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The Impact of Professional Learning on the Teaching Identities of Higher Education Lecturers

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Abstract

Higher Education is currently undergoing some of the most profound changes in its history. Against a backdrop of increasing marketization, rising levels of student debt and far greater fully online offerings, the higher education lecturer is grappling with new ways of working and high expectations of teaching quality. This 3 year qualitative study based in The Open University UK investigates the ways in which HE distance learning lecturers are approaching professional development and learning, identifying what type of learning may be most effective in creating and sustaining an online teaching identity. The study also examines ways in which resistance discourse is shaping these identities and practices revealing emerging re-conceptualisations of what it means to be an effective and well-motivated distance learning lecturer. The investigation uses a framework for identity analysis which analyses professional identity via the expression of hegemonies, phenomenological, narrative articulations of identity, and a post-modern, constructivist view of identity which is shaped by social interactions and communities of practice. It highlights the importance of personal agency in identity formation. The results revealed a number of insights into the ways in which a combination of resistance discourse, professional learning and reflections from student interactions are shaping new understandings of professional knowledge in this context.

Background

Changes within the global higher education sector due to social, educational and economic for some time now have been driving the need for ever greater online engagement. Currently some 2,800 HE courses are offered online in the UK alone, and this number looks set to rise; implying a greater need than ever for HE teaching staff to be able to work comfortably and confidently in the online environment. On an international scale, an increasing number of post-secondary colleges are also including e-learning as an integral part of their offering, using social networking tools, online platforms and the wider internet to enhance the student experience (Ferguson & Tryjankowski, 2009). Working within fully online environments implies the need for different types of pedagogies, and differing strategies to enhance both the student experience and lecturers' own sense of self salience or feeling of efficiency, self-confidence and motivation (Baxter, 2011b; Baxter 2012; Hanson, 2009; SWRB, 2011). The HEFCE strategic plan 2006-11 states that students '*expect their experience of HE to deepen their personal and professional development, extend their subject knowledge and prepare them for employment and lifelong learning*' (HEFCE 2009:17). Recent studies of UK online learning, (White, Warren, Faughnana, & Manton, 2010) highlight the need for staff to have support in assessing how to use and whether to use non institutional tools e.g. Facebook, cloud-based applications and other social networking applications, in order for them to optimise the student learning and social experience whilst also being aware of the caveats and challenges of use of such technology. But what type of professional learning is most effective increasing population of online teaching staff with the confidence, skills and attributes to be able to give students the type of learning experience that will equip them for life in an increasingly competitive world? What type of development will equip them with the confidence and skill to pedagogically manipulate their technological environment rather than feeling victims of a system in which technological determinism stifles notions of creativity and feelings of self-salience (Turkle, 1993; Baxter, 2004; Baxter, 2010)? This study explores both aspects from the lecturers' point of view and concludes with recommendations for future professional learning.

Introduction

For some time now educational developers in both distance learning institutions and campus based universities have been investigating ways in which online lecturers may acquire greater confidence in not only using online tools, but also the ways in which they can pedagogically innovate within their online environments (Baxter, 2010; Hanson, 2009; Turkle, 1993). A key part of this is their perception of whether they feel that they are acting as effective teachers: able to facilitate the learning of their students using creative and exploratory teaching techniques that integrate teaching values are effectively integrated within online pedagogies (Macfarlane, 2004). An important element of this is their ability to be able to project

their personal teaching persona in a fully online environment, effectively replacing face to face teaching attributes such as body language, para- linguistic cues and other communicative attributes that are considered to be second nature by most teachers working in a face to face environment (Day, 2004; Freedman & S. Holmes, 2003; Heron, 1999). In addition other tools considered to be vital elements of classroom engagement such as such as the use of humour as a teaching tool, also need to be somehow woven into the online teaching role (Aragon, 2003) so that, as far as possible, online teaching is a satisfying and rewarding activity for both teachers and students. The wider implications of adoption of a salient online teaching identity are profound in terms of student retention, progression and success. Research to date has shown that the lecturer plays a key role in student success and that psychological factors influencing withdrawal from HE courses are most effective when mediated and effectively addressed by the lecturer (Baxter, 2011d; CLG, 2010; Tinto, 2007)

