An Exploration Into The Influence An Master of Arts in Education Has On Emerging Identities

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Illeris (2014:38) claims that '… identity includes both the self and the personality and something more'.   For Illeris (2013) identity is what is transformed in the learning process. This abstract is about the first phase of data collection in an ongoing doctoral study of the emerging identities of a group of students as they study, part time, towards achievement of a Master of Arts in Education. Of particular interest is how identities develop while students grapple with the complexities of growing masterly academic competence and manage both a professional and personal life. The work of Daniellson & Warwick (2014) and Tobbell & O'Donnell (2013) support the notion that the journey through postgraduate study is a complex one. I would like to invite the audience to help think through the problems I am grappling with as the research unfolds.

An interpretivist paradigm has been found appropriate for this study and has led to a qualitative research methodology. This first phase of data collection has consisted of two focus groups with part time, in-service students from a range of educational employment and at different stages of their studies. Findings are ongoing and emergent but some common themes appear to be presenting in terms of motivators and attitudes to learning

Particularly clear from the data collected so far is that a prime motivator in enrolling to the programme is to do with engagement with their professional role. It might, therefore, be fair to assume that, whilst Education may not be acknowledged as a discipline in its own right, for these participants being a Master in Education means not only master of a subject area ie Education, but also master of their professional role. It seems that professional development takes priority over developing academic competence.

Other notions expressed in the focus group included a 'need to be brainy' and that study presented a 'brick wall' and, taking into account that these students had applied for the course, met the entry requirements and many had already passed several

modules, there seemed to be a hint that some students may hold themselves back from, or perhaps even resist, their academic learning identity. In addition, students often doubt their own ability; they are surprised that personal development is a windfall outcome and relationships with others are important in their progression.

These themes raise a number of questions ie: how do these students perceive an academic identity?; do they perceive an academic identity to be of relevance to themselves?; to what extent do their perceptions have implications for the way they engage in masterly study? how do the tensions experienced between a professional identify and an academic/learning identity play out in the transition to becoming masterly and are there consequences for the pedagogical approaches being employed in the programme? Certainly, the data seems to suggest that whilst students acknowledged that they were studying at something called 'Level 7'; this had not correlated in their perception to an understanding of becoming Masterly for practical, learning purposes.

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