

5-2 Participant Identity: “I’m probably quite an odd case”

Introduction

“The use of the word ‘community’ in discussions of higher education courts two problems. First, it is a warm glow word which implies good relations when they may not exist or may not even be necessary for good working. Secondly, it obfuscates the need for close analysis of roles within and beyond education in which the relationships may be that of dependency or exchange or a hard business of establishing *quids* for *quos*.” (Kogan, 2000, p.209)

At the start of each interview, each participant was invited to describe their professional role and to give a short account of their career. This provided background factual information whilst prompting them to start talking about themselves. This provided important contextual information that could be compared to their subsequent responses. Responses from all participants are included in this section.

Analysis

Most participants began with a statement of their job title and then began to describe their formal activities and accountabilities. For example;

Current job has the title of Teaching Enhancement Developer. [...] However, [...] it’s enhancing teaching in many different ways I’m learning so it’s not quite what I thought it was. It is working to improve student experience in learning terms by assisting staff. (Participant 01)

At the moment I am in charge of Masters courses in media subjects for <Institution>. I am about to become a separate role in charge of research in the areas of media, art and design, English and performing arts. (Participant 04)

At the moment I'm working as a researcher on Embarrassing Bodies on Channel 4 and Embarrassing Bodies: Live on Channel 4.
(Participant 05)

Okay. My current role is academic registrar and that's in the quality directorate which obviously approves and reviews courses and is supportive of the development of courses. And administers quality assurance processes with regards to external examiners and their responses, (...) queries of, of students with regards to regulations and so forth. (Participant 12)

Yeah (...) my name is <name> I'm the head teacher here at <school> and have been since 2003. (...) <school>'s an 11 to 18 mixed academy of about 1,020 (...) students. (Participant 13)

Whilst consisting of basic factual information, a closer reading of the responses can give some insight into the aspects of the role that participants wish to emphasise through looking at the prominence they give them in their responses. For example Participant 15 (course leader, BA(Hons) Broadcast Journalism, Russell Group University) immediately replied with;

Yes. I'm programme leader of the (...) undergraduate degree in broadcast journalism which is a three year BA honours degree. (...) And it's accredited by the BJTC. (Participant 15)

This response indicated that BJTC (Broadcast Journalism Training Council) accreditation was at the forefront of the participant's thinking at the time of the interview and provided a hook for later in the interview when a further prompt provided very useful insights into the tensions between a Russell Group academic research-intensive setting and the associated professional accreditation body.

A similar phenomenon can be observed in the response of Participant 18 (Principal Lecturer and Sub-Dean (Quality Enhancement), Million+ university);

My current role is principal lecturer in media, sub-dean of quality for the faculty of creative arts, technologies and science. What I do within that is manage the quality assurance and enhancement processes of the faculty, and support, generally, the academic quality managements within the faculty, with particular reference to new course development, the monitoring of courses, the external examination of courses those would be the main things. (Participant 18)

This participant starts by stating their role; “my current role **is**” but then immediately switches to describing their activities; “What I **do** within that is...” and that element of their response indicates that whilst their headline role is as a Principal Lecturer, their activities as Sub-Dean (Quality Enhancement) appear to take precedence for them. This can then be used to contextualise their subsequent responses in relation to course design and the role of formal approval and review in that process.

Having established the participants’ current role they were then prompted to describe their career leading up to their role. This gave the participants a further opportunity to construct their identity in relation to the study and to provide further important contextual information regarding their experiences and wider institutional affiliations. This confirmed that the selection of participants has resulted in an appropriate group of those involved in or interacting with undergraduate media studies in England.

Central University Staff

Staff with a central university professional role with a responsibility for some aspects of academic practice outside media studies departments were careful to

establish their academic credentials as part of their account of their journey to their current role:

So just briefly, in terms of experience of course design, I first started designing courses in round about 1998. I was designing HNDs and degree courses in then a polytechnic in Wales. (Participant 02)

Okay. (...) I was a senior lecturer in German at various universities that was Thames Valley University which is now the University of West London and Oxford Brookes and at some stage I became a what they- at the stage called programme manager... (Participant 12)

This can be seen as pointing to a rather defensive position where academic credibility is seen as important in the process of influencing departmental teaching staff. Participant 02 addressed this:

I don't (...) tell a lot of people about that [laughter] but it does mean that I do have, a) some experience of how it happens and should happen but also some experience of the difficulties that people actually wrestle with when they're trying to design courses. (Participant 02)

His response indicates that he does not feel the need to explicitly establish his academic credentials with course teams but that he sees his experience of 'doing it' as important to his identity as the university's Director of Teaching and Learning.

Media Academic Staff

I have been involved in the media in various capacities, really since the beginning of the 1970s, originally for six years as a media technician in Hornsey Art College and then as a student I was part of the first cohort and, as far as I know, the first ever BA course in media studies for the Polytechnic of Central London, 1975 to 1978... (Participant 04)

Okay my current role is course leader for the BA film and television production in the arts school here. That entails management and development of the course curriculum, delivery of the modules management of a team and collaboration with a team in delivering the modules which cover a range of film and television production skills. It also includes extra curricula development as well which supports the main curriculum. strand. (Participant 06)

So I spent about eleven years with the BBC then worked freelance as a drama director and then started working as a consultant on television productions in various countries, well mainly, well only Eastern Europe and then (...) decided to apply for this job and got the job. (Participant 07)

Head of the School of Media which means exactly what you'd expect it to mean. That is looking after six degree courses, line managing the course leaders of those six courses. As well as two senior technicians, one in the area of photography and one in film. I'm also an Associate Dean of the Faculty of Media and Performance. And what that means [laughing] is I've got kind of more institutionally wide responsibilities. (Participant 08)

