Abstract List

Talks Session 1: Agency & Identity

Storying identities: Using narrative in professional development to represent the voices of early career colleagues

Sarah Moore, University of Sheffield

Identity is understood not as a fixed property, but as part of the lived complexity of a person's project (Clegg, 2008, p.329).

As Clegg (2008) argues, professional identities are dynamic, fluid in nature, and inform the practice of early career academic colleagues. In the shifting higher education landscape, academic identities are becoming increasingly complex, integrating research, teaching, administration, leadership, gender, race, class and personal lives among others (Clegg, 2008; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). Nonetheless, while early career researchers are influenced by socio-cultural pressures, it is simplistic and dehumanising to ignore the potential for agency within these constraints (Archer, 2000). Researcher developers therefore need to consider how they can support early career colleagues to cultivate professional identities and identify spaces for agency. However, there have been critiques of professional development activity as a form of socialisation, which focuses on shaping participants to 'become' a particular mould of being, rather than valuing the skills, knowledges and experiences they bring with them (Todd, 2001). There is also a risk that the support we provide as researcher developers comes solely from our worldview, rather than representing and valuing the diverse backgrounds, experiences and voices of early career colleagues.

This proposal draws on an empirical project for my EdD research to demonstrate how fictional narrative approaches can offer a richer understanding of the diverse range of early career identities and experiences. While my research focuses on Graduate Teaching Assistants, the messages I present around the value of storying as a methodology and the findings around the complexity of their liminal identities can be applied to broader researcher development. In this paper I discuss how the participatory storying methods I used can be used in researcher development activity to foreground a range of different voices and ensure representation.

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Agency In Careers Guidance

Donald Lush, King's College London

Professional identity, choice and planning are the currency of careers guidance. Our practice as developers of research staff and guidance workers makes assumptions about them that philosophy and neurophilosophy question. This presentation will look critically at free will, identity, decision making and causation from a metaphysical perspective. It will examine the idea of agency in depth and show that the idea of an agent possessing free will, making informed, rational career choices leading to actions that entail predictable results is an illusion. The notion that people can act rationally against their own interests will be examined in depth and the importance of time in decision making will be examined. The presentation will show how the sense all humans have of a coherent subjective reality unfolding in front of them is a construction and will show how this is created. Having removed some of the foundations of guidance, advice and support it will take stock of what is left and how it is that our activities have self-evident value and are still well worth engaging in but with a more nuanced and contextualised sense of our practice. It will conclude that moral philosophy offers a possible way forward and that all career decisions and actions are essentially moral ones.

References

Nick Chater – The Mind Is Flat

Daniel Dennett – Consciousness Explained

David Hume – A Treatise of Human Nature

Derek Parfitt – Reasons and Persons

Arthur Schopenhauer – The World as Will and Representation

Desired in theory, troubling in practice: The identity development and becoming of the PhD student

Hugh Kilmister, Birkbeck University of London

Over the past twenty years various conceptualisations have been used to examine the PhD student experience including socialisation and how an emphasis on research skills development reflects a general neoliberal approach in higher education. Nevertheless Leonard et al (2006), Peterson (2007) and McAlpine et al (2012) claim that the field of PhD study remains under-theorised and that much of the research that has been undertaken lacks a guiding theoretical framework. More recently McAlpine et al (2014), Keefer (2015) and Mantai (2017) argue the experience can be conceptualised as a process of identity development and these studies provide the background to my research that looks to supplement our developing knowledge. My research applies the concept of becoming to argue that PhD student identity development is never stable and is continuously emergent and the concepts of assemblage and connected lines (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) are used to analyse and take account of the adaptations and resistances that constitute the nature of research student identity. Drawing on the interview data and photo-elicitation of my current PhD study, my presentation will discuss how for my participants their identity development is an on-going process influenced by their professional identities, expectations of PhD study and perceptions of the future.

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How do doctoral students exercise agency to make the most of their doctorate and complete on time?

Shane Dowle, University of Surrey

The doctorate in the United Kingdom is changing due to an intensification of policy interventions during the last three decades. These interventions have dislocated the PhD from its purely knowledge-based origins and have pushed it toward providing a broader training that produces graduates who are expected to be entrepreneurial leaders (Balaban, 2016) capable not only of producing knowledge but being a competent user of knowledge, with the capacity to translate it into a commercially or socially viable enterprise (Hancock & Walsh, 2014). The economic and social benefits of doctorates have encouraged policies that restrict the timescales for completion, seeking to ensure the efficient supply of highly skilled graduates for the knowledge-based economy.

