

Made Clearer By the Dozen: *Expressing an Academic Identity for the First Time*

Louise Wilson, Coventry University, UK

This paper shares the preliminary findings of a study telling the tale of twelve early-career academics who are finding their next 'identity' and in particular their 'academic identity'. The paper turns the lens to focus upon practitioners who have crossed the threshold from professional life to teach in their discipline. In a sense they leave behind a 'professional identity' as they become immersed in a new environment that of Higher Education. These new lecturers morph as they leave an external career on the 'outside' to being part of an academic community. A large community of established academics who themselves understand 'academic identity' in different ways. As these practitioners move to the 'inside' they take on another form but who do they say that they now are? How do they express their new identity? What is their 'academic identity'? Are they even aware of what one is or the need for one?

The paper uses extracts from interviews with these early-career academics, lecturers who have joined Universities in the last five years, to provide insights from their responses to those very questions. Relatively little appears to be known about these newcomers as they transplant themselves in an academic community. Hearing their story gives rise to further discussion around the importance of knowing who one is within a new place. The work of Becher and Trowler (2001), in relation to academic 'tribes', further influences thinking and this paper draws focus and considerations towards those professional practitioners joining the established academic community for the first time.

The notion that these new academics would be conscious, and know how to express their next identity is explored through their narratives. Insights reveal a lack of personal awareness and depth of understanding in articulating an academic identity. It helps to see that it is not easy for people to become aware of what an 'academic identity' is especially when they enter directly from the outside in without having treaded the research path. Nevertheless, academic identity is essential and it is only when inside, and part of the academic tribe, that creating this for oneself becomes important for practitioners to understand. It is only then that the power and capability to develop one forms. Past experiences and new existence can be merged but only really when self-awareness is triggered and the 'blind self' brought to the forefront for continued examination.

The 'blind self' and 'unknown self', as termed by Ingham and Luft (1995) in the Johari Window model, emerges for shared consideration. Findings disclose that the 'unknown self' surfaces to reveal newcomers ability to articulate their own 'academic identity' using a language that is understood by the academic 'tribe'. The paper concludes considering how new academics can overcome a lack of knowledge in this area and gain the ability to articulate their first academic identity as well as being able to express a multiple identity in terms others understand. The paper

closes having shared the stories so far and opening up for further consideration whether multiple professional identities can become one?