

Abstract for a paper in the 'Power and powerlessness in individual identity-making' theme for the Academic Identities Conference

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This paper reports on a longitudinal study of five aspiring academics' development as academic teachers during their first two years in-service. The study investigates identity formation with graduate teaching assistants, a group of teachers who are often marginalised from development opportunities and career structures (Park, 2004). Research into academic identity formation has predominantly identified how social structures influence and constrain the agency of those involved in academic work (McLean, 2012). This reflects the sociological underpinnings of much of the research in this area (Clegg, 2005). This study introduces psychological theory on identity formation to offer a complementary focus on individual agency and personal meaning making. This was investigated through discourse analysis of the writing of five tutors who participated in the LSE Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCertHE) during their first two years in-service. Changing identity positioning over time (Wetherell, 2001) was captured in these tutors' writing using a form of discourse analysis developed in the Discursive Psychological tradition (Edley, 2001).

This form of discourse analysis investigates presentation of self in communication. In the social constructionist tradition, identity is a relational concept, constituted through interaction (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Identity is therefore tied to presentation of self and it involves 'work' (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998) to offer positive presentations of self to others, as well as to ourselves. The analytical categories used to analyse identity 'work' in these texts were subject positioning (Althusser, 1976), ideological dilemmas (Billig, 1997) and interpretative repertoires (Edley, 2001). Positioning is how our use of discursive practices relates us to others. Ideological dilemmas are narratives we tell that position us as certain kinds of teacher or person. Interpretative repertoires are '... basically a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterise and evaluate actions and events from a given position' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 138). This tripartite analytical frame enabled the investigation of 'individual identity-making' in a genuinely longitudinal study, since it allowed the researcher to follow how participants' presentation-of-self shifted during their first two years in-service.

The findings of this study offer insight into academic identity formation. However, this study also contributes to research into the impact that participation on developmental courses, such as the LSE PGCertHE, can have on aspiring faculty as academic teachers. Impact has been assessed in different ways such as pre- and post-testing (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Hanbury, Prosser, & Rickinson, 2008; Postareff, Lindblom-Ylänne, & Nevgi, 2007) and case studies (Butcher & Stoncel, 2012; Ho, Watkins, & Kelly, 2001). These studies have found impacts in terms of increased student focus and self-efficacy (Stes, Min-Leliveld, Gijbels, & Van Petegem, 2010). This discursive study presents complementary findings. However, the longitudinal design offers an account of how the change identified in the larger, survey-based studies can come about. This shifting positioning is presented here in terms of initial 'idealism' becoming 'realism' with experience, but then leading to 'independence' as tutors developed 'pedagogic content knowledge' (Shulman, 1987).

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