Consequently, there is now additional pressure on doctoral students who are asked not only to become adept at the knowledge-production process, but to take advantage of the myriad of value-adding opportunities that will leave them well-prepared for a variety of career trajectories; all within a constrained timescale.

In the context of a dynamic and changing doctoral landscape, this presentation asks: how do doctoral students exercise agency to make the most of their doctoral experience and still complete on time?

This presentation draws on interviews [n=28] with students, supervisors and administrators in a Russell Group university and two validation workshops [participant n=42] with cross-institutional representation. Four modes of agency are identified from the data, as follows:

- Reflexive agency
- Personal efficacy-oriented agency
- Relational agency
- Passive agency

Each mode of agency will be elaborated in the presentation to illuminate the strategies and tactics that doctoral students employ to manage the multiple components of the doctoral experience and emerge as career-ready, independent researchers. The insight provided will help to inform how learning opportunities and support structures within the doctoral experience might be optimised.

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Fashioning Minds: A discussion on the role of dress in academia

Emma Davenport, London Metropolitan University

Drawing upon the theme of being and becoming an 'academic', there has been very little research and critical discussion on the role of dress in the lived experiences of academics. Yet, the practice of dressing, whether it be considered fashionable or not, is a rich and textured process where choices about garments, accessories and adornment interact with the everyday material world, particularly that which relates to our daily occupational lives, in order to communicate and imagine our professional practices and philosophies at an individual, social and institutional level. As Barnard (2002) suggests, clothes are never merely representational or functional but complex locales for a range of intentions, affiliations, ideals, subversions and desires. Furthermore, the academic body is rarely encountered unclothed but, rather, as a dressed entity located in time and space, where social, historical and cultural relations are ascribed to both getting dressed and being dressed.

And yet, the clothed academic body is often invisible, both to itself and others, whether colleagues, managers or students. Reasons for the lack of enquiry into the 'sartorial consciousness' (Entwistle, 2000) of academics include intellectual concerns about fashion as superficial and consumer driven, increasing emphasis on student centered learning and continued support for a transmission model of knowledge transfer within higher education. With this in mind, my paper will make a case for using dress, in particular the 'wardrobe approach' (Tseelon, 2010), and oral history (Slater, 2014) as a mode of enquiry into the lived and living experiences of academics that allows the shared subjectivities of professional identity to come centre stage for a moment. Finally, my paper suggests that by broadening our understanding of academic dress, it might be possible to encourage more diverse academic representation.

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Mid-Career Academic Women: the role of prestige in developing academic careers

Kelly Coate, University of Sussex

Tania St Croix, King's College London

Prestige plays a very particular role in the development of academic careers, and men and women have different experiences of accessing the indicators of esteem that enable career progression (Coate and Kandiko Howson 2016). Drawing on 30 semi-structured, concept map-mediated interviews, the project we will present in this paper investigated the gendered nature of the prestige economy in academia and subsequently how mid-career academic women strategise their career development, and what barriers they perceive. Concept maps were used to facilitate dialogue about career plans and provided an artefact from the interviewee's own perspective. In terms of prestige, the interviews indicated that women generally feel that men access indicators of esteem more easily. Many women also had ambivalent feelings about gaining recognition through prestige: they understood the importance of status and knew the 'rules of the game', but were critical of these rules and sometimes reluctant to overtly pursue prestige. The findings are valuable for understanding how women's slow access to the highest levels of higher education institutions is shaped by the value that organisations place on individual status.

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Talks Session 2: Effective Professional Development

Students Vote With Their Attendance: Making Digital Postgraduate Professional Development Meaningful to Students & the University

E Alana James, DoctoralNet Ltd

Lifelong learning opportunities have moved to the internet, with its enhanced potential for personalised service and offerings, yet the outcome of those, attempts have not been widely studied. Postgraduate Deans are hampered by technology designed and aimed at undergraduate student issues. This has led to almost non-existent adoption across universities of any but the most basic digital professional development for postgraduates. This longitudinal study addresses these gaps by reporting the progress of a digital professional development platform built to cover ten topical areas: academic writing, critical thinking, argumentation, research design, thesis design, job prep, graduation prep, getting published, academic hacks & tools, and wellness. Fourteen university platforms currently serving 45K students contribute to the study.