A strong and effective professional identity has been recognised across the public sector for some time now as being key to effective practice: important to the professional's sense of psychological wellbeing and motivation to succeed in their chosen field (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Menter, 2010; Moss, 1988). But in recent years, the professional identity of teachers across the public sector has been called into question with challenges not only to what is taught, but the way in which learning is delivered (Macfarlane, 2010, 2011; Woods & Jeffrey, 2002) , provoking a good deal of research into what these changes mean for professional identities and autonomy, as Kaz articulates:

"Few professionals talk as much about being professionals as those whose professional stature is in doubt." (Kaz in Etzioni,1969:33).

Researchers have attributed this teaching identity crisis to a number of factors: the accretion of a number of target driven managerialist policies which look to shape and form professional identities in order to make them increasingly responsive to political, economic and social targets (Avis, 2003; Baxter, 2011c); Macfarlane, 2011; Whitchurch, 2008):the need for HE teachers to work in different ways , separating out functions at one time performed by a single individual into myriad roles: learning instructors, learning designers and other para-professional roles associated with teaching (Baxter, 2011c; Macfarlane, 2011). Macfarlane sees this parsing of traditional academic functions as a weakening of core academic roles, leading to increasing levels of institutional isomorphism and concomitant erosion of academic autonomy (Macfarlane, 2011). But a body of research is beginning to identify something that Whitchurch terms, '*the third space*'. (Whitchurch, 2006), in which new professional identities are formed from the amalgamation of existing values and manipulation of new discourses (see also Harrison, Clarke, Reeve, & Edwards, 2003). This paper examines expressions of resistance discourse in the formation of online teaching identities and what this implies for future professional learning

Context and methodology

The Open University (OU) has some 7,000 part time Associate Lecturing staff, teaching on over 500 courses using a blend of media. Some 62 % of courses offered are web focussed using a number of differing tools to deliver learning. Some courses have been using e-technology for some time while others are more recently adopting new technologies, rendering it an appropriate context for a case study of this nature (Cohen, Manion, Morrison & Morrison, 2007). Insights gained within an institution that has been working with online pedagogies for some time offer potential in terms of examining the perspective of not only those that Kotter defines as 'early adopters': those who embrace change first within an organisation, but also lecturers who have recently moved from a blended teaching role to fully online engagement (Kotter, 1995). Lecturers who have had time to reflect on development they feel to have been helpful in developing online teaching. Associate Lecturers are not a homogenous group, but emanate from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some are employed full time in other universities and may teach only a few hours per week for the university, others work virtually full-time, combining a number of fractional contracts and working over a variety of programmes and modules. Some work full or part-time as professionals within other contexts, some have professional and administrative roles within either The Open University or other organisations, making them privy to different understandings and priorities in terms of policy decisions and imperatives, practices, pedagogies and procedures.

Sampling challenges raised by this diversity were resolved via a pilot study in which the Associate Lecturers website was used to engage a small sample of participants from across the university (Moustakas, 1994). The pilot revealed that in terms of the sample, taking respondents from across the whole university would mean that those that self-select were very likely to be the early adopters outlined earlier. Due to the fact that for many early adopters online technologies are a curriculum and research area I decided to confine the study to a single faculty which was moving from blended learning (face to face and online), to full online engagement. This also aligned with recommendations within phenomenological research methodology, which advocate a 'criterion sample': 'finding individuals who have experienced the phenomenon' (Althusser, 2008:120). Twelve respondents from The Faculty of Education and Language Studies were chosen. These individuals were selected due to the fact that although they all had some exposure to online teaching, they were all in process of moving into a more fully online teaching context. The respondents emanated from a variety of backgrounds: some taught at campus based institutions, some worked in other professional fields and some combined a number of Associate Lecturer contracts and were teaching Open University modules for a substantial part of their working week. All had experienced the