I was living with a lot of students and I thought I could do this so I went back to education, did an access course at Brighton College of Technology and then went to Sussex University, did my degree there in media production. (Participant 09)

So I started teaching in 1997 when I was doing my PhD, and I taught for a couple of years on the Media Master's Degree at Westminster before coming over to the <university>, which was then <previous name>, having then, teaching on the Undergraduate BA Media Production... (Participant 10)

And here I was appointed as course leader for media studies, with a view to revalidating the programme, within the first eighteen months. So I came in and we went through validation, quite successfully, and then about six months ago my head of department stood down. I'd been acting as a head of department for the last six months with my, probably, interview tomorrow, to be made HoD. (Participant 11)

I'm probably- I'm probably quite an odd case although probably everybody says that to you but (...) I haven't ever been a journalist. (...) I actually came straight out of a degree in media (...), media and communications and I started working as a researcher... ..once my

full time research career changed in 2007 to become a lecturer which was a kind of natural thing because the grants that I had and w-was working on had, had changed... (Participant 15)

I'm senior lecturer in politics but I teach on a politics and media degree programme - in a media department. So yeah, and that involves teaching, it involves research, it involves, we're just in the process of thinking about recruitment and open days, so the whole. Everything, yes basically, yeah, everything. (Participant 16)

I left school [sigh] in the late sixties, Grammar school, A levels, went straight into (...) newspapers, an indentureship as we used to call them (...) at a local paper, did (...) a year's professional qualification, was in local newspapers for seven years and then went to Fleet Street and worked in national newspapers for twenty-eight years. (...) At the end of that period, I did a master's degree validated by Nottingham Trent that was in media and I started doing some visiting lecturing first at what's now Southampton Solent... (Participant 17)

[Sighs]. Eclectically, and randomly. [Laughs]. So... [Sighs]. In 1995, I finished my PhD, which was entitled James Joyce, Modernism and Post-Modernism, which looked at the relationship between modernism and post-modernism in twentieth century culture, through the prism of the work of James Joyce, particularly Finnegans Wake. I'd done a little bit of teaching before that. I say, a little bit I'd done some...some tutorial teaching at the university where I was doing my PhD, actually, my doctorate, which was Oxford, and I previously, between the ages of seventeen and eighteen, taught at a rural state school in Zimbabwe, as you do. [Laughs] (Participant 18)

My Masters is in English literature. I was researching eighteenth century British travellers to India, when I got a commonwealth scholarship to do a PhD. And the reason why I'm telling you about this is because my PhD is about media education. It's about using media for education. I did a PhD on using television to teach English in India. But even before I finished my PhD, I got a job at the BBC, and I worked at the BBC for eleven years. (Participant 19)

Media Graduates

I work for the <Institution A> as a Media Technician. I work primarily with the media department. And I teach, er, I don't teach; I instruct the students on how to use cameras, any sort of media equipment including sound, lighting, location lighting and digital

recorders, all sorts of video cameras whether they be tape based or solid based. And that is my general role. (Participant 03)

...and also various other things, but then after that, it was a bit hard for a couple of months, but I decided I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I knew because I did TV production at university and I got some work experience at Sports Relief, and then as a runner, and... ..then I got offered a job as a researcher, based in Birmingham for The Gadget Show... (Participant 05)

Currently trainee lecturer at <College> (...) teaching on BTEC and foundation degree urm studying for professional doctorate at <University> which finishes in April and that was a career decision for (...) a more stable income and sort of focus career (...) after ten years as a film maker, festival director and sort of project film educator. (Participant 14)

Student Advisor

Went to university, to Nottingham University, did maths degree. And then I did one year PGCE at Nottingham (...) as well. Then I went into teaching for a year. Then I left and went into the RAF... (Participant 13)

These responses demonstrate the range of background and affiliations of the participants. Their professional and personal journeys have all resulted in an interaction with media studies and participation in these 'snapshot' interviews that capture their ideas, pre-conceptions, values and experiences. Their response was typically crafted chronologically.

Summary and Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the provision of undergraduate media courses in England and their distribution across various types of higher education providers, these responses, in their diversity and depth, are an appropriate data set for the

qualitative research aimed at addressing the research questions posed in Chapter One, Section 1-7. Collectively, the responses cover a range of factors;

Further Education College	Participant 09
Teaching-Intensive Universities	Participants 01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 12, 18, 19
Research-Intensive Universities	Participants 04, 15, 16, 17
Small Institutions	Participants 09, 08, 11
Large Institutions	Participants 06, 07, 15
Specialist Art Schools	Participants 06, 07, 08
Media, Communications and Journalism Departments	Participants 04, 11, 15, 18, 19
Media delivered by non-media specialist department	Participant 16
Distance Learning Delivery	Participant 10
Media Graduates	Participant 03, 05, 10, 14, 17
Student Advisors	Participant 13
Central University Functions	Participants 01, 02, 12, 18
Media Industry Experience	Participants 01, 04, 05, 06, 07, 14, 17, 19

This categorisation of the participants demonstrates the complexity in attempting to assign specific individuals to clearly delimited categories. Each participant constructs a specific unique identity through discursive practices that build a narrative based on a selection of their experiences. Participants' experiences of varying media studies settings, experiences of professional practice in the media industries and experiences as students themselves all combine in different ways to provide a '*back story*' to their current role.

This self-constructed identity can be considered alongside an institutionally defined identity (Billot, 2010) that can result from a move from a '*community of scholars*' to a managerial imposition of a role and associated identity (Harris, 2006). As institutions begin to define themselves in relation to others through a discourse of '*competition*', academic identities based on identification with a

subject/discipline rather than an individual institution can become increasingly problematic.