

Getting Personal: An Autoethnographic Study of the Professional Identit(ies) of Lecturers in an Australian Pathway Institution

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For educators, understanding what draws an individual to the teaching profession and, arguably more importantly, what keeps them there, involves recognition of how one's professional identity is located in the classroom. This chapter presents the findings of a pilot study focused on qualitative data stemming from an autoethnographic approach in which one author's own narrative of 'professional identity' is presented alongside several teaching colleagues at the Eynesbury Institute of Business and Technology (EIBT) in South Australia. EIBT offers full fee-paying pre-university pathways for predominantly international students entering one of two partner universities; The University of Adelaide or The University of South Australia. The multiplicity of social, cultural, and educational factors that have influenced the professional identity of these higher education lecturers are shared with the main objective being self-reflection and collaborative action for learning and teaching improvement.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher identity is based on the core beliefs one has about teaching and being a teacher; beliefs that are continuously formed and reformed through experience. Educators are constantly in the process of negotiating the many social, cultural and educational forces, trends and structures within which they work; evolving with knowledge, with students, and with professional colleagues (Hooley, 2007, pp. 52-53). Professional learning begins in an ‘examination of experience’ and of the stories enacted throughout our lives, schools and society (Beattie, 2001, p. vi).

This chapter is primarily focused on qualitative data stemming from an autoethnographic approach (Ellis & Bochner, 2000a) in which one author’s own professional identity narrative was examined alongside several colleagues at the *Eynesbury Institute of Business and Technology* (EIBT). An autoethnographical approach enabled EIBT lecturers to be involved in both the method and the data that was empirically derived from their own articulated experience. The three research questions that guided this study were:

- *What social, cultural and educational experiences have contributed to your professional identity as a higher education (HE) teacher?*
- *How/Why did you become a teacher in the HE sector?*
- *What rising challenges are you facing in the HE milieu?*

To achieve the principal aim of illuminating the way(s) in which ‘past’ memory of one’s own experiences may have influenced how one works with students ‘today’, the three research objectives were:

- To *examine* one’s own social, cultural and educational experiences and explore causal links between one’s individual past with their individual and collective present;
- To *acknowledge* the value of one’s life experiences and understand how we are a source of rich description and insight; and
- To *share* personal narratives for learning and teaching improvement in EIBT, and for future empirical exploration.

As Vandebroek (1999, p. 29) stated, ‘identity is not static, but is dynamic, multi-faceted and active...never completed and is a personal mixture of past and future, of fact and fiction, creatively rewritten into an ever changing story’. O’Connor and Scanlon (2005) also contended that educators have more than one professional identity. Accordingly, ‘identity’ has been considered in a holistic rather than fragmented way (i.e., identities) throughout this chapter and in the forthcoming narratives.

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