

Negotiating teacher identities in an academic workgroup

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While opportunities for the teaching development of academics have grown worldwide, formal award programs (postgraduate and graduate certificate in university teaching and learning) continue to inhabit a vexed social and political space. In many universities, these programs are voluntary (unless tied to the requirements of academic probation); attract relatively small numbers of staff; and are considered time consuming, especially as they are usually completed alongside a full academic workload with little or no time release. The UK experience could be seen as an exception.

Despite these ongoing organizational difficulties, the participant experience of completing a graduate certificate course is relatively well researched. Where there are published studies evaluating the experience, outcomes and impact of award courses, there tends to be a mixed focus (Trigwell, Rodriguez & Han, 2012; Postareff et al, 2007; Ho, Watkins & Kelly, 2001). One evaluation model developed by Guskey (reported in Trigwell, 2013:258) showcases the different levels of existing research: (i) academics' reaction to the development program, (ii) the degree of academics' conceptual change (ie, changes in teaching conceptions, intentions, knowledge of teaching, attitudes, motivations and self-efficacy), (iii) the extent of academics' behavioural change (ie, use of teaching skills, techniques, and strategies), (iv) organizational support and changes; and (v) changes in students' learning. Trigwell (2013) claims that of the five evaluation foci, there has been less focus on organisational support and change suggesting that much of the evaluation effort has centred on changes to individual academics' teaching, and the accumulation of new activity they take on as a result of having established a more scholarly and professional approach to their teaching. There is a paucity of empirical research about how these academics put their learning from a graduate certificate to use in their academic workgroups, and more specifically, the ways in which their new scholarly knowledge and institutional learning, teaching and curriculum know-how, flows through the academic disciplines, departments and work groups they are associated with.

This paper is part of a new international project focused on those academic workgroups, departments and disciplines in which several academics have completed an award course in university teaching and learning, and where there is a history of doing so over time. The project profiles how learning, teaching and curriculum knowledge and know-how from a graduate certificate, circulates within academic workgroups. Alongside interviews with departmental Heads, focus groups with disciplinary colleagues, and textual analysis of relevant work group documents, the study examines these academics (graduate certificate completers) negotiate their new scholarly teaching and learning knowledge and identities within their academic workgroups. Three cognate conceptual frameworks inform the study: first, teaching and learning regimes (Trowler, 2008); second, the critical realism of Archer (2000); and third, socio-material approaches (Fenwick, 2010). These frameworks – together

and separately – remind us that different sorts of material, symbolic, psychic and discursive arrangements lend meaning to how academics’ negotiate their teaching identities.

One aspect of the study involves interviews with academics that have completed a graduate or postgraduate certificate. Following Trowler’s notion of teaching and learning regimes, this paper offers an analysis of those interviews looking in particular at these academics’ desires and attempts to influence learning, teaching and curriculum conversations in their academic workgroups. We ask: what kinds of questions about academic identity do their efforts represent?

References

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