Abstract: Contemporary academic workplaces are characterised by change, complexity and diversity. With the ‘enterprise’ university presenting new and varied demands on university teachers, conceptions of teaching expertise and teacher identity as stable and enduring are no longer sustainable. In this paper we argue for a contextualised view of teaching expertise that acknowledges both the dynamic and relational nature of expertise and the social and cultural positioning of university teachers. Selected findings are presented from a narrative study conducted with award winning university teachers. Using identity as a framework for analysis, attention is given to the shaping and reshaping of teacher identities in a changing higher education environment. Discussion of teachers and teaching practices moves beyond adapting and responding to ‘situations’ to a more complex view that focuses on how teachers handle the multiple frames of understanding, action and identity that Barnett (2000) argues are increasingly a feature of professional life. Mastery of subject knowledge, while still an important foundation of teaching expertise, must be supplemented by a teacher’s capacity to be reflexive and to manage both the self and the social encounters in which teaching and learning take place. Viewing teaching expertise in this way parallels a more general trend in assessing educational outcomes. Increasingly the focus on outcomes is as much on the characteristics, subjectivity and orientations of students as on skills and knowledge (Chappell, Rhodes, Solomon, Tennant and Yates 2003). This view of teaching expertise throws up a range of challenges to existing professional development programs for university teachers. To conclude, we speculate on how professional development for academics can be reconceptualised to address the complexity and diversity of the contemporary university workplace.
Changing contexts: Changing views of teaching expertise

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Abstract

Contemporary academic workplaces are characterised by change, complexity and diversity. With the ‘enterprise’ university presenting new and varied demands on university teachers, conceptions of teaching expertise and teacher identity as stable and enduring are no longer sustainable. In this paper we argue for a contextualised view of teaching expertise that acknowledges both the dynamic and relational nature of expertise and the social and cultural positioning of university teachers.

Selected findings are presented from a narrative study conducted with award winning university teachers. Using identity as a framework for analysis, attention is given to the shaping and reshaping of teacher identities in a changing higher education environment. Discussion of teachers and teaching practices moves beyond adapting and responding to ‘situations’ to a more complex view that focuses on how teachers handle the multiple frames of understanding, action and identity that Barnett (2000) argues are increasingly a feature of professional life. Mastery of subject knowledge, while still an important foundation of teaching expertise, must be supplemented by a teacher’s capacity to be reflexive and to manage both the self and the social encounters in which teaching and learning take place. Viewing teaching expertise in this way parallels a more general trend in assessing educational outcomes. Increasingly the focus on outcomes is as much on the characteristics, subjectivity and orientations of students as on skills and knowledge (Chappell, Rhodes, Solomon, Tennant and Yates 2003).

This view of teaching expertise throws up a range of challenges to existing professional development programs for university teachers. To conclude, we speculate on how professional development for academics can be reconceptualised to address the complexity and diversity of the contemporary university workplace.

Introduction

In Australia and worldwide, universities and academics have witnessed massive change in the last 20-30 years. The experiences of university teachers are rapidly changing as economic, social, political and technological forces reshape contemporary workplaces. The ‘enterprise’ university places new and varied demands on university teachers. Government has gradually repositioned itself from being a patron of universities to a purchaser of higher education and expects demonstrated accountability and return for this investment (Coaldrake and Stedman 1999). This demand for accountability has seen the rise of an audit culture and has coincided with a shift in the discourses of quality from ‘excellent standards’ to ‘quality assurance’ backed by external validation (Vidovich 2001).
Not only has the relationship between government and universities shifted. Students and their families, and employers are contributing an increased share of the cost of university education, and have their own demands of universities (Coaldrake and Stedman 1999). The student-as-client with the power of a key audit instrument - the student evaluation - is reshaping the relationship between teachers and students in some areas. Growth of the higher education sector and increased access to universities has seen an increase in diversity in the student population, in terms of academic preparation, language and socio economic background (Coaldrake and Stedman 1999). Information technology is also transforming academic workplaces.

While many of these changes are readily apparent, the deep-seated character of change is often less understood. As Barnett (1999:31) comments:

When we are faced with changes in our technologies, systems and patterns of work, we are also faced with challenges to our basic concepts. Work, communication, identity, self, knowing and even life: the meaning of fundamental concepts such as these are no longer clear in a world of change.

