Teaching-only Academics in Research Intensive Universities:

A Case of Spoiled Identity?

HEA STEM Annual Learning and Teaching Conference 2014

Abel Nyamapfene
Objectives of this Study

• To investigate and document how teaching-only academics in research intensive universities in England make sense of their academic status in comparison to that of research-active academics:
  
  – How do teaching-only academics perceive their role in an increasingly compartmentalised academic profession?
  
  – To what extent does the teaching-only academic identity conform with the academic identity?
  
  – To what extent does the teaching-only role meet their career aspirations?
  
  – To what extent is the teaching-research nexus impacting on teaching-only academics’ shared identity as academics within research intensive universities?
Working Definition for Research – Intensive University

• A research-intensive university as one that is:
  – involved in pure and applied research, delivers research-led teaching, has a breadth of academic disciplines,
  – has a high proportion of postgraduate research programmes,
  – has a high level of external income and has an international perspective.

(Taylor (2006))

• In general, the pre-1992 universities meet Taylor’s characterisation of a research-intensive university.
“In the past, rewards in higher education – particularly promotion – have been linked much more closely to research than to teaching. Indeed, teaching has been seen by some as an extra source of income to support the main business of research, rather than recognised as a valuable and high-status career in its own right. This is a situation that cannot continue. Institutions must properly reward their best teaching staff; and all those who teach must take their task seriously.” (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2003:51)
Background: Increased Demands for “Better” Teaching

Result:

• Evaluation and control of academic programmes shifting from the academics into the public domain.
Response to External Scrutiny - Managerialism

• Increased shift in university administration from collegial systems to managerially oriented systems
  – (Dearlove, 2002; Henkel, 1997).

• Managerialism characteristics include:
  – employee performance monitoring,
  – attainment performance targets,
  – public auditing of quality,
  – imposition of external accountability e.g. league tables
  – Deem and Brehony (2005)

• The academic is now subject to performativity, whereby the productivity of an individual or an organisation is assessed against defined measures and targets
  – (Ball, 2008:50).
The RAE/REF and its Impact

The research assessment exercise (RAE), now called the Research Excellence Framework (REF) is:

- an academic peer research quality assessment
- used to determine the distribution of research funding amongst higher education institutions.

A market for research –active academics has ensued (Harley, 2002).

- Research is now much more highly esteemed than teaching.
- The disparity between teaching and research is increasingly being formalised, with academics now being recruited to research and teaching roles, or to teaching-only roles (AUT), 2005).
The concept of teacher identity was used to investigate the changing dynamics of the relationship between teaching-only academics and the research intensive university.

Teacher identity is “a unique embodiment of each teacher’s stories to live by, stories shaped by knowledge composed on landscapes past and present in which a teacher lives and works”. Clandinin (2006)

A constructivist approach to identity was assumed, namely that identity is not static, but is formed and constantly adapted “through experiences of, and identification with, certain events, rituals, social institutions and symbols of culture(s) in which an individual was raised and lives” (Lillie, 1998).
Study Methodology

- This was a case study on the teaching-only academics, including myself, within the Science and Engineering College of a Russell Group research intensive university.

- The study was primarily narrative enquiry and included documenting and analysing:
  - how we make sense of our lives as teaching fellows within the College
  - what we identify as the important issues within our academic careers
  - our interactions with each other and with the rest of the academic community,
  - our perceptions of the current academic environment in so far as they impact upon our own careers
  - the role that personal agency plays in shaping our individual academic career trajectories
## The Study Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anon. Id</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Specialism</th>
<th>Academic Qualification</th>
<th>Previous Job Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOA1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45 - 50</td>
<td>Computing &amp; Engineering</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Engineering Practice, University teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOA2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Postdoctoral Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOA3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>High School Teaching, Teacher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOA4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Computing</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Graduate teaching assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOA5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Postdoctoral Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOA6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Postdoctoral Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOA7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>55-60</td>
<td>Learning Technology</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>FE Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOA8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Postdoctoral Research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching-only Academics in Research Intensive Universities:

An Emergent Profession or a Peripheral Academic Identity?

