involved data familiarisation and gathering initial exploratory comments (Smith et al., 2009). Emergent themes were then drawn from the data and grouped into superordinate themes. This process was conducted individually for each set of interview data prior to cross-comparing across the whole data set. The research study is still in progress.

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