Work plays a central role in how we define ourselves. In times of complexity and uncertainty in universities academic identities are being challenged and competing views emerge about what it means to be an expert teacher. With the ‘enterprise’ university presenting new and varied demands on university teachers, conceptions of teaching expertise and teacher identity as stable and enduring are no longer sustainable. To be an expert one must participate in a particular work activity, and transform it, and in the process be transformed by it (Laufer and Glick in Barnett 1999).

In this paper we argue for a contextualised view of teaching expertise that acknowledges both the dynamic and relational nature of expertise and the social and cultural positioning of university teachers. Focusing on narrative and identity we make the case for a view of teaching expertise that acknowledges the ongoing identity work involved in developing teaching expertise.

To illustrate in a practical way how identity can be used as a frame to examine university teaching expertise we present selected findings from a narrative study conducted with award winning university teachers. The aim of this study is to explore the way university teachers engage in their own developmental process, fashioning and refashioning their identities to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing workplace characterised by a multiplicity of often conflicting demands.

**Narrative identity and expertise**

The conceptualisation of this study evolved from an initial examination of a diverse range of literature on expertise. Study of expertise, in common with much adult education literature and practice, has traditionally been underpinned by a view of self that is both individualistic and unitary. Experts are generally recognised as displaying outstanding performance with their expertise built on knowledge gained through sustained practice and experience (Tennant and Pogson 1995). A key to demonstrating expertise is the application of knowledge to specific workplace
situations (Kuchinke 1996) with the performance displayed over time rather than being a single achievement in a unique situation (Ericsson and Smith 1991).

In studying expertise with a focus on the individual, the central purpose has been to understand and account for what distinguishes outstanding individuals in a domain from less outstanding individuals in that domain, as well as from people in general (Ericsson and Smith 1991). To this end, qualities of expert performance are represented in contrast to the performance of novices. Development of expertise is seen to be the result of deliberate practice over extended periods of time involving structured learning and effortful adaptation (Ericsson and Charness 1994; Ericsson 2003).

Studies of the acquisition of expertise from this cognitive perspective have relied heavily on the use of experimental design. The focus has been an attempt to describe the critical performance under standardised conditions, to analyse it, and to identify the components of the performance that make it superior (Ericsson and Smith 1991). Underlying assumptions of this approach are a relatively stable environment, an enduring knowledge base that applied in a range of contexts and an autonomous self. This static view of expertise is not well suited to workplaces characterised by change, complexity and diversity.

Expanding the study of expertise to natural settings has resulted in a broadening of the scope of knowledge that experts are seen to possess. With consideration given to the context of application of the knowledge, expertise involves the acquisition, storage and utilisation of at least two kinds of knowledge: explicit knowledge of a domain and implicit or tacit knowledge of a field where domain refers to a knowledge base and field to the social organisation of that knowledge (Sternberg 1998). Explicit knowledge is the kind most frequently studied in the literature on expertise. It is knowledge of facts, formulas, principles and major ideas of the domain of inquiry. Implicit or tacit knowledge of a field is the knowledge one needs to know to attain success in a field that usually is not talked about or even put into verbal form. However, while consideration is given to context of application, the focus remains on the individual with limited attention to sociocultural factors contributing to the development of expertise.

Much of the literature on teacher expertise, influenced strongly by educational psychology, parallels this approach with “good teaching” seen as being developed:

primarily through cognitive structuring of learning experiences in ways that facilitate reflection on theory in relation to experience of practice...The good teacher therefore, is progressive, one who draws from a given range of robust theory and evidence, is aware of tradition and is reflective and self-steering in relation to their own professional development (Nicoll and Harrison 2003:29).