following types of online interaction: forum teaching, email, teaching via synchronous media (for example Elluminate, Lyceum, Blackboard, WebCT, Skype®), e-submission and marking of student work. Some had experienced other elements of online interaction such as quizzes, computer generated marking systems, blogs, wikis and external social media (for example Facebook). Some had been involved in peer observation of online teaching although their exposure in this context tended to be fairly limited. Their exposure to formal staff development in the context of their online teaching varied: some had experienced e-technologies for staff development and some had attended conferences on the subject of e-pedagogies and learning. Some had attended face to face events both within and outside of the university. The pilot project revealed that the way that questions were phrased was important so as not to limit participants' understandings and interpretations of what development meant to them in this context, aiming to encourage a far wider and more lateral view of what type of learning had impacted upon their practice and professional identity, and provoking them to reflect on why this may have been so.

Each individual was interviewed for 1.5 hours each, twice within a six month time period. This was in order to capture the ways in which practices and pedagogies were developing, whilst also ensuring participants were afforded the opportunity to reflect upon their practices (Aragon, 2003; Cohen, et al., 2007). The interviews were transcribed and analysed according to the research questions and the framework for professional identity. Respondents were then given the opportunity to revise or add to their transcripts, in order that they accurately reflected their stories (McLaren, 1997). This approach is not without caveats, and the study fully acknowledges that no differentiation was made between gender or level of engagement or in terms of hours spent teaching with the Open University. Nor was any comparison attempted between those teaching with other Universities, and those teaching purely for the OU.

Analysis

In order to identify the point at which individual identities change it was first necessary to define a framework for professional identity analysis. The idea of professional identity is complex and has been explored in many ways drawing upon literature from across the areas of philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and political theory (De Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006; Langridge, 2007; Wetherell & Mohanty, 2009). The major psychological theories of the 20th century have provided the basis for many of the understandings around identity development and concomitantly, professional identity development; engendering a complex mix of biological and psychological attributes that go to make up understandings of identities (Bandura, 1977; Erikson, 1975; Piaget, 1953). Within the last 15 years these theories have been criticised by both postmodernists such as Foucault, Lyotard and Ricoeur (Foucault, 1980; Lyotard, 1984; Ricoeur, 1984), and also by feminist researchers (Gilligan, 1982a; Gorelick, 1991; Lloyd, 2005; McLaren, 1997; Rose, 1982) who claim these theories to be too individualist, too positivist and founded on a Universalist view that is predominantly based upon the ethnocentric theories of white, middle class men (Kinman, 2001; Lloyd, 2005; Rose, 1982; Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, Eteläpelto, Rasku-Puttonen & Littleton, 2008). The feminist view of identity formation and research is supported by work founded upon the principles of Third Wave Feminism which privileges: the anecdotal, subjective and story-telling aspects of identity articulation via discourse, denying the idea that identity formation can be analysed according to a set of pre-ordained 'truths'. It is supported by Lloyd's, view of feminist philosophical orientation in prioritizing the, 'phenomenological, contextual and relativistic viewpoint', over that of the so called rational view. Taking the point at which these paradigms converge (see later discussion) resulted in a framework for professional identity analysis, the rationale for which is outlined below. (Figure 1)