A Case Study of Teaching-only Academic in a Science and Engineering College at a Russell Group Research Intensive University

1. Study Objectives
2. Research Context
3. Methodology
4. Results and Conclusion
Entry into the Job Role

• For all it was a job role that came along when they needed a job.
• Nevertheless all express a love for teaching
• Reasons for taking the job included:
  – family relocation (TOA3 and TOA7 )
  – End of research contracts in other universities (TOA2, TOA5, TOA6 & TOA8)
  – Completion of PhD studies (TOA1 and TOA4)

• Typical Comments:
  – “I entered this role because this was the only academic position I managed to secure. However, I am passionate about teaching and would like to see the teaching of mathematics improve” – TOA2
Importance of Discipline-Specific Research

• For PhD holders, discipline-specific research features prominently on website profiles

• General disappointment that role leaves too little time for research
  – Concurs with Henkel (2005), who notes that amongst academics in the sciences, research is an important component of academic identity

• Typical supporting comments:
  – “I love my research ... my personal definition of an academic is someone who is research-active who uses their research to inform their teaching.” – TOA4

  – “I embarked on a PhD because I wanted to do research. I miss research, I miss the opportunity to do research, I don’t want to lose expertise in my research area, another one or two years will make me lose touch.” – TOA8
Engagement with Learning and Teaching Research

• Increasing interest in learning and teaching research as evidenced by:
  – Mention in website profiles
  – Active engagement in funded learning and teaching research.
  – General view that funded learning & teaching research is critical to the acceptance of teaching-only academics as bona fide academics.

• Representative comment:
  – “I entered this role because this was the only academic position I managed to secure. However, I am passionate about teaching and would like to see the teaching of mathematics improve” - TOA2

• Only TOA3, from a high school teaching background, remains uninterested in learning and teaching research:
  – “I am a teacher. That is what I was employed to do, and that is what I do – teach.”
The Teaching-only role as a full-time career choice:

• Generally viewed as a pathway to the traditional research and teaching role (Exceptions – TOA1, TOA2, TOA7).

• Hence Engagement with discipline-specific research is critical.
  – Attending discipline-based research seminars,
  – Conference attendance and journal paper publication
  – submitting research grant proposals

• TOA4 has secured a two-year 50% time-sharing secondment to another college within the university to work as a research associate.
  – This is despite the fact that she has recently been promoted to a senior lecturer role.
Self -perception of Teaching-Only Role

• Perceive role to be held in low esteem within the institution (Skelton, 2012)
  – “I don’t want to be pigeon-holed as a teaching-only academic.” - TOA4 on her reasons to apply for a research post in another College.

  – “We are lecturers, but not the real thing, hence the label ‘education and scholarship’” - TOA1 commenting on the official university name for role - lecturer – education and scholarship.
Contested Definition of the Term Academic

• Allocation of office space:
  – Research and teaching academics have individual offices whilst teaching-only academics have shared desks in an open-plan office.

• The College definition of the term “academic”:
  – An “academic” as a member of the research and teaching job family.
  – Teaching-only academics are officially classified as belonging to the “teaching fellow” family.

• Destination for failed research and teaching academics:
  – The teaching fellow job family is increasingly being mentioned within the College as a potential destination for research and teaching academics who consistently fail to meet their research targets
Conclusions – The Present status of the Teaching-only Academic Role

• There is a definite role for teaching-only academics in research intensive universities given the increasing performativity demands from the government and the general public

• However the teaching-only academic role is perceived as a lower status academic role

• The institution is actively promoting the differentiation of the higher status research and teaching role from the lower status teaching –only role

• Even teaching-only academics accept that the role has a “spoiled identity” status – i.e. the wrong sort of identity to have within a social setting (Goffman, 1963)
Finally – Whither Goes the Teaching-only Academic Role?

• The research suggests that the teaching-only role currently has a low status peripheral identity.

• However, academic institutions now face a changed external environment (increased public scrutiny, changes in funding regimes, compliance with increased neo-liberal socio-economic performance targets).

• Hence job roles within academic institutions are changing correspondingly (Whitchurch, 2008)

• The academic institution is therefore a dynamic, complex environment in which values, norms and working relationships are currently being redefined.

• Consequently a more sophisticated analytic framework such as Bourdieu’s analytic framework or Complexity theory is required to shed light on the internal dynamics within academic institutions.
The End

Question Time