Little attention, however, is given to understanding learning as social practice or to considering the changing contexts of university teaching. In the context of workplace learning, Billett (1998) argues for a sociocultural view of expertise to complement the cognitive perspective on expertise. He argues that an individual’s learning is not isolated from social practice and that consequently expertise is fashioned within
particular contexts and embedded in social circumstances. Following this argument, Billett presents a view of sociocultural view of expertise where expertise: (1) is *relational* in terms of requirements of a particular community of practice; (2) is *embedded*, being the product of extensive social practice (3) requires *competence* in the workplace’s discourses, in the routine and non-routine activities of practice, mastery of new understanding, and the ability to perform and adapt existing skills (4) is *reciprocal*, shaping as well as being shaped, by the workplace practices which include setting and maintaining standards of the culture of practice; and (5) requires *pertinence* in the appropriateness of solutions to problems, such as knowing what behaviours are ‘acceptable; and in what circumstances.

This reshaped view of expertise addresses a number of the key limitations identified with the cognitive view of expertise. By taking a situated view of learning, due consideration can be given to the dynamic, complex and contested nature of expertise.

Building on this sociocultural perspective a narrative approach to the study of expertise can address the process of the development of the expertise by examining the ‘storying’ of expertise which to date seems to be missing from the expertise literature. Telling our stories we not only try to make meaning of our own actions but also the social processes of which we are a part. As Edwards (1997:6) explains:

> an adult educator may tell their own story rooted in their unique autobiographical trajectory, but the narrative is itself sedimented in the wider narratives of adult education, and beyond that, in the wider narratives of the culture and practices in which the adult educator are located. They live these stories; through them they construct others and are interactively constructed by them, as active, meaningful, knowable subjects acting in meaningful and knowable ways.

In using identity as a frame to examine teaching expertise, we are not presenting a view of self as coherent, unified and fixed, a perspective that has underpinned much adult education literature. Rather, following Hall (1997), we take the position of identity as multiple, positional and strategic, always under construction. This postmodern take on identity avoids the concerns raised about theories based on acceptance of individual-society dualism with either a focus on the individual to the exclusion of social and cultural factors or the assumption of a passive individual moulded by external forces (Tennant 1998). The concepts of ‘individual’ and ‘social’ are recast as ‘subject’ and ‘social’ jointly produced through discursive practices.

Identities are thus fashioned in narrative as Edwards (1997:5) highlights:

> Through narratives, selves and worlds are simultaneously and interactively made. The narrator is positioned in relation to events and other selves an identity conferred. Positioning oneself and being positioned in certain discourses becomes therefore the basis for personal self-identity.

Because there are numerous available discourses, a number of subject positions are produced. Given the multiplicity of competing and contradictory discourses,
subjectivity is regarded as multiple with individuals and groups having access to a repertoire of socially available positions. The postmodern ‘story of self’ as portrayed by Usher, Bryant and Johnson (1997:103) is that of:

a decentred self, subjectivity without a centre of origin, caught in meanings, positioned in the language and narratives of culture. The self cannot know itself independently of the significances of which it is enmeshed...Meanings are always ‘in play’ and the self, caught up in this play, is an ever changing self, caught up in the narratives and meaning through which it leads its life.

While narratives open the possibilities to multiple and shifting selves they can also provide a sense of coherence and unity at the particular point of telling. In a study of women’s development in the workplace, Fenwick reported that a “a common preoccupation of most participants seemed to be seeking a stable, coherent and deeply meaningful self, which they seemed to discern underneath layers of surface turmoil and life choices” (Fenwick 1998:201). Goodson and Sikes (2001) also suggest that the more fragmentary our existence, the more unitary our life stories may become. However it can be argued, from the modern narrative perspective that autobiographic coherence is an illusion – a tactical manoeuvre (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992) that reflects a desire for unity and a response to a social expectation of a representation of coherence.

This narrative view of identity brings to the fore the social situation of the self. The narrative structures that we use to organise our life are not of our own making – they are socially embedded and culturally transmitted. Thus the ability for a person to narrate their own life is both limited and enabled by the narrative resources they are able to draw on. Thus, the self remains situated in history and culture and continually open to re-inscription as Hall (1997:4) explains:

identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’ so much as who we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.