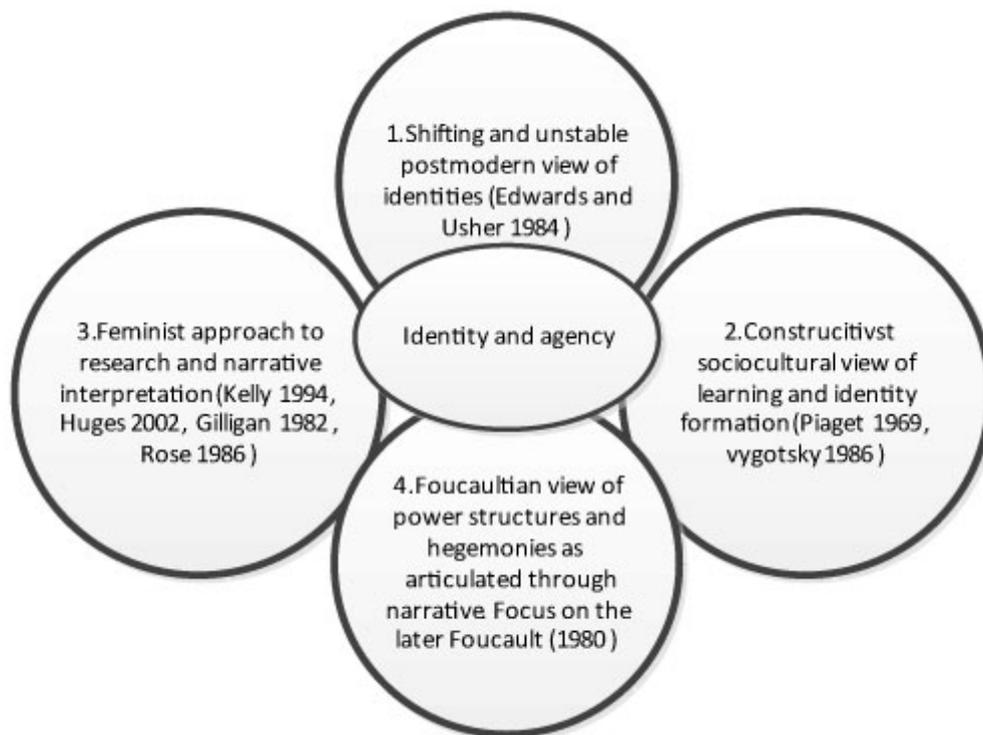


Figure 1.

The post-modern view of identities construction underpins the entire diagram in terms of both the notion of the construction of professional identities and also the view of professional learning as non-formal, shifting and subjective according to the individual's perception. The post-modern underpinning also gives rise to the idea that the essence of social reality is superior to bureaucratic or scientific forms of reasoning (Edwards & Usher, 1994; Lyotard, 1984).

The constructivist element of the framework emerges from a category of learning theories in which the emphasis is placed on the personal agency of the learner, and an emphasis on ways in which the social and cultural environment influence the learning process. The theory based largely on the work of Piaget and Vygostky (Piaget, 1954; Vygotsky, 1986), assumes that there is no such thing as an objective view of reality and that our views of reality are formed from our own constructions. This approach to learning takes a particular view of the human mind and its workings and assumes that mind is formed by the use of human culture (Stevenson, 2004). The social constructivist premise also points up the idea that that teachers and learners learn from each other and that the notion of the expert is contested: each bring their own experiences to learning and negotiating meaning between them. The relationship between the learner and teacher is key to the learning process as they work together to create a joint understanding of the 'truth'. In the University's online system (MOODLE – Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) the learning tools have been designed with this relationship in mind and are available for teachers to key into new pedagogies to build an environment in which learning is negotiated and constantly evolving.

The feminist underpinning of the diagram is founded upon the principles of third wave feminism which privileges the anecdotal, subjective and 'frivolous aspects of self-talk' (Gilligan, 1982b; Maclure, 1992). This ideology denies the idea that identities formation can be analysed according to a set of pre-ordained 'truths'. It is supported by Brabeck's; view of feminist philosophical orientation in prioritises the phenomenological, contextual and relativistic viewpoint over that of the so called rational view (Brabeck & Brabeck, 2009).

The point at which professional identity, learning and professional salience (or feelings of doing a good job) intersect is important in order to understand and identify particularly useful types of development and learning and those which are less so (Lategan, 2002; Mac Labhrainn, 2006). It is also important in terms of developing an understanding of the ways in which individuals accept certain elements of practice, and reject others. This resistance discourse within the development of professional identities has been well documented in the literature on professional identity formation (see Thomas and Davies, 2005; Stevens, 2011). It is seen to emerge at a time when existing professional identities are faced with new organisational or professional imperatives. Whitchurch terms it, 'the third space': a position somewhere between compliance with organisational objectives whilst remaining true to professional standards and ethics. This feminist understanding of resistance discourse is not located within the binary of recursive or compliant individual but suggests instead a new professionalism borne chiefly out of the ways in which individuals are agentive in their ability to manipulate policy discourses which they find to be incongruent with their own professional ideals and operational field of practice. This is articulated by Lloyd as the individual's ability to:

"Act in autonomous and creative fashion despite overarching social constraints." (Lloyd,

2005:91).

