Using narrative to explore our scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) identity as academic developers

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Academic life is increasingly becoming fragmented and the need for sustainability in higher education is necessary (O’Farrell & Fitzmaurice, 2013). Critically reflecting on the roles, values and emotions that guide us as academics and the challenges we face requires us to pay attention to the affective dimension of our changing roles and designations and find ways to sustain ourselves emotionally (Kensington-Miller et al., 2015). We have done this through our engagement in shared narrative over three years. In 2012, eight of us from 5 countries (3 continents) explored the influence of engagement with SoTL (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) on academic identity (Simmons et al., 2013). We used narrative to explore our own identities as SoTL scholars: to understand the influence on identity of engaging with SoTL and how interaction with SoTL impacted the way we shaped our academic identities. In 2013-14, three of us further engaged in shared narrative enquiries: collaborating to explore the impact of context on our identity, specifically as academic developers (Kensington-Miller et al., 2015) and how we are positioned in universities today. Our most worrying issue is the pervasive trend in the change of academic developers’ status from tenure-track academic peers to professionals. For both of projects, reflective narratives were used as a way of communicating and capturing our experience: “stories help us create, interpret, and change our social, cultural, political, and personal lives” (Chase, 2005: 651). Narrative was found to be a useful and powerful way to explore our changing identities as SoTL scholars and academic developers, which we experienced as a discomforting, troubled, and in a marginal space. Brookfield (2013:127) maintains that “… memoir, story, and personal narrative – can indeed be a crucial element of the scholarship of teaching and learning”. Latterly, we have found ourselves drawn to the use of metaphor to further explain and explore the impact of challenging situations and critical incidents on us as SoTL scholars. In this presentation, we will share the narrative enquiry techniques used to explore and examine our changing identities. We share some of our stories and the emerging conclusions we have drawn from the work so far.

References

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