Using identity and narrative provides a way of exploring the development of teaching expertise in dynamic and complex way that suits times of change and uncertainty in contemporary universities. We will present selected findings of a study in which the dynamic and relational nature of expertise is explored by focussing on the different ways award winning teachers narrate the development of their teaching expertise. In analysing these narratives, discourses around higher education, which provide positions for the narrators can also be read.
Gathering stories of teaching expertise

University teaching, like many professional areas, does not lend itself to objective measures of expertise. However, social measures of expertise can be employed. While entry to many professions involves meeting particular knowledge requirements, during a career path, identified experts are more likely to have been socially selected. Social selection means that experts are performing in the role of expert because a large group of people (their constituency) consider them to be an expert (Agnew, Ford and Hayes 1997).

In this particular study, selection of participants was based on their receipt of an award for teaching excellence either at the institutional level (often named Vice Chancellor’s Teaching Awards) or at the national level (Australian Award for University Teaching). The Australian Awards for University Teaching, introduced in 1997 by the Federal Government as a way of recognising excellence in university teaching, are currently awarded in six categories. Five of these are discipline based and are open to individuals and teams. Criteria used to assess applicants include: interest and enthusiasm for teaching and student learning, ability to arouse curiosity and independent learning, command of subject material, appropriate assessment, innovation in design and delivery, student guidance and assistance to students from equity groups and participation in professional activity and research on teaching. Receipt of an award reflects peer and institutional recognition of performance. The set of structures, processes and practices involved in teaching awards reveal institutionally endorsed discourses of ‘good teaching’ (and hence teaching expertise).

Particular award winners chosen for interviewing were selected with a concern for diversity. The six participants, three female and three male, were drawn from six disciplines, politics, law, geography, engineering, accounting and psychology and five universities in metropolitan and regional NSW and Canberra. Two interviews were conducted with each university teacher. In the first interview session, participants were asked to tell the story of their teaching life and did so with limited interviewer prompting. The second session was more structured than the first but conversation was still very much open ended with respondents giving extended responses to questions. Key issues that were probed included how they accounted for the development of their teaching expertise and how they understood expertise. Also of interest were changes in the university workplace and the impact of these changes on teachers and their teaching practices. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed to produce texts for analysis. In the following section, we look at the way Joy narrates her teaching life.

Developing teaching expertise: Joy’s story

Joy’s story telling is punctuated by laughter and by her own admission she runs pretty hard and fast. For over 15 years she has been at the same university teaching on both undergraduate and postgraduate programs across a range of social science subjects. During this time she has taught large classes and small classes and programs preparing students for professional practice. She was an early and enthusiastic adopter of ICT. Her first university teaching experiences occurred while she was
studying for a doctorate overseas. In this paper we can only select and explore fragments of Joy’s story. This will be done for the purpose of furthering our understanding of development of teaching expertise and how changes in the contemporary university are impacting on teacher identities and teaching practices.

In analysing Joy’s narrative we distinguish two interdependent processes of narrative identity formation: reflexive identification and relational identification (Chappell, Rhodes et al. 2003). Adopting this perspective, it is proposed that identity is formed in a dynamic interplay between reflexive identity and relational identity. Reflexive identification is the process through which people come to see themselves as unique individuals with a story that belongs to them. This form of identity is produced over time in our life stories. Representation of identity is an ongoing process and an important aspect in the construction and negotiation of identity is the past-present relationship (Sarup 1996). The past will be interpreted and reinterpreted in the light of the present. Relational identification draws attention to positioning of personal narratives within broader social narratives. The idea of relational identification is that personal identity is constructed, in part, from socially and culturally available identities and their practices.

Joy, in narrating her development of teaching expertise, tells of struggle and mistakes as she attempts to become the kind of teacher that she aspires to be. She moves from fear and anxiety about being exposed as an impostor to having the confidence to empower her students. She works hard and gains confidence in her teaching philosophy. A constant theme in the story of her early teaching experiences is the fear of being exposed as a fraud. She is constantly assessing how her performance measures up to her perceptions of the ideal teacher.

> When I first started the anxiety would have been enough for me not to even know where my skin finished and [the class] began. Very vulnerable. And a lot of the over preparation and going to all lengths to cover all bases would have been to actually try to measure up to being the expert, while constantly entertaining being an impostor anyway.

She tells of a focus very much on the subject matter, slavish with the content, rather than considering the students she was teaching. Her main focus appears to have been achieving her aspiration of positioning herself as subject expert.

