Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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Professional development, workplace meaning-making and (re-) framing individual identity: a thematic analysis

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

Abstract:

This paper explores the role of professional development for industry professionals entering a new role as university educators.. It considers the extent to which institutional and colleagues' expectations of their role are communicated; whether those responsible for professional development (such as a PGCert) identify particular challenges for experienced professionals as HE novices, and DPs experiences of moving between two roles.

What is the affective impact of socialisation into new communities - institutional, departmental, other ECAs? How do DPs reconcile credibility gained through professional expertise with their role as an HE educator? (How) could professional development help them make better sense of this? DPs expect that of professional development?

Shreeve, A. (2011). 'Being in two camps: conflicting experiences for practice-based academics. *Studies in Continuing Education*, vol 33, 79-91.

Wohrer, V. (2014) To Stay or to Go? Narratives of early stage sociologists about persisting in academia. *Higher Education Policy*. 27,4, 469-487

Paper: Context

The academic workforce and the nature of academic work are constantly changing.   This is a global issue, affecting changing expectations of the nature and purpose of universities and academics (Locke *et al*. 2016; Teichler *et al.* 2013; Wohrer 2014), workforce profiles (Coates & Goedegebuure 2012), staff orientations towards their work (Boyd & Smith 2016) and staff experiences of negotiating multiple professional identities. (Smith 2010)

 In the UK, there is growing scrutiny of what universities offer and their performance against specific metrics such as the National Student Survey, QAA audit, REF, TEF. The value-for-money of degree study and graduate employment prospects are monitored, publicly available and contribute to league tables. Workplace preparation has led to some university curricula integrating skills reflecting what employers might expect of graduates, and appointing teaching staff with expertise in professional practice, the dual professionals who are the focus of this paper. (GuildHE 2018)

 Dual professionals' presence in the academy illustrates Coates & Goedegebuure's assertion (2012:877) that 'The classic conceptualisation of *homo academicus* - the all-round expert in teaching and research across a broad range of disciplines – [is] becoming less relevant to current practices and future needs.' Shreeve (2011), Smith & Boyd (2012) powerfully document the difficulties these staff experience when moving from (or between) their practice and lecturer roles; Morell-Scott (2017) highlights different levels of acceptance of these staff into established HE teams. Earlier literature explores socialisation processes for new lecturers and pressure on newcomers to existing communities to conform (Trowler & Bamber, 2005). Dual professionals' situation may be further complicated both by their identity as practice experts and HE novices and differing expectations of their professional practice and HE leadership roles - many were appointed at Senior Lecturer level, reflecting their expertise and an attempt to match salary.

This paper contributes new knowledge by interrogating the perceptions of programme leaders and dual professionals concerning the role of professional development in enabling dual professionals make sense of their new workplace and navigate possible identity shifts between their HE and professional worlds.

Research project overview

The research is grounded in Lave and Wenger's longstanding conceptual framework of communities of practice. This concept, and the associated theory of socially situated learning, has been extensively applied in a variety of disciplinary and organisational settings, including universities. The sociocultural perspective adopted in this study takes identity as being a process of intertwined trajectories between the different communities with which an individual is involved and seeks to illuminate the affective impact of socialisation experiences.

The principal research questions for this study are

1)   Are there significant differences in approaches to professional development in different kinds of

institutions?

2)   Have leaders of institutional professional development provision identified specific issues for dual professionals?

3)   Is there a gap between what universities say they offer and the lived experiences of dual professionals?

Research participants were drawn from 5 universities with different missions: teaching-intensive (including vocational teaching), research-intensive, teaching and research, specialist conservatoire. Programme leaders for PGCerts or equivalent identified suitable interviewees i.e. those who had completed professional development programmes in the last three years, on the basis that their memories would be reasonably fresh but allowed time for participants to reflect on the impact of professional development.

Semi-structured interview protocols guided interviews, while giving interviewees freedom to express themselves as they wished. Disciplines represented were Digital Industries, Health, Law, Performing Arts, Social Work and Visual Arts.

Interviews were conducted in 2018 with 5 programme leaders and 14 participants (of whom 4 were not currently in professional practice) in their HEIs.

Key findings

All programme leaders identified issues around the clarity of institutional policies concerning professional development, how they are communicated and how participation is enabled – further complicated by 12 of 14 participants being on fractional contracts. Four of the five HEIs identified mismatched expectations i.e. what universities expected of a Senior Lecturer compared to what dual professionals had understood by leading in professional practice. In research-intensive and research and teaching universities, professional practice experience is perceived as less prestigious than a PhD and research record. Given the small number of institutions involved in the research, further work is needed to generalise whether policy variations would be replicated in other similar *types* of HEI, or whether variations are within individual institutions.

Professional development curricula in both research-intensive and research and teaching universities are primarily designed for 'traditional' ECAs and GTAs. Specialist and teaching-intensive universities aim to balance generic provision with scope (in-class and in coursework) to explore workplace applications. All programme leaders identified challenges engaging participants with the unfamiliar discourse of HE research and adopted an incremental approach to its introduction. These challenges were exacerbated for dual professionals by their lack of recent experience of the HE environment, as many had either not studied in HE or had graduated many years ago.

Dual professionals as students on professional development programmes confirmed a lack of clarity about role expectations. In the absence of other guidance, several had sought out informal mentors. Maintaining a professional practice role created ongoing tensions between establishing and maintaining credibility (with students and colleagues) and their own work/life balance, but was so central to their identity they would not consider giving either up. Those not in practice worried their credibility was compromised.

Irrespective of institutional type, professional development created a space in which participants could think creatively and collectively about negotiating evolving identities. Engaging with new perspectives was seen as part of the process; all participants hoped professional development would help link theory to their evolving practice. However, 60% both confirmed programme leaders' view about finding HE literature daunting and expressed surprise at the lack of 'How to...' sessions, finding on-the-job support from immediate disciplinary colleagues. Professional development was seen as key in making sense of their situation, bringing their professional skills into their HE role and reshaping their identity. It is even more productive if it helps strengthen synergies between practice and teaching.

References.

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