Identity as trajectory: How faculty members modulate their newly formed educator identity after graduating from a longitudinal faculty development program

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ABSTRACT BODY:

Short Description: This was a multi-institutional, cross-sectional, qualitative study of longitudinal faculty development program graduates evaluating how they modulate, or negotiate among multiple sources of accountability, their educator identities (EI) following graduation. Faculty graduates felt unmoored from their educator community and had to rely on their individual agency to modulate their EI. Their ability to successfully remoor their newly formed EI was a product of both their individual agency and affirmation from their external environments.

Abstract: Purpose: Longitudinal faculty development programs (FDP) provide faculty with membership in a supportive community of practice. Research shows that FDPs support the development of participants’ identity as educators through shared learning activities that enhance their competence, confidence, and credibility. What is less well documented is how graduates modulate, or negotiate among multiple sources of accountability, their newly formed educator identity (EI) following graduation.

Methods: This was a multi-institutional (n=4), cross-sectional, qualitative study of 2 different FDP cohorts: one-year and five years post graduation. Every graduate was invited to participate in cohort-specific focus groups. Verbatim transcripts of the focus groups underwent qualitative data reduction and thematic analysis. Analysis was informed by Wenger-Trayner’s conceptual framework of knowledgeability in a landscape of practice and the concepts of engagement, imagination and alignment.

Results: Thirty-seven faculty members participated in 8 focus groups. Key themes that emerged included formation of a new EI through engagement in the FDP community of practice and reified through their shared experience. Following graduation, they felt unmoored from their FDP community due to tensions between their EI and other competing identities and demands. Faculty members described having to rely on their individual agency to modulate their EI(s) within the workplace through: ongoing engagement with an educational community of practice, imagination time to allow for educational thoughtfulness and inventiveness and alignment with the local context of their institutional and departmental goals.

Conclusions: These findings affirm that faculty members form new EI in FDP learning communities. Wenger-Trayner’s theory helps extend our knowledge about how graduates modulate their new identities. Faculty member’s ability to successfully remoor their newly formed EI(s) was a product of both their individual agency and affirmation from their external environments. In this way, faculty development is evaluated as a social phenomena rather than a traditional examination of individual participants.

Level of Audience: Expert

Focus of Presentation: CME