But the idea of resistance discourse and the impact that it has on identities often appears in binary form, either as a very positive force: enhancing professionalism and professional autonomy, or in a more negative context: a subversive entity that confounds attempts to modernise: a challenge to operational requirements and institutional control. As Thomas and Davies note discussion of resistance discourses appear a good deal within the field of organisational analyses as:

“clandestine and low level misbehaviour.” (Thomas & Davies, 2005:686).

Organisational responses to resistance discourses are often negative, as discussed by Alvesson and Willmott (2004). Their paper discusses the ways in which managerialist discourses

“Discourses of quality management, service management, innovation and knowledge work have, in recent years, promoted an interest in passion, soul and charisma. These discourses can also be read as expression of an increased managerial interest in regulating employees ‘insides’ – their self – image, their feelings and identifications.” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2004:5)

In recent high profile cases throughout the public sector, resistance discourse has been viewed as a reason to distrust professionals (Walker, 2012) seeing this discourse as largely self-serving and frequently detrimental to the public or student body. Resistance is one of the central tenets to Foucault's work, and features particularly prevalently within The History of Sexuality in discussions on ways in which homosexuals create discourses to counter dominant heterosexual hegemonies (Foucault & Hurley, 1990). It also emerged as Second Wave Feminist Discourse gave way to Third Wave Feminist theory, which conceptualised women as being more agentive in the ways in which they negotiate and navigate discourses (Lloyd, 2005). It is viewed by many researchers to be a core element of social identity formation (see Dimsdale's account of survival within the Nazi concentration camps, or Snow's account of creating a salient identity whilst living on the streets). (Dimsdale, 1980; Snow & Anderson, 1987).

Within the context of this study it is most accurately described by Stevens (2011):

“Where there is a space between the position of subject offered by a discourse and individual interest, a resistance to that subject position is produced.” (Stevens, 2011:113)

Wenger (1998), Alsup (2006) and Heron (1999) see the point at which resistance discourse is engendered to be the point at which professional learning has the potential to exert most influence on the nascent and evolving identity: the 'point of metanoia' (Alsup, 2006:33): the time when the individual decides to integrate new learning into the formation of a new identity, or reject the new learning as being too great an investment of time and energy with too little to gain (Alsup, 2006; Baxter, 2012).

“Resistance is understood as a constant process of adaptation, subversion and reinscription of dominant discourses. This takes place as individuals confront and reflect on their own identity performance, recognising contradictions and tensions and, in so doing, pervert and subtly shift meanings and understandings.” (Thomas & Davies, 2005:687)

In an online world as Bayne points out, resistance discourse can often emanate from competing world views in this case expectations that may emanate from previous experiences, such as that of the initial assumption that online interaction will purely involve transferring face to face competencies to the distance environment (Bayne, 2005). The resultant discord appearing at what Alsup terms the 'point of metanoia': the point at which individuals move into new psychological territories and require new skills and knowledge in order to do this. This study revealed that it was at this point that individuals revealed concerns about their new role whilst also voicing what they needed in terms of professional learning (Alsup, 2006). Stevens echoes Bayne articulating the creative space at the point at which the resistance discourse is formed:

“Where there is a space between the position of subject offered by a discourse and individual interest, a resistance to that subject position is produced.” (Stevens, 2011:113)

The study revealed several areas in which individuals were attempting to find new online teaching identities. In many of these statements individuals were looking back at old pedagogies and practices and to adapting these in an online world. Indicating that they had reached the point of metanoia outlined earlier. Resistance discourse did emerge as agentive providing elements of synthesis and homogeneity with the feminist and constructivist underpinning. It also revealed key areas around which the discourses were proving productive and instructive in terms of type of development needed by the individuals.