> I think as a beginning teacher I would have been so good, at trying to keep it all the same and not make any modifications, as though the thing that I learnt in the book was more important than the people I was teaching... I think as a beginning teacher I was so nervous and anxious and that all the time, that I wouldn’t have been, I wouldn’t have had the better communication skills that we need as a teacher. That I would probably prepare about the stuff or the competence rather than for the whom. I think I probably my timing would have been out, the rhythm of teaching, the listening to the students. Even though I used to ask them things.

Relationships play an important role in construction of identity. “There is an important sense in which the very meaning of an individual’s actions from moment to
moment is derived from the manner in which they are imbedded in ongoing relationships” (Gergen and Gergen 1993:41). The relational aspect of teacher identity and expertise comes through constantly in Joy’s account of her teaching life. Joy evaluates her development as a teacher by reference to her relationship with students, moving from a focus on the ‘stuff’ to empowering her students.

I guess letting go of the know-it-all was important. And taking up, not just a philosophy that people have to learn, but actually knowing that they do and they do everyday… Then me as teacher, I want the expert voice to actually be taken from me and given over…So yeah my expertise would definitely be in not being needed as someone to answer questions, but someone to consult on the best way to go about getting there. And also to actually be part of the audience that celebrates somebody’s growing awareness, and the beauty of words. So I’m sure that that’s pretty central to my idea of teaching... So the final product for me is empowering the student, watching the student see that knowledge is a way of getting on in the world and being more able to make decisions.

What is readily apparent in analysing Joy’s narrative is that there is not a single teacher self. A multiplicity of selves can be read including the teacher Joy would like to be, the teacher(s) students would like Joy to be, and the teacher her institution expects her to be. It is not uncommon for these selves to be in conflict. One of the most vivid accounts in Joy’s story deals with the first lecture she gave in an Australia university. Prior to this she had been teaching at a North American university while studying for her doctorate.

I think my first lecture I noticed that everybody was just going like this (looking blankly) and I realised that I had to adjust my Canadian teaching into an Australian kind of context. I can remember stopping the lecture and saying that ‘One of the key things about lecturing is communication and I can see that, you know, something’s not going right here.’ And I thought, ‘Oh my heavens, what am I going to do?’ And so somebody put their hand up and said ‘It’s your job to lecture and it’s our job to write.’ And I said ‘Well not in my classes it isn’t.’ So we talked about engagement, in effect, what sort of things did they want from their lecture etc and I turned them into the experts telling me what it was that they wanted back.

This story highlights the issue of negotiation of identity and the dynamic nature of teaching expertise. Teacher self and teaching expertise are not only bought to the classroom they are created in the classroom (or teaching space) and can often involve negotiation. Thus, developing reflexivity plays a central role in developing teaching expertise. University teachers need to go beyond simply adapting to change – they need to engage with change and understand how they see themselves as a teacher and how others attempt to position them. The capacity for reflexivity – self and social questioning- is part of negotiating a trajectory through the insecurities and risks associated with change (Edwards, Ranson and Strain 2002).
Joy’s discussion of her first lecture starkly illustrates competing views – her view and her students’ views - of what makes a ‘good teacher’. She indicates strong alignment with particular teaching practices but also a consideration of where students are at any particular stage and the navigation involved in bringing them along to the places she wants to take them.

And I guess that’s been part of my philosophy of teaching is that I want to meet the students where they are at. And be very respectful of that and have full confidence that by the time - if I meet them there - they will get to where I’m heading with them. You know, like I do actually have an end in mind but I want to know where it is that I’m working from. So in that first lecture it was really important for me to have the confidence to stop and say ‘Who are you out there?’ and all those sorts of things and to get some really, really authoritarian type answers back. You know, and I thought, I’ve got to deal with those people whose passion it is to actually finally get there, whether they understand anything or not, but have a role in mind for me. So I have to actually fit this role at some point but at others I’ll be wanting to know who it is that I’m teaching so that the examples I give or the principles that I’m trying to get across are going to be put back into the context where they belong.

So far we have looked at Joy’s narrative at an individual level. However, we will now return to the concept of relational identification which highlights that the resources that are used in defining a ‘self’ reflexively are not of the self’s own making. In constructing a personal narrative one draws on a stock of alternative social narratives and socially available repertoires of self. Thus the story of self is bounded by discourse structures that place limits on both expression and understanding (Hatch and Wisniewski 1995). Within the confines of this paper we will take up two discourses within which Joy’s narrative can be read as being located. These are the adult education discourse of student-centred learning and the wider discourse of enterprise.

A student-centred approach to teaching has become something of a mantra in higher education circles. Connecting with students is a constant theme in Joy’s story

I just try different things – giving affirming the world of the student in the content and as much as possible engaging them in not only the delivery but also in the presentation in the ways I examine [topics]. So as much as possible I’ll do authentic type of assessment tasks so the assessment will have some relevance to what it is they do rather than just retain the information...I’m always surprised by the students. I think the rewarding thing for me is that I learn more from the students than I think I give them. You know, by being involved with them I get reenergized each year, especially by the top-level students. They just blow my mind every year. With just what they come up with and how fantastic they are. And so I find that really rewarding.
However, while student-centred teaching is constructed as conversation and exchange and importance is placed on a positive relationship (Lee and Wickert 2000), it is not a conversation between equals as indicated in Joy’s comments below:

So that’s one of the things that I won’t, is that I will value student feedback, but I’m not, I’ve got to actually be the person who makes the call. And I’m quite prepared to put up with the flack that goes with it and to counsel the anxiety. So that adds to the workload and brings you closer to some students and pushes you away from others. So I realise I’m not going to be loved by all.

The element of performance, which would more commonly be associated with a teacher-centred approach, is also prevalent in her story. Performance and entertainment are positioned as central for student engagement.

It’s sort of like, I just don’t just go into the class and give across material. I deliver it. I go in there and try and make this thing seem palpable and real... A flair for entertaining, that’s really important, so that students will engage and be on task. I like catching them out, you know, so a lot of the things, by taking on you know from the undergrads, when I used to take on the game show type things or the Oprah Winfrey or Jerry Springer or whatever else I would come up with. The thing was that the students didn’t even realise that in there was all of the stuff that they were going to have to take away.

Sustaining this level of performance in the current university is not an easy task but Joy places a high value on continuing to provide the level of teaching that she thinks is essential.

I don’t think universities now – are really building into the workloads what it really takes to teach well. You know it takes me hours to do a lot of the assessable tasks, because there are so many elements in them... So I’m not a good teacher when it comes to how teaching is regulated... I want emulate those who have been good teachers and I don’t want to stay at that- I want to actually teach this group of students this year in this way.

What is apparent here is that it is self-regulation that is promoting the development of Joy’s teaching expertise. Taking up the discourse of enterprise, Joy can be read as an enterprising individual striving for fulfilment, excellence and achievement. As highlighted by Rose (1996:154):

Enterprise here designates an array of rules for the conduct of one’s everyday existence; energy, initiative, ambition, calculation and personal responsibility...The enterprising self is thus both an active self and a calculating self, a self that calculates about itself and that acts upon itself in order to better itself.
The enterprising self encapsulates the framing of development of teaching expertise as identity work. Like identity, expertise is a process under construction. It is dynamic, complex and relational and needs to be examined within a social and cultural context. This view of teaching expertise throws up a range of challenges to existing professional development programs for university teachers. To conclude, we speculate on how professional development for academics can be reconceptualised to address the complexity and diversity of the contemporary university workplace.

**Conclusion**

Through Joy’s story we have attempted to illustrate the complex and dynamic nature of teaching expertise and the work involved in making and re-making teacher identity. Adopting this position calls into question the suitability of generalised professional development workshops removed from sites of teaching practices. In the current ‘audit’ environment, regular attendance at professional workshops is a key indicator of ‘quality’ academic performance (McWilliam 2002). However, while these workshops may have a place, they can only ever be part of support for the development of teaching expertise. Boud (1999) argues that formal approaches to academic development need to be more fully situated in sites of academic practice. Stories of development of teaching expertise highlight the role on ongoing informal learning in teaching sites. In times where university teachers are confronted with ongoing change and challenges in their workplace, teaching sites need to be given greater acknowledgement as sites of professional development and institutional support. Perhaps reflexivity provides a basis for rethinking professional development, particularly the development of expertise in situ.
References


