

Where academics oscillate, within the field of higher education

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This paper will offer empirical insights into the academic identities and practices of dual-disciplinary academic health professionals at a research-intensive university in Australia. Through a practice-focused ethnographic (Trowler, 2013a) doctoral study within one traditional (sandstone) urban university, I will illuminate the experiences, impressions and imaginations of participants in response to their teaching and research missions and the ways in which these relate. When depicting and researching disciplines (Trowler, 2013b), a common feature of all participants in this study was that they held two or more professional practice qualifications and hence multi-disciplinary identities. For example a practicing psychologist who is a community pharmacist, or a nurse conducting qualitative research drawing on her earlier identity as a sociologist. Secondly, what is common in 'health' (and other fields) is that teachers and researchers collaborate with other academic health professionals across a range of disciplinary areas in support of the well-versed inter-professional mandate. Thirdly, within a research-intensive environment academics are encouraged to explore complex issues by constructing teaching and research teams that strive to contrast disciplinary ideologies, purposive to gain wider and critical perspectives. Finally, all are practicing within the field of higher education, being foremost identified as an academic and scholar.

Revisiting my academic experiences when undertaking insider educational research (Lewis, 2012), I was interested in how, why and where these academics constructed their everyday, multi-faceted practices. My sense from observations on academic work, in-depth interviewing, and reviewing documents, was that academics were bundling their many identities, vacillating between potentially contrasting university missions, teetering between the rhetoric and realities of university missions, and swaying between their liberal academic and vocationally-based disciplines. In managing these many frontiers, how do they attempt to avoid dualistic ways of thinking, typologies that divide and fragment, and Cartersian binaries that simulate oppositions/dualities? As suggested by Carey (2006) we can have extremes, but they do not need to oppose each other or "be reduced to annoying polarization" (p. 143). For example, Carey likens religion in the Australian context to be like barracking for one team or the other and relates this back to our sporting obsession and its impact on our collective psyche.

In response to these key questions, academics in my study were able to suggest the ways in which they, as Carey suggested, "wish to travel between two campsites?" (2006, p. 141). In fact, they daily traverse many landscapes by being able to "oscillate", rather than living our lives taking sides and setting up oppositions. I argue oscillating is not only an acceptable position in itself, but a survival strategy for

many academics in the Australian context. Participant stories describe the nature of their oscillations in the maintenance of their many selves, alongside attempts to attract and create integrations, interplays and the seeking of synergies. Complementing Careys' oscillation with the theoretical frame of my study, The Theory of Practice (Bourdieu, 1977; Grenfell & James, 1998), I invite conference delegates to reflect on the position of oscillation, within their field of practice in higher education.

499 words

References

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