Built on the hypothesis that adults attend professional development when they are clear about how it fits their needs; this study is theoretically grounded in the socialisation research of Gardner (2009) who outlined five variables, coalescing 50 years of postgraduate socialisation research. These five frustrations have proven to be key elements in PhD disengagement. They are: ambiguity, work-life balance, independence, skill development and support.

Using mixed methodology in an action learning paradigm, this report of current findings draws primarily on three data sources: a postgraduate student survey (n=400) into the role of the five frustrations in their experience, adoption data of the various digital tools on their university platforms powered by DoctoralNet (n= 6,530). Qualitative responses from Deans comment on the current stage of the development of these tools and areas needed to be developed

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Beyond carrots and sticks: Building a culture of researcher development through intrinsic motivation

Kate Jones, Vitae

Our ongoing participatory action research explores factors contributing to researcher engagement in (or disengagement from) their professional development. The aim is to inform effective engagement strategies and is prompted by mounting evidence (including anecdotally) suggesting that a significant proportion of researchers intend to but do not engage with professional development [1].

Identity: Researchers can be deeply connected to their academic identity, resulting in a difficult transition beyond academia [2], though the majority will face this at some point [3].

Choice: Hence, universities provide an array of development opportunities, but uptake can be low, no-shows high, and result in overwhelmed researchers making a false choice between 'academic' and 'non-academic' development, or choosing instead to prioritise their research outputs [4].

Agency: Therefore, instead of adding to the pressure or becoming another 'tick-box exercise', how can researcher developers foster intrinsic motivations for engagement in development? Can we build an institutional climate that enables researcher developers as change agents and supports researchers to have agency in their careers?

The literature examining professional development in other sectors suggests that interest in and uptake of development is linked to lack of awareness of need and availability [5], perceived impact on career progression [6], dissatisfaction with available development opportunities [7] and issues of time and funding [8]. Vitae's research draws together cross-sector evidence to answer questions including: why some researchers sign up for sessions at their institution that they then don't attend, what universities are currently doing about this problem, and whether these measures are successful.

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TIPS for an effective and engaging career development programme for researchers

Sarah Blackford, Lancaster University

What makes for an effective and engaging career development programme? What elements should be included which result in positive outcomes, such as enhanced employability, increased confidence and greater recognition? What determines whether or not the programme attracts the attention and attendance of PhD students and researchers?

Drawing on published research, as well as findings from my own research (Blackford, 2011), I will present the TIPS Model to capture what appear to be the key elements of an effective and engaging career development programme. At its centre is the training, the 'input', namely professional and personal career development activities together with work and associated real-life experiences (Patton and McMahon, 2006; Jones and Warnock, 2015; Candy et al, 2019). 'Output' is identified as skills development and recognition, enhanced employability, increased confidence and personal growth (Wall and Welsch, 2013). Connected to 'input' are the four elements of the TIPS Model: 'Type and Timing'(T), 'Identity and Individuality' (I), 'Peers and Patronage' (P) and 'Sustainability and Support' (S). Whilst acknowledging that no one-size fits all, key factors such as the work environment and culture (Bosely et al, 2003; Shacham and Od-Cohen, 2009; Lee, 2012; Duke and Denicolo, 2017; Way et al, 2019), diversity and personal motivation (Su et al, 2015; Hall, 2004), as well as delivery formats and connectivity (Saunders, 2009; Pritchard et al, 2010; Blackford, 2018) and brought together into this 'catch-all' TIPS Model. During my talk I will briefly explain these elements more explicitly, referencing the relevant research and drawing on examples, after which I will invite discussion amongst the delegates. By the end of this interactive talk, I anticipate we will have drawn together experiences and real-life examples, which will add evidence to the current knowledge base.

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Walking together with the researching academic: accompanying researchers along the career trajectory

Erika Corradini, University of Southampton

Julie Reeves, University of Southampton

This presentation reflects on the impact of a pilot development programme for mid-career academic professionals commissioned by the PVC Research at a research intensive university. The pilot is aimed at staff newly promoted to Senior Lecturer roles and who have secured a mixed-portfolio (education and research) position but who may need help transitioning into this more demanding role. The vision for this programme was to institutionalise practices which enhance the quality of research. We achieve this, as developers, by accompanying researchers along a journey of professional development. The pilot experiments with an innovative, flexible approach which challenges assumptions rather than responding/reacting to perceived needs with a one-size-fits all approach – i.e. researcher centred not developer-led.