Areas of resistance and development

The first resistance emerged in connection with online marking:

“If you haven't met these students and know a bit about them, marking, it just becomes an

automatic task -ploughing through masses of anonymous scripts. When you know the students, then their work speaks to you in a meaningful way” (Hannah)

Although tutors have plentiful opportunities to get to know their students online before marking their work (via email contact, forums, the telephone), the statement is interesting in terms of the way in which it articulates a certain perception of what it means to get to know your student. Is there as Bayne points out, a suspicion that the self-portrayed online may not be the real self of the student? *‘As though there is a danger in the threat to the real self by the online constructed self, as though the real self is something fragile, protected by a boundary which is too easily transgressed, too vulnerable to a loss of division [...] in constructing an online persona we again risk a dangerous loss of control (Bayne, 2005:8).* Exploration of this point which at first glance may seem to be a sticking point may provoke a discussion about what it means to get to know a student: what makes for a productive online relationship between tutor and student? One tutor had addressed their feelings with regard to this aspect by going into a group formed by some students on Facebook:

“I find marking difficult if I don’t know the student, but I decided to have a look at their Facebook group and after a while, got to know the characters a little more...that helped” (James)

This raises interesting elements of what may be thought to be genuine communication and reflects some of the findings of an earlier survey: the Constructivist On-Line Learning Environment Survey (COLLES) which reflected that students may create more authentic learner online identities when interacting in a relatively unmediated setting (Taylor & Maor, 2000). Again it highlights the need for development to address fundamental philosophies, not only in terms of online teaching, but also in terms of what individuals feel about identities that are articulated online (Wiesenberg & Stacey, 2008).

Gaining feedback and concomitant personal reinforcement of the worth of their work, was an area in which the resistance discourse was particularly felt. Feelings of doing a good job were viewed as particularly problematic online lecturers, many stating that that gaining effective and meaningful feedback was very difficult online and that automated systems for collation of student feedback, felt impersonal and were of limited use in terms of professional development:

“Doing a good job; it’s about student feedback, not that type of automated questionnaire type of feedback, but the type that you get from the student; body language, the look on their face when you know they’ve ‘got it” (Millie)

Some of the most powerful resistance discourses appeared in relation the way in which the university is replacing many of its summer schools: opportunities for students and lecturers to get together for a week at a time in an intensive learning environment. These discourses keyed into what Armitage and colleagues term the three types of curriculum (Armitage et al., 2007), the curriculum considered as everything that impacts upon the student’s identity while learning takes place. This deep transformative identity learning was seen to be highly problematic in the online environment as Ruby articulates,

“I’m a real advocate of online, but the online case study, doing it online over a period of between five and six weeks , instead of going to residential school, is nothing, absolutely nothing like the same experience for either me or them. ... That don’t get the same learning, they don’t the same social experience and the learning experiences. ... At residential school, by the end of it they could have written an essay on the what they’d learned and how they’d learned it ,during that time” (Ruby).

How to replicate this feeling of life changing learning, in an online situation, was a topic which pre occupied respondents. Whilst they fully appreciated the benefits of virtual group work, this was an area that was felt to be challenging, in terms of the facilitation skills needed to effect full engagement by students. Where lecturers felt that they did not achieve this as effectively as within a face to face environment, this became a cause for concern, impacting negatively on their professional online teaching identities. In some cases, respondents created powerful metaphors and anecdotes for their feelings about their changing identities:

“I just feel it’s like putting one foot before the other, it’s like learning to walk and teaching wise, I did that a long time ago; I feel as if I should be skipping and what I’m doing is a slow, ponderous walk, and I’m only one step ahead of my students” (Marie)

Marie’s comments offer powerful insight into the affective element of identity change: she felt like a beginner again, willing to learn but by the same token, painfully aware that she was professionally disempowered by having attained expert status in a face to face situation but was now experiencing feelings that echoed her experiences as a beginning teacher. This compromised an important part of her professional identity. Understanding personal learning preferences and styles has proved to be useful in online teaching situations, particularly in cases where individuals can compare the ways in which their teaching preferences affect their online interactions and has been used to good effect in exploration of student styles and preferences (for further discussion see Fuller et al., 2000; Harrington & Loffredo, 2010; Kanuka & Nocente, 2003; MacGregor, 2000; Northrup, 2002). Studies that highlight techniques for investigation of the emotional and affective aspects of online learning, (see for example Juutinen & Saariluoma, 2010) may also be useful to use in online development sessions.

