

**G3 Beaumaris 2 Thursday 6 December 09.00 - 09.30**

***Understanding HE environments: a suggested framework for lecturer identity work (0461)***

**Linda Mcghe<sup>1</sup>** *University of Cumbria, United Kingdom*

Abstract

This paper explores HE lecturer identity, and a framework for supporting a consistent methodological approach. This focuses upon the HE lecturer's background, self-practices and relations with authority sources. The contested nature of identity in society has created lengthy debate (Jenkins, 2014). Conceptualising lecturer identity is important because it forms part of the HE environment (Clegg, 2008), and influences teaching-learning interactions (Ashwin, 2009). This study finds identity tied to second level discourses, in line with social constructionism (Burr, 2015). These discourses influence personal beliefs in both limiting or enabling ways, significant for the agentic ability of lecturers and student inclusion.

Ashwin, P. (2009) *Analysing Teaching-Learning Interactions in Higher Education: Accounting for Structure and Agency*, London: Continuum

Burr, V. (2015) Third Edition *Social Constructionism*, London: Routledge

Clegg, S. (2008) 'Academic identities under threat?' *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 34, 3, pp329-345

Jenkins, R. (2014) *Social Identity*, Fourth Edition, London: Routledge

Paper

Understanding HE environments: a suggested framework for lecturer identity work

This paper focuses upon a methodological approach to the study of lecturer identity that could be useful for others engaging in identity work. It explores the use of a framework specifically created for analysing the identity of Higher Education lecturers. It is drawn from recent doctoral research which explored lecturer identity in relation to pedagogical approaches in HE. Lecturer identity is important because it contributes to the students' environment, which can support the persistency of social difference and inequality (Avis and Orr, 2016). Exploring lecturer identity allows us to make sense of the hierarchies that exist in our social world, including the range of HE settings from college-based HE, private providers and traditional universities. This has implications for widening participation and inclusive environments in the UK and globally.

The UK and global HE landscapes have shifted and changed over recent years, and the identity of those working in HE can no longer be considered as stable, constant or singular. The varying identities of 'academics' have been under threat, marginalised, fragmented, and at the mercy of the changing tides of government policy and initiatives (Barnett and Di Napoli, 2008; Clegg, 2008). The stereotype of the academic as an autonomous authority in their discipline has shifted, due to the

output measuring, managerial practices of the neo-liberal environment (Whitchurch, 2013). Other factors, such as the increasing emergence of vocational programmes, which collaborate with work-based environments have changed cultures and notions of HE, as teachers, nurses and other professionals shift from their previous roles to that of HE lecturer (Findlow, 2012).

Exploring identity is itself a subjective process, fraught with contention about its social, fluid and situated nature (Jenkins, 2014). This study identified the need to create a method for studying lecturer identity that is repeatable, structured and goes beyond asking participants to reflect on their identity, because its paradoxical nature means that people cannot easily recognise their own agentic possibilities and limitations.

In developing a methodological approach, Clarke's (2009) teacher identity study was particularly instructive. Clarke showed how using Foucault's thinking around the 'technologies of the self' supported a consistent approach through a 'diagram' that allowed the exploration of particular aspects of the individual, which formed the life and role of the teacher (2009, p191). This social constructionist approach revealed how the individual went through ethical and political struggles as they lived out discourses that they created and reinforced through their own beliefs (Burr, 2015).

This paper explores a reinterpretation of elements of Clarke's diagram, and suggests a new approach for analysing HE lecturer identity. This framework was used for a study on college-based lecturers in the UK; significantly though, this method could be used for any HE setting. The new framework was developed and utilised to support the data collection and analysis for the study, and this involved semi-structured, in-depth interviews with participants. The phenomenological approach had particular reference to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] (Smith et al, 2009). Using a framework to support a IPA may be considered contradictory. However, it provided a useful structure through super-ordinate themes. Here, it is suggested as a helpful tool for similar studies.

The framework puts forward three main themes: i, the background of the lecturer, which includes their parents' education, their own education, career and aspirations. ii, the self-practices within the role, such as teaching, researching, marking, supporting students and administration. iii, the relations with authority sources, such as managers, colleagues and students. Within each of these areas the analysis considers the levels of fulfilment experienced by the lecturer. The themes emerging are considered in relation to the pedagogical implications for the students and the teaching and learning interactions that they experience.

The use of the framework in this study showed how the elements of the role that lecturers found fulfilling were linked to their personal experiences of education. So, in this instance, their own backgrounds showed convoluted journeys to their role, which were rooted in similar backgrounds to their own widening participation students. These participants had enjoyed their journey through HE and were fulfilled by seeing others on similar paths. The relationships with authority sources revealed fulfilment in the autonomous pockets of freedom that they found in their specialist roles, and this motivated them to work above and beyond contracted hours and expectations, particularly in levels of support offered to students.

By presenting this framework as a method for others to use, this paper encourages individuals to reflect on an understanding of identity. In considering our own backgrounds, self-practices and relations with authority, and reflecting on fulfilment, we can make links to personal practice. This

helps us to understand and reflect upon the experiences of students and how this might vary according to their setting. The social constructionist stance of this research found that individuals were at the centre of creating their own discourse and the discourse of their institutions. This has significant implications for individuals, in their beliefs around who they can become and, not least, in the collective beliefs around who their students can become, which is so vital in creating an inclusive environment.

Avis, J. and Orr, K. (2016) 'HE in FE: vocationalism, class and social justice', *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, Vol. 21, 1-2, pp49-65.

Barnett, R. and Di Napoli, R. (Eds) (2008) *Changing identities in higher education: voicing perspectives* Abingdon: Routledge.

Burr, V. (2015) Third Edition *Social Constructionism*, London: Routledge.

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