A key aim is to move away from traditional approaches towards professional development (i.e. those often offering suites of courses or generalised training in key areas) by focussing on the researcher component of a mixed-portfolio career pathway in a responsive way (Macfarlane, 2018 and Visser-Wijnveen et al., 2009). The concept underpinning this programme is one of guiding researchers to personalise their development. By making time and drawing participants in through a variety of channels, we create spaces in which staff can generate strategies and be productive. Thus addressing the pressures that often lead to a lack of engagement with traditional training (Robertson and Bond, 2001). We present an insight into the design and pedagogy/androgogy informing the programme (Trowler, Wareham, 2008), making preliminary considerations as to whether our approach has the potential to test the boundaries of researcher development and instigate change in both the practice and culture of development.

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How do we successfully champion an 'integrated academic practice' model through the development of postgraduate/early career researchers?

Ruth Windscheffel, City, University of London

More postgraduate/early career researchers are being employed by HEIs to teach (Park and Ramos, 2002; Muzaka, 2009) and are expected to achieve professional recognition against frameworks such as the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Learning in HE [UKSPF] (HEA, 2011). Simultaneously, they are facing heightened research pressures: to complete their research degrees quickly, publish earlier and in high-rank journals, generate 'impact' and be effective 'digital scholars' (Hakala, 2009; Gouseti, 2017; Prasad, 2013). The UKPSF presents this 'integrated approach to academic practice' as the model expected for established academics (pp. 5, 6, 7). Its definition goes beyond workload, however; it expects the outcomes of subject and pedagogic research/scholarship to be actively incorporated into teaching and learning. Descriptor 1 of the UKPSF (linked with Associate Fellowship of the HEA) is the category against which the majority of postgraduate/early career researchers who teach seek recognition. D1 does not require explicit evidence of an 'integrated approach ', but still anticipates those claiming against it will be able to show how 'subject and pedagogic research and/or scholarship' (p. 4) impact their teaching.

Drawing on both professional educational development experience and also the outcomes of a small-scale 'insider' research study undertaken in a UK 'commuter' university in London in 2019, which used a case-study approach and narrative interviewing to explore participants' experiences of the 'research-teaching nexus' (Healey et al, 2007), this contribution will discuss some of the challenges postgraduate/early career researchers face in developing an integrated approach. These challenges include the way in which this model operates as part of a 'hidden curriculum' (Jackson, 1968) for this group (i.e. they may not know they need to develop it until they have to apply to gain professional recognition formally); a dearth of integrated forms of training; cultural conflicts over the relative 'value' of research and teaching in their disciplinary communities (Becher and Trowler, 2001) and how these are influenced by research-supervision practice; workload and precarity issues; confusion over academic 'identity', etc. Given these structural expectations and challenges, it is vital that we explore how this 'integrated approach' can be supported by well-thought-out developmental programmes which acknowledge and respond to the realities of contemporary academic careers, particularly, it is argued, by considering the potential offered by reconfiguring this as a type of interdisciplinary endeavour (Cleaver et al, 2018)

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Enhancing researcher wellbeing through support groups

Fryni Panayidou, Queen Mary University of London

Benjamin Priest, Queen Mary University of London

Following studies on the prevalence of mental health issues within the PGR population (Levecque et al 2017), we ran a weekly PhD Support Group over eight weeks that aimed to provide a safe, confidential space where PGRs could support each other with personal, emotional and relationship issues that obstruct academic progress and agency.

Three support groups ran in 2018-19 with a maximum of twelve participants each. The groups were facilitated by the joint expertise of a Counsellor and a Researcher Development Adviser.

Participants completed a survey at the start and at the end of each group. The survey included questions from PRES 2017 on personal outlook and confidence in timely completion and measured the wellbeing of participants on the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS).

Following the intervention, participants showed a significant increase in:

a) confidence in completing their degree in the expected timescale (start: 63%, end: 91%, sector benchmark: 82%);

b) satisfaction with work-life balance (start: 37%, end: 59%, sector benchmark: 61%);

c) having someone they could talk to about day-to-day problems (start: 50%, end: 86%, sector benchmark: 69%).

Group participants' average WEMWBS scores increased by over 5 points by the end of the group (start: 42.50, end: 47.86) and moved above the 41-45 scoring bracket, which is correlated with high risk of psychological distress.

Qualitative participant feedback showed that PGRs felt less isolated through hearing from peers experiencing similar problems. Participants gave strong support for continuing this initiative and offering more than eight sessions to future groups.

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