Separation of identities online, the personal from professional, was an interesting issue raised by several respondents,

"I love using Face book for friends and family , but lately my students have been sending me friend requests...I find that uncomfortable, I mean it's not the same as meeting down the bar – this way they can connect to everyone you know" (Judy)

"I used to be me in the classroom and me in the pub, now it's me and I'm not sure which me the students are getting!" (Ruben)

This also links to the struggle individuals articulate around creating a salient online identity online: an online persona that enables the individual to feel professionally competent within the role (Salmon, 2002; Sheehy et al., 2009). How to convey this online presence both textually and visually was an area in which many were struggling.

"On Facebook, you make a comment and it's there, not just there for the lesson or online session but it's there in text. Ok you can delete it, but it is still more permanent than say an offhand remark in a classroom. Same with Elluminate, you offer them a transcription and there you are; your silly comments, the ones that didn't work and the questions that you failed to answer. Ok so the good things are on there too, but you know how people perceive things; they'll always tend to hone in on the bad" (Ron)

Keying into a point that Chrystal makes on online linguistic identities (Crystal, 2006), in his book on internet language he reflects upon the shame that individuals feel when they examine their own online identities, or rather, when they reflect on the online identities that they *have articulated*. The two perspectives are substantially different; the first keying into spontaneous articulation of identity, (with perhaps little thought as to how this may be perceived), the second, standing back and seeing themselves in the way that a student may see them. Although this is uncomfortable for the individuals above, it is a key insight within the context of this study, indicating that lecturers are beginning to reflect not only on their responses, but on the ways in which they articulate and create their online identities.

Embodiment and online presence was a key talking point for those who had tried applications such as Elluminate and Communicator, offering head and shoulders video link, and were able to contrast these with experiences of using MUDs (Multi User Domains), such as Second Life® in which individuals create an avatar or online representation of themselves.

"I think that body language is very important , because we all know that good teachers use it all the time, particularly for the difficult student, and there's something called mirroring, which is, probably what a lot of teachers do face to face to build a relationship with students" (James).

"You can do that if you have a bit of a body, an avatar or a face on a screen, at least that's something more than just text" (Duncan)

Issues of embodiment also arose in the context of online collegial interactions and professional learning:

"I felt disempowered, if you had said to me at the beginning, this is going to be a hard course, you'll find it really tough going, I would have said 'oh don't be silly, I know about interacting on emails and it's just an extension of that isn't it?' But I think it was trying to cope with all the different voices, the different identities, trying to get a picture of who the person was. I just lost the plot after a while." (Judy).

Issues of narrative online portrayal and ways in which to achieve a measure of online embodiment were points at which resistance discourses were emerging. But the discourses were emerging with the degree of agency which did not appear in earlier literature (see Hanson, 2009). The degree to which the lecturers were reflecting upon their online interactions was particularly evident within the second interviews in which they were able to articulate the very specific ways in which their practices were evolving. One of the ways in which they were developing and overcoming areas of difficulty was by using their online interactions to analyse themselves in terms of student reaction, noticing not only what students were saying but the ways in which students altered their style in order to create communicative bridges:

"the students copy my style, and I found that if I changed my style , say became more formal , invariably they would too, so I got this book on body language and am trying to adapt it online so mirroring for example ..." (James)

"I went on a chat room the other day, (nothing to do with work),and found myself really thinking about the ways that people were saying things, phrasing things online. When I went back to my forum I felt that I was noticing different things about people and that made me feel a bit more in control." (Louise)

James' allusion to mirroring , or copying elements of another's behaviour and body language in order to

create empathy (Sawicki, 1991), points to an area that could be adapted for the online environment and a new area in which professional learning is taking place. But the term itself was viewed much more widely than in terms of development events and interactions with students:

“Professional learning is a funny thing when it comes down to online teaching? I did a repertory grid the other day, and it came out that all of the stuff I really valued, I’d learned outside of school and professional context.” (Mark)

“I use technology all the time, Facebook for family, chat rooms for politics, so when it comes to learning a new university application, I find I am developing all the time. I also learn a lot from friends, who work elsewhere, and how they are using technology in their hobbies and I think, ok well I could apply that” (Ruben)

Raising awareness of the strategies that are used in everyday communication is an important part of learning to teach in a face to face environment: body language, facial expression and the ways in which the body can be used in classroom management, communication and pedagogy is central not only to most teacher training programmes but to many public sector professions (see for example Day, 2004; Lieberman, 1995). Strategies that are being developed on social networking sites, sometimes inadvertently, may be useful in provoking a less pressured way of thinking about online interactions than those engendered on organised training sessions where risk of professional exposure, particularly where individuals have been teaching online for some time, may give rise to resistance discourses that may have unintended consequences for professional online practice. Leading to a withdrawal from opportunities to learn and a perpetuation of poor or underdeveloped working practices.

Conclusions

The evidence presented within research indicates not only the changing nature of professional teaching identities, but also lecturers’ developing awareness of the ways in which they present and manipulate these online identities. The framework for identity analysis revealed the ways in which new identities were constructed as part of a trajectory with old identities whilst also integrating elements of the personal. The online environment created very specific interactions between the two. Resistance discourse appeared most often at the point at which individuals felt that teaching values were being compromised (Heron, 1999; Mezirow, 1991) indicating a need for development which focuses on the affective domain of online teaching. This supports points made in the literature review by Baran and colleagues which highlighted the need for further research into online teachers transformational learning and Rennert Arie’s work into the hidden curriculum of teacher education (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011; Rennert-Arie, 2008) in the move from face to face to online learning. But as this study has argued, lecturers are drawing laterally on their on-going experiences in order to shape and form their online interactions and have already developed creative strategies in order to overcome difficulties in their online teaching. In order to harvest this rich source of knowledge requires more work on the development of online teacher agency and the constructive role of resistance discourse in the production of unintended but potentially productive outcomes.

Feelings that the online persona may often be in conflict with the face to face teaching persona causing dissonance and feelings of discomfort is a leitmotif occurring throughout a number of studies into online identities of both tutor and student (Bayne, 2004, 2005; Lategan, 2002; Thach & Murphy, 1995). As greater numbers of students elect to study online due to financial constraints rather than a specific preference for online learning, both campus based and online universities may need to investigate ways of raising understanding of not purely the strategies involved in online communication, but the narrative tools involved in this. Some studies have investigated this by using personality indicators such as the Briggs Myers Model in an attempt to profile the type of preferences that indicate tutors that will thrive and be most effective in communicating in a fully online environment (Dewar & Whittington, 2000; Fuller, Norby, Pearce & Strand, 2000; Harrington & Loffredo, 2010). The opportunity to engage with some of the discourses of online self-narrative by use of case studies of online interactions may offer tutors greater degree of insight into how they can manipulate their online narratives to greater effect, concomitantly feeling a greater sense of control over their online identities rather than the ‘*potent fusions and dangerous possibilities*’ alluded to by Haraway (Haraway, 2009:33).

The research concludes that identification of resistance discourse is useful not only in order to identify online professional learning needs but also that by parsing the situative, cognitive and affective dimensions of the discourse, that more targeted interventions may subsequently be applied. It has also revealed that in order to permeate professional identities at a deep and transformative level, views of professional learning need to be lateral enough to encompass the psychosocial, ethical and political dimensions of this mode of teaching. Finally that opportunities for professional learning need to include the facets of identity construction and development, outlined in figure one; so that learning affects not only the ways in which lecturers teach online but contributes positively to feelings of self-salience, personal efficacy and confidence concomitantly leading to high levels of academic and professional autonomy, motivation and job satisfaction.

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