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Early career academic experience: The ups and downs of negotiating intentions (0042)

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Our earlier work in Canada identified how doctoral students and pre-tenure professors were purposeful and emotionally invested as they negotiated relationships with others who might have different intentions and be more powerful. However, we had not clarified the range of ways and different contexts in which agency and affect emerged. This study elaborates the variation and reports similarities and differences for students and pre-tenure professors. The results contribute a more integrative embodied understanding of early career academic identity construction. They emphasize the range of ways in which individuals engage with others to achieve their intentions as they negotiate a) similarity in order to belong and b) difference in order to be distinct. The analysis provides a novel perspective from which to understand the difficulties (as well as positives) experienced by both doctoral students and pre-tenure professors that may lead them to question the value of academic work.

Early career academic experience: The ups and downs of negotiating intentions

Context: We have argued that the intentions and emotions of both doctoral students imagining academic careers and pre-tenure professors in their first academic appointments appear similar (McAlpine et al, in press). In this work, Positive affect was often linked to being intellectually challenged and being affirmed by respected others, while negative affect emerged when individuals experienced a lack of clarity around expectations and norms, or felt forced to do something. In sum, this analysis demonstrated that relational interdependence, negotiating with others to achieve one's intentions, was central (Billett, 2006) to their developing identities and evoked a range of affective responses (Nardi, 2005). Yet we had not clarified the range of ways and different contexts in which agency linked to affect emerged, which we do in this study.

Purpose: to elaborate the variation in expression of agency linked to affect and how contexts for students and assistant professors are similar and dissimilar.

Method: Interview transcripts of six doctoral students and six assistant professors were drawn from a program of research in Faculties of Education in two Canadian universities, ensuring variability in institutional contexts and programs. The transcripts were analyzed by the two authors drawing on a structure developed in McAlpine (2009). We sought narratives in which a) context was described, b) individuals articulated intentions, desires and hopes – whether achieved or not; and c) intentions were linked to affect (feelings, motivations, values, assessments of intentions and actions). Saturation was reached before analysis concluded. Given limited space, we summarize here the variation in agency

and some differences in context for doctoral students and pre-tenure academics. These will be more fully described in the session.

Results: We found evidence of agency linked to affect in the following ways.

1. personally initiating some activity (or wanting to but lacking something or choosing not to);
2. taking up or responding to, watching for an emerging experience, event or opportunity (or not);
3. facilitating another's agency (or not);
4. mutually helping each other to achieve an intention (or not);
5. modifying or balancing one's intentions in order to achieve a larger outcome, such as balancing multiple motives within and across systems;
6. accepting the situation as it is, that is continuing to act in the same way while aware of other options that are not being taken up;
7. being helped by others to achieve an intention (or not), sometimes by those more powerful;
8. shifting of agency from one person to another in achieving an intention;
9. negotiating agency within perceived situation or boundaries, such as negotiating a less common, less accepted practice;
10. acting against, resisting, questioning the perceived situation or boundaries.

While there was individual variation, all of the above emerged for both students and pre-tenure academics. For students, facilitating (#3) rarely emerged, but being helped and helping each other occurred frequently (#4, #7). Balancing one's intentions to achieve a larger goal (#5) emerged, sometimes around family and academic work and sometimes in dealing with institutional structures or more powerful others – this was also the case for assistant professors (Table 1). Doctoral students described interacting with supervisors, colleagues (other students), undergraduate students and conference participants. The contexts for these interactions were often focused on writing, but also on teaching and presentation of work.

Not surprisingly, pre-tenure professors more frequently reported facilitating another's agency (#3), most often that of individual students. They also reported responding to events and opportunities (#2), such as listening in on useful conversations in collegial meetings. In their narratives, they described interacting with students, colleagues (who might also be students), and more senior academics. The contexts in which interactions with colleagues and more senior academics occurred were course design and student assessment, expectations around departmental practices and personal responsibilities, particularly in relation to supervision and tenure.

Table 1. Two instances of modifying or balancing one's own intentions due to institutional structures/ more powerful others

Holly, changed her thesis structure in order to complete her degree	SM took on additional responsibility in publishing with students as it could help tenure
"I had started writing my dissertation with a ...more narrative ...focus and [in] the department ...you get a lot of support for doing things that are ...creative ... but ...when it came down to it that kind of ...creativity was not matched with ...the institutional demands of ...a dissertation. ...there was ...inherent conflict [so] ...I ended up changing the way I was writing.	"I could see myself co-publishing with two of [my students] ...but ...I'll inevitably be doing more ...at the same time ...it is a good thing to do [for ...the old tenure and promotions committee as well. ...I think this is an essential part of our job and it is extra work for me, but at the end of the day I think it is beneficial all around.

Contribution: This analysis contributes a more integrative embodied understanding of early career academic identity construction by emphasizing the range of ways in which individuals engage with others to achieve their intentions as they negotiate similarity in order to belong and difference in order to be distinct. The notion of 'authoring space' emphasizes that how one acts in a particular situation is not predetermined nor is it wholly open since the potential exists within certain socio-cultural-historical boundaries Tonso (2006). In other words, identity construction emerges through the willingness to engage in, perhaps modify or contest, specific socio-historical practices. Authoring spaces provides a novel perspective from which to understand the difficulties (as well as positives) experienced by both doctoral students (Bieber & Worley, 2006) and pre-tenure professors (Schrodt et al, 2003) that may lead them to